The Intersection Between Identity, Leadership and Interests in Understanding Turkish Foreign Policy Orientations Toward Syria

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Abstract

This study analyzes the relationship between identity and interest in how they shape Turkish foreign policy towards Syria. Identity became the governing factor in Turkey's foreign policy since the AKP's rise to power. Turkey's new foreign policy was based on proactive engagement. However, the developments that took place in the Middle East changed the meaning of proactive engagement from creating peaceful relations to seeking regime change. As a result, this study traces the shift the occurred in Turkey's foreign policy from interest to identity, and from creating peace to intervention in the region. This study also investigates the role of the leadership style in defining Turkey's new foreign policy toward Syria.

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Introduction

Turkish foreign policy orientations toward Syria have undergone fundamental changes since the 1980s. In the 1980s the relationship was described as one of "enmity" in which there were confrontations between the two countries over several unresolved disputes, such as, trans-border issues, water rights, and the Kurdish question.[1]This situation lasted until the rise of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) to power in 2002. Under the leadership of the AKP, this relationship of "enmity" turned into one of "amity" and engagement between Turkey and Syria. This period witnessed significant changes in which Turkey pursued its goals with Syria through diplomatic negotiation rather than military force. Turkey focused on its soft power assets emphasizing engagement and economic interdependence and promoting mediation roles, especially with Israel. This period was a genuine translation of Ahmet Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* theory, which revolves around Turkey's connection to the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia, where Turkey is portrayed as the "natural heir" to the Ottoman Empire.[2] As part of this, there were ambitions for a "zero-problems policy" with Turkey's neighbors and an active foreign policy built upon a "win-win approach" for all sides. In regard to Syria, Turkey offered opportunities for cooperation, such as forming the Supreme Council for Strategic Relations. Additionally, they abolished the need for travel visas and began conducting joint military exercises.

However, these more amicable orientations toward Syria changed completely with the outbreak of the Syrian uprising. This resulted in a period of attempted regime change where Turkey cut off its relations with Bashar Al Assad and called for him to step down. This represented a sudden shift in Turkish-Syrian relations. Turkey now actively supports the

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[1]Hinnebusch Raymond and Tur Ozlem, *Turkey-Syria Relations, between Enmity and Amity*, (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).
[2]Ahmet Davutoglu, "The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World Disorder," *Perceptions,* Centre for Strategic Research, Vol.II, No.4, (December 1997-February 1998).

opposition, hosts them in Turkey, and has called for the imposition of a no-fly zone in Northern Syria. As such, Turkey has begun to use different means to achieve its foreign policy objectives in the region that are centered on directly intervening in the internal affairs of its neighbors.

Turkey has found itself increasingly isolated in pursuing this objective, which has ultimately proven to be futile given the unwavering support for the Syrian regime in Tehran and Moscow. This is compounded by the fact that Turkey also depends heavily on the international community for help in overthrowing Assad's regime. However, this is seemingly in contradiction to the interests of Turkey, and the region as a whole, especially given the experience of Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, in which international intervention resulted in chaos and instability.

The ongoing transformations in Turkey's foreign policy regarding Syria are relevant and raise important questions about how and why they shifted so dramatically. The role played by identity and leadership in contrast to pragmatic national interests regarding Turkey and its Arab neighbors are of great interest. Firstly, the prior relations between these two countries had granted Turkey a gateway into the Arab world due to the normalizing of economic, military and political relations. Until the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, Turkey had been a role model for Arab countries,[3] due to its growing economy, the Islamist background of the ruling party and its ascendant democracy, which, to some extent, may explain the policies of Erdogan and his party to support these uprisings. Secondly, the Syrian revolution was a rupture with this model; following Turkey's radically changed stance toward Syria, which some scholars attributed to Turkey becoming "a trouble-

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[3]Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey: The New Model?" *Brookings,* April 25, 2012, accessed March 23, 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-the-new-model/.

maker" country.[4] Hence, this study seeks to answer three relevant questions: Firstly, how does Turkish identity play a role in defining Turkish foreign policy orientations and what are its limitations to Turkish interests toward Syria? In addition, what is the relationship between identity and interests in shaping Turkish foreign policy orientations? Secondly, what are the main variables or factors which led relations between Turkey and Syria go through three periods of change, from enmity to amity and to regime change since the Syrian crisis in 2011? Lastly, what is the role of leadership in defining foreign policy orientations toward Syria after 2011? Based on this question – how does Erdogan's psychological and social background inform AKP and thus Turkish foreign policy?

In addition to these questions, there are two issues in particular that need to be addressed in this study. First, the issue of foreign policy change. One of the major debates in foreign policy analysis is to identify change as well as to explain it.[5] The second issue is debating the significance of the agent of that change. Pertaining to the case study, this argument is premised on two assumptions. Firstly, the rise of AKP in 2002 resulted in a reorientation of Turkish foreign policy towards Syria to more engagement that stemmed from Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth theory to improve Turkey's relations with its neighbors, including Syria. These orientations were based on a new Turkish identity based upon Islam and neo-Ottomanism, seeing Muslim countries as a brotherhood. Secondly, the eruption of the Syrian uprising marked a new phase of enmity due to Erdogan's single-minded pursuit of regime change. Erdogan affected the shaping of relations between the two countries, moving it away from any material calculations toward interventionism, which was at odds with Turkish identity. Understanding the implications of the psychological and social background

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[4]Jack Rosen, "Turkey's Erdogan: Mideast Troublemaker", *The Wall Street Journal,* September 19, 2011, accessed March27, 2017.
https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111904106704576580641016522396.
[5]Kilic Kanat, "Theorizing the Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Insight Turkey*, Volume.13, No.3, 2014.

of Recep Tayyip Erdogan is increasingly important to foreign policy analysis as he continues to consolidate his authority as the prime decision maker and sole arbiter of Turkish foreign policy. In other words, this study offers a systematic analysis of Erdogan's individual accountability by way of examining his personality using Leadership Trait Analysis. Using the leadership trait analysis performed by scholars, such as Herman, I will employ their findings for my study.

My research relies on process tracing methodology to understand the mentioned case-study, drawing on constructivism for theoretical grounding. Process tracing is a tool for qualitative analysis and can be defined as "an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence— often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena".[6] This model is widely used, in order to determine casual mechanisms between an independent variable and the outcomes of dependent variables and studies, in a linear direction.[7] Process tracing tackles different events over different times, and connects major events as points that redefine the phenomenon.[8] The relevance of this approach is that it allows for understanding the sequence of the relations between both countries not chronologically but by focusing on transformative events and how they shaped the environment within which agents operate.

Process tracing explains causal mechanisms to a precise degree of detail. In essence, it is used to explain links between the causes and effects by tracing possibilities and seeking evidence to support those processes. Determining the causal process is the key to the activity

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[6]David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing,*" Political Science and Politics, Vol.44*, No.4, 2011, P 824.
[7]Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (the MIT Press, 2005), P 206.
[8]Ibid, P 824.

and finding the causal mechanisms, which may have led to the process, are crucial.[9]I will focus on the major events between Turkey and Syria, and to investigate the changes that took place in Turkey's foreign policy orientations particularly after the Syrian Uprising. I will depend more on qualitative analysis to identify the development of the bilateral relations between the two countries over a relatively long period that stretches from the 1990s until the present. Process tracing focuses on the way human actors make a decision, and the data that I rely on identifies the developments that are crucial to understanding the interplay between Turkish identity and Turkish foreign policy regarding Syria. I argue here that the role of Erdogan and his personal traits dominates the decision-making process about foreign policy issues; his perception of the Turkish identity is redefining the content of Turkish national interests. Process tracing depends on the narrative, which lays down the background in which human agents operate. Secondly, I initiate a process of general explanation of processes taking place in the background. Then, I analyze the processes theoretically by examining different hypotheses to the case-study. Finally, I test the results and to what extent they answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the research.

The thesis makes use of Process Tracing, which seeks to understand how a particular process changes over time. One of the key sources that I engaged with was the work of Alexander George and Andrew Bennett on the use of case studies in social sciences and their detailed discussion of process tracing.[10]The usefulness of their work is that it allows for the engagement of different methodological approaches to benefit from the comparative strengths and recognize the limitations of each method, and how they can be utilized complementarily after solid understanding of these methods. Andrew Bennett's process tracing presents

[9]Natalie Martin, "Structure, Process and Agency: the Evolution of EU-Turkey Relations 1999-2004," (PhD diss, Loughborough University, 2012), P 75.
[10] George and Bennett, PP207-208.

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another important contribution to the study of International Relations.[11] He explores why certain revolutions used force while others did not, and he puts these major events one after the other to discover if there is some sort of historical development relying on process tracing. Understanding process tracing requires comprehending its different hypotheses, how they are used and deployed in the research field, and finally its limitations. One the biggest concerns that I grapple with regard to Process Tracing is the question about generalization: how can the reliance on a particular case study be the basis for generalization? These questions were adeptly tackled in the works Beach and Pedersen.[12]

In terms of theoretical framework, I focus here on a limited aspect of Foreign Policy Analysis, which is "foreign policy orientations". I do this to analyze the content of these orientations, the sources of continuity, and the change exhibited through the given period of study. Foreign policy, in general, has inputs and outputs. Foreign policy orientations are the output, while actions and decisions are the input of foreign policy. Kal Hoslti defines it as a "state's general attitudes and commitments toward the external environment, its fundamental strategy for accomplishing its domestic and external objectives and aspirations for coping with persisting threats".[13] This embraces different orientations from isolation to an alliance, and these orientations are motivated either by ideology or interests.[14]

In this study, constructivism, to which the notion of "identity" is central, is used to understand and analyze the role of Turkish identity in making changes to its foreign policy

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[11] Andrew Bennett, "Process Tracing and Causal Inference," In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd edition , ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010)

[12]Derek Beach and Brun Pedersen, "What is Process Tracing actually Tracing?" (Paper presented at the Annual meeting for American Political Science Association , August 2011) accessed April 15, 2017. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1902082.

[13]Kal Holsti*, International Politics: A framework for Analysis*, 7th ed. (London: Prince Hall International, 1995).

[14]Bahgat Korany and Ali Dessouki, *the Foreign Policies of Arab States: the Challenges of Globalization*, (Cairo: the American University in Cairo, 2008), P 39.

toward Syria and to look at the role of interests and their relationship with identity. Constructivists assert that states do not consider norms as only part of their interests but link them with their identities.[15] This study draws on constructivism as the theoretical basis to understand Turkish foreign policy and how its interests are constituted. In this regard, constructivism proposes that identity produces the binary of "others" and "self", although it can change over time. In this case, the state presents a new phase of foreign policy and thereby changes its structure. Hence, identity can direct national interests by defining enemies and friends based on states priorities.[16]

Moreover, the study of identity includes leadership traits. Margret Hermann defines leadership style as "the way in which leaders deal with other people in the political environment (constituencies, advisors, and other key personalities) and "how they structure interactions and the norms, rules, and principles they use to guide such interactions".[17] To understand the personal traits, this study tackles the psychological, sociological and philosophical aspects, which are pivotal in understanding the role of leadership in shaping and affecting the foreign policy process. The psychological perspective revolves around the perceptions of individuals about the instability of the world, while social factors are the fact that individuals' identity can be defined within the social motivators of the groups, such as beliefs, perceptions, and norms and so on. Finally there is an important aspect, which represents the relation between the self and others and how others are perceived as a threat.[18] When it comes to theories of leadership, there is a consistency between identity and

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[15]Maxyn Alexandrov, "The Concept of State Identity in International Relations: A Theoretical Analysis*", Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, Vol.10, No.1, 2003, P 34.
[16]Ibid.
[17] Margaret Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis," in *the Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, ed. Jerold Post, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), P 179.
[18]Ibid, PP5-6.

its traits; which includes the aforementioned perspectives in addition to the political and structural dimensions which center on authority and power.

The thesis proceeds as follow: in the first chapter, I will introduce the theoretical framework on foreign policy orientations, leadership analysis, the intersection between identity and interests as developed in constructivism. In the second chapter, I will elaborate on the period of enmity between Turkey and Syria before the rise of the AKP by showing the main conflict issues with Syria. In the third Chapter, I will trace the improvements in relations between two countries by explaining the Turkish foreign policy orientations toward Syria during that period. Finally, the aim of the fourth chapter is to explain the Turkish interventionist policy in Syria in which Erdogan's personality directed the relations between Syria and Turkey.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces three theoretical foundations for the analysis of the case study: foreign policy orientations, leadership, and constructivism. The linkage between these three foundations will be employed in this study to understand and analyse the changes that took place in Turkish foreign policy orientations toward Syria. There are two primary reasons for the importance of introducing these three theoretical foundations. First, Turkish foreign policy witnessed changes in its orientations from "Western backed-orientation" before the rise of the AKP toward a more Eastern orientation during the AKP era. Here, the role of Turkish identity is the central factor to understanding these shifts; before the AKP the influence of Kemalist identity directed foreign policy toward the West, as the ruling government at that time considered the country to be part of the Western alliance (Europe, NATO, etc.). Second, the rise of the AKP constitutes a rupture with this Western orientation due to its Islamist background and because it laid new foundations based on neo-Ottomanism. Then, the role of identity and its intersection with interests are analysed using constructivist theory to understand Turkish foreign policy toward Syria. Moreover, leadership analysis is used to understand the role Turkish leadership played in directing foreign policy toward Syria.

1.1 Foreign Policy Orientations

It has been argued that the analysis of foreign policy has not paid enough attention to the effects of culture and society on foreign policy decision-making. James Rosenau was among the first scholars who focused on the relevance of these elements in understanding foreign policy, and he presented his insight in the "adaptive model" which combines cultural

and societal sources to understand foreign policy orientations.[19] In the same line, Baard Knudsen attempted to understand foreign policy as a totality manifested in his endeavor to present a comprehensive model in analyzing foreign policy. His model contains three elements; foreign policy orientations, sectorial policies and foreign policy behavior.[20] He argued that "there is a link between cultural/societal forces and foreign policy orientations and between situational/contextual factors and foreign policy behavior respectively".[21]

State orientation is determined by its policies, strategies and obligations.[22] The way a state determines its strategy is guided by several conditions. The most important of all is the nature of the international system, which helps guide policy actions, and in the same time places constraints that reduce the freedom of action a state enjoys through subordination and dominance.[23] However, domestic pressures and needs, external threats to state values and interests, and geographic concerns, such as resource endowment, do play a substantive role in defining state orientations.[24]

Holsti defines three types of foreign policy orientation: isolation, non-alignment, and coalition making and alliance construction. First, isolationist orientation refers to the belief that state could maintain stability and interests by limiting transactions with other units in the international system and building administrative walls.[25] It aims to eschew the traps of world interests by staying away from alliances that could result in tensions among countries.[26] Secondly, non-alignment orientations are based on maximizing opportunities to achieve

[19] James Rosenau, *The Adaptation of National Societies: A Theory of Political Behavior and Transformation,* (New York: McCaleb Seiler, 1980), P 501.
[20] Baard Knudsen, "The Paramount Importance of Cultural Sources: American Foreign Policy and Comparative Foreign Policy Research Reconsidered", *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. XXII, 1987, P 81.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Holsti, P.109
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid
[25] Holsti, P 110.
[26] Ibid, P111.

interests by reducing dependencies; it has no connection with the non-alignment movement of the Cold War. [27] Thirdly, coalition making and alliance construction means that governments are eager to build permanent diplomatic and military alliances to deter threats and defend their interests.[28]

The changes that happen to a state's foreign policy orientations could be traced back to two primary factors. The first factor is related to the displeasure with existing external or domestic issues, which cause the leadership to change foreign policy orientations.[29] This displeasure can result from a variety of reasons: security threats, prestige, cost-benefit analyses, domestic political disputes and personal traits of leadership.[30] The second factor is related to exploring why one new approach was chosen over other available alternatives.[31]

Foreign policy orientation determines what actions are taken, but these actions are also heavily influenced by leadership traits and by the international system. Examining the role of leadership in foreign policy orientation is important to understanding why states opt for certain political actions over others, or what some scholars called "the Foreign Policy Analysis Framework".[32] The examination of the role of leadership falls in the intersection of three essential elements. Firstly, there are cultural constraints, which are the set of ideals, societal foundations and collective memories that create a national identity.[33]This national identity can, in turn, create a national ideology, which shapes worldviews and leads to the

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[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Kalevi Holsti,"A Pioneer in International Relations Theory, Foreign Policy Analysis, History of International Order, and Security Studies*", Springer Briefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice*, 2016, P 116.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]DeVere Pentony, *Foreign Policy Analysis,* (San Francisco: San Francisco State University, 2000), P 9.
[33]Ibid.

formulation of national goals.[34] Secondly, there are objective conditions, which are the series of circumstances that enable or limit the actions of a state in international affairs. Typically, these are understood to be the geographic, demographic, resource and environmental conditions that influence what a leader can and cannot feasibly accomplish given the limitations.[35] Lastly, there is the international system, which determines the way that political, economic or, for example, environmental policy can and cannot be enacted given its anarchic nature.[36]

1.2 Leadership Analysis

The role of leadership deserves greater scholarly attention. Studies often concentrate on the effects of internal and external pressures in shaping state behavior. However, power holders and occupants of key political positions usually take matters into their own hands when they have direct interest or concern in getting a specific issue done, and do not easily delegate their authority to someone else.[37] It is therefore crucial to look at the role of leadership in articulating policies and decisions, and in explaining phenomena and problems. Thus the leaders' impact plays a greater role in shaping and directing the situation, while structural analysis that tackles how a phenomenon or a problem is made up of different and smaller parts falls short in accounting for the decisiveness of dominant leaders in power.[38]

There is no agreement on the definition of leadership. Political Leadership was defined by Glenn Paige as, "the behavior of persons in positions of political authority, their competitors and these two in interaction with other members of society as manifested in the

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[34]Ibid, P 10.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.
[37]Ibid, P 360.
[38]Görener and Ucal, P 378.

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past, present and probable future throughout the world".[39] The absence of a widely agreed on definition on the nature of leadership directed scholarly attention towards the kinds and types of leaders that exist. Margret Hermann focused on Leadership Traits Analysis (LTA), which is commonly used for assessing political leaders comparatively, as it is a "multiple approach" that examines a leader's choices and statements along with their personality to deduct how his personal traits shape his decision. The significance of the leader's traits, she claims,: "the trait analysis is quantitative in nature and employs frequency counts... at issue is what percentage of the time in responding to interviewers' questions when leaders could exhibit particular words and phrases are they, indeed, used".[40] In Herman's analysis, there are traits calculated according to scores by analyzing the leader's discourse, these traits are: nationalism, the belief to control events, need for power, need for affiliation, conceptual complexity, and distrust.[41] Here, I use the leadership trait analysis performed by scholars, such as Herman, and employ their findings for my study.

Other scholars attempted to deploy "LTA", for instance Stephen Dyson ventured to compare Tony Blair with previous British Prime Ministers since 1945.[42] Dyson found that Blair believed he had the ability to control the political sphere, and this belief emanated from Blair's notion that Britain was a key player in international affairs.[43] Blair was also found to possess a simplistic binary worldview; he saw the world as black and white, good and evil.[44] Blair's simplistic worldview was reflected in his decision-making style, where he relied on a

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[39]Glenn Paige, *The Scientific Study of Political Leadership*, (New York: The Free Press, 1977), P 105.
[40]Ibid, PP 178-212.
[41] Margret Hermann, "Foreign Policy Role Orientations and the Quality of Foreign Policy Decisions, in *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Stephen Walker,(Durham, Duke University Press, 1987), PP 123-124.
[42]Stephen Dyson, "Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 2, No. 3, July 2006, PP 289-306.
[43]Ibid, P 303.
[44]Ibid

handful of carefully selected individuals to work with, and thus had what is described as a "high need for power".[45]

Tackling the domestic influence on state orientation entails discussing expansively the role of political leaders. Political leaders are usually characterized as being heavily influenced by their beliefs. Their personal philosophies shape their understanding of the surrounding circumstances and how to make choices that assist them in achieving their aims locally and internationally, and hence these beliefs have direct effect on their foreign policy orientations.[46] One of the most prominent scholars in laying the foundations for the idea of foreign policy orientations and foreign policy behavior was Margret Herman. She defines six different types of orientations; expansionist, active independent, influential, mediator-integrator, opportunist, and developmental orientations.[47] In the context of leadership traits, the expansionist is interested in increasing control over land, resources, and population. The influential is primarily concerned in influencing the foreign policy orientations of other states by exercising leadership within the international system. The mediator-integrator is focused on helping to resolve issues between other states. Finally, the opportunist seeks to take advantage of contemporary situations to put his own nation in an advantageous situation.

Herman also defines four types of personal characteristics connected to the previous orientations which are: beliefs, motives, decision style, and interpersonal style.[48] First, beliefs reflect the leader's assumptions about the external environment and outside world and his role in this world, and focuses on nationalism and belief in one's own ability to control events. Second, motives influence leader's interpretation of the external world, and his strategies revolve around the need for power and affiliation. Third, decision style refers to the methods

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[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Margret Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No.1, March 1980,
[48]Ibid.

of making decisions; it contains openness to new information, complexity in structuring and analyzing data. Finally, inter-personnel is concerned with the ways the political leader deals with other policy makers, and it comprises two characteristics: paranoia or excessive suspiciousness, and Machiavellianism or pragmatic behavior. The orientations of political leaders are dealt within the expansive literature on political psychology. The heart of the idea of conceptualization orientations shows how leaders conceptualize the national role and how those ideas relate to foreign policy goals. [49]

Hermann informs us that orientations come with a unique set of qualifying conditions based on the leader's conceptualization of his surrounding environment and the worldview he creates as a result. The worldview associated with orientation shape the way leaders interpret and categorize information and formulate particular political decisions. Erdogan's personality was a dominant, assaultive one; he used confrontation to overcome problems and obstacles.[50] Under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey accomplished extensive reforms, politically and economically. In foreign policy matters, Turkey abandoned its status-quo positions and moved toward a considerably more proactive foreign policy.

Similarly, another attempt made by Görener and Ucalto analyzes the personality of Erdogan using the personal traits; they found that Erdogan's personality is characterized with inveterate beliefs and fixed ideas about the world around him.[51] They found also that Erdogan usually forces his way through problems and dismisses the need for maneuver and bargains when it comes to the uncertainties of international relations. He possesses rigid, black and white evaluations, and only allows people who share views similar to his to get close to him, and does not feel comfortable, nor does he believe in diversity and alternatives; there is only

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[49]Jerold Post, "Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders with Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton, (Michigan: the University of Michigan Press, 2003), P188.
[50]Görener and Ucal, P 375.
[51]Ibid, P 377.

the right way and that is the one he is supposed to tread. The gravity of this belief was reflected on Turkey's positions and policies; Turkey's mediating, neutral role was given up for more proactive, biased policy choices. This point particularly testifies to the threats and perils of dominant leaders, and how their emotions, sentiments, preferences steers the direction of state policy without any check.

This study wills also briefly examine the personality of Davutoglu, the architect of Turkey's new foreign policy in shaping Turkey's positions regionally and internationally. Turkey's strategic depth is a foundational notion to understand the country's role and ambitions, which were designed by Davutoglu. In fact, the current active Turkish role would not have been possible without the personality of Davutoglu in framing and implementing Turkish action with regard to foreign matters.[52]

1.3 Constructivism

Emerging at the end of the Cold War, constructivism offered a new approach encompassing the social dimension in explaining world politics.[53] Constructivists employed empirical analysis and abandoned the belief that theory defines and drives action in the international system. Significant geo-political changes in the 1990s, such as the role of non-state actors, humanitarian interventions, and the nature of institutional practices required scholarly interpretation.[54] In contrast to traditional approaches to international relations, constructivism offered an unconventional theoretical paradigm. Constructivism relied on intersubjectivity or the interactions between actors as one of its foundations. Shared notions, ideas, values, and beliefs shape these interactions, and subsequently inform social and

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[52]Öni, P 51.
[53]Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carloina Press, 1989), P 341.
[54]Audie Koltz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid*, (New York, Cornell University Press, 1995).

political action.[55] This foundational technique lent itself well to analysis of the relationship between identity and interests and assisted in identifying which affected social and political action more: identity or interest?

Constructivism rejects assumptions that identities and interests are fixed arguing that they are adjusting and adapting constantly. Alexander Wendt expands on this relation between identity and interest offering three important claims: states are the primary units of analysis, the structure of state systems is intersubjective, and identities and interests are socially constructed.[56] As part of this third claim, Wendt offered four types of identity: the personal, the social, identity defined by the other and collective identity. The first distinguishes the "self" and the "other". The second relates to interpersonal characteristics. He saw characteristics as carriers of meaning and social content that are defined by the community or the society in which they were produced. The third holds that identity is not a relation between the "self" and "itself", but that identity must stand against another who holds a different or "counter-identity". The fourth claims that the "self" and the "other" are combined into one single entity, and together seek the welfare of this superior entity. Wendt argues for the supremacy of identity to interest. Identity defines the actor and his status, position and functional role in the environment, while interest represents agent desires and goals stemming from status, position and role.[57]

However, Wendt is clear in his rejection that identity is fixed; rather it develops and changes during interaction. Therefore, inter-subjective interactions rather than material aspects determine actor behavior. Intersubjective interactions refer to interactions between

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[55]Christian Reus-Smit, "Constructivism," in *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd ed. Scot Burchill and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), P194.
[56] Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State,"*American Political Science Review*, 1998, P 385.
[57] Wendt, P 231.

actors sharing collective meanings. Identity, in Wendt's view, generates disposition and behavior thus providing the basis for interests.

Similarly to Wendt, Ian Hurd argued that interests are defined on the basis of identity. Hurd posits that interests are not fixed; rather they are socially constructed and drive states towards certain political behavior. He adds that interests do not merely encompass social forces, but importantly, explains that other material elements are involved in how states come to hold particular interests.[58] For his part, Jeffery Legro highlighted that identity is more than an idea; rather it possesses an organizational quality and symbolism that transcends the individual and is present in the collective quality of government actions, discourse, and procedures.[59] Legro claims that identity creates dominant ideas in society and effects how individuals perceive and understand events. This builds on Wendt's claim that actors obtain their identities through their intersubjective dealings which create shared meanings.[60]

Actors in constructivism participate collectively in producing meanings, norms and beliefs, but their role would benefit from further analysis. These shared norms and meanings have a dual role both defining appropriate action for the state and establishing constraints that limit such actions. The state functions according to consensually agreed upon norms between and shared amongst diverse actors.[61] Actors create their understandings and their relations with the others based on these norms and beliefs. Simply put, without norms, actions and

[58]Ian Hurd, "Constructivism" In The Oxford Handbook of International Relations. ed Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) P 301.
[59]Jeffery Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).
[60]Alexander Wendt*, Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[60] Wendt, P231.
[61] Wendt, Collective Identity Formation, P 385.

behavior are meaningless. On the other hand, the state is devoid of meaning if it contains no norms, values, or interactions between actors.[62]

Examining the relationship between identity and interests encourages a discussion regarding critical constructivism. Critical constructivism focuses on the acquisition of meanings paying close attention to the role of discourse in producing reality. Critical constructivism develops traditional constructivist visions regarding shared meaning amongst actors, and contends that the world is shaped by the correspondence between actors and the manner through which they reach agreement regarding the meaning of the international system. Critical constructivism stresses the importance of identity, and like traditional constructivism, acknowledges the emergence of multiple identities, and posits that identity generates certain actions.

However, critical constructivism does not merely aim to evaluate the effects of identity in directing action; rather, it examines identity creation and how identities can subsume one another.[63] Critical constructivists do not take identity as an axiom; rather they try to explain why people seek identity and why identity is critical to society.[64] Critical constructivists move beyond constructivist claims that identity is the positioning of the self in opposition to the other, and attempt to explain what transpires regarding that other; assimilation, oppression or something else entirely? More importantly, critical constructivists recognize the role scholarship plays in affecting the social entities being studied, as such; the role of the actor and the scholar cannot be detached.[65] Critical constructivists attempt to

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[62] David Dessler, "What is At Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?", International Organization, Vol.43. No.3, 1998, p.461
[63] Thomas Hoffman, "Restructuring, Reconstruction, Reinscription, Rearticulating: Four Voices in Critical International Theory", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.20. No.1,1991, P.170
[64] Ibid. p.184
[65] Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory", *International Security Journal,* Vol23. No.1. 1998, P.188

uncover the dominant actor in interaction because they reject that interactions occur in situations of parity. To them, interactions take place between unequal actors, with varying degrees of power thus affecting outcomes. Critical constructivists stress the existence of strong actors and weak actors that influence power relationships and how those relationships influence the production of meaning.

In my research, I refer to and examine these claims with regard to the formulation of Turkish Foreign policy and its development. Critical constructivism is an extremely helpful analysis tool. It helps carefully account for different forms of interaction that exist between actors, and the differences in power and influence between those actors. However, I incorporate the claim that identity plays a substantial role in defining meanings and norms, and have investigated the manner in which identity has informed Turkish foreign policy before and during the Syrian uprising. I came to the conclusion that identity cannot be simply defined, rather, interactions between actors generates the prospect for change and multiplicity in a shared identity.[66] Building on Wendt, I argue that interests emanate from understandings of identity, and that interests are not fixed, but changing due to evolving understandings of identity. I employ a multilevel analysis of relations between Syria and Turkey to understand how relations developed in different sectors under the general rubric of Turkish identity.

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[66] Vaughn Shannon, "Norms Are What States Make Of Them", International Studies Quarterly, vol.44, No.2, June 2000, p.293-316

Chapter Two: Period of Enmity (1980-2002)

The dramatic changes in relations between Syria and Turkey mark a significant phenomenon. In less than a decade, the two countries went from the brink of war in 1998 to a period of amicable relations and then back to enmity with Turkey calling for regime change. Remarkably, it is important to mention the historical background of the relations between the two countries before the rise of the AKP to shed light on the role of changing identities in moving the relationships toward these different stages in Turkish history. The period under investigation here, stemming from disputes over water, the PKK, and borders, can be characterized as one of "enmity" until 1998 when both sides signed an agreement to solve their security problems by severing its ties with the PKK and expelling its leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

2.1 Sources of Tensions

There were several issues of contention between Turkey and Syria, namely territory, water, and security. The history of these issues dates back to the 1920s, but, they escalated in the 1990s because of the changing regional environment.

First, the problem of water. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the Great War and the redrawing of the region's political map, the emergence of new political entities in the Middle East created a complex situation. Turkish interest in the exploitation of Euphrates waters began in the 1950s when Syria launched a development scheme on its segment of the river.[67] However, riparian rights became a source of interest frictions only in the 1970s, when Turkey began the Southeastern Anatolia project.[68] Syria called for an equal distribution of water claiming that the rivers are international waters. While Turkey rejected

[67]Murhaf Jouejati, "Water Politics as High Politics: the Case of Turkey and Syria," in *Reluctant Neighbor*, ed. Henrij Bakery, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), P 133.
[68]Ibid.

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these claims, and argued that "the rivers are trans-boundary".[69] Up until the 1980s the issue of water remained mostly a technical matter of discussion between the two countries, though.[70]

In the late 1990s water became an issue of power contestation and a channel for achieving economic and political development, and a field for exercising state sovereignty.[71] The development of the "Southeast Anatolian Project" in the 1980s with the purpose of producing profits in the economically underprivileged area of Turkey's Southeast had been a crucial development with the dams and hydroelectric plants it comprised.[72] The basic problem related to the utilization of water is that the demands on water were so high from generating energy for irrigation, this spurred Iraq and Syria's protests over the use of the river's water for development.[73]

Second, the confrontation between Syria and Turkey in the 1990s mainly emanated from Syria's support for the PKK. Syria's support for the PKK remained the main reason for the conflictual relationship between the two countries,[74] with Syria providing the Marxist guerilla with training and arms.[75] It is notable that the Kurdish insurgency chose Syria for as its base, despite of the oppression the Syrian government practiced against its own Kurdish population who roughly represent 10% of the overall Syrian population.[76] Syria sought to use

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[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Selin Kent, "The Underlying Causes of the Post-1998 Turkish-Syrian Strategic Partnership", *NIMEP Insights*, the Institute for Global Leadership, Volume.111, fall 2007, P 31.
[73]Ozden Oktav, "Water Dispute and Kurdish Separatism in Turkish-Syrian Relations", the Turkish Yearbook of International Relations, Ankara University, Volume XXXIV, 2003, P97.
[74]Ibid.
[75]Zeynep Kaya, "The AKP and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East", *Middle East Centre*, *London School of Economics,* Volume.5, April 2016.
[76]Ibid

the PKK as a proxy against Turkey as the power and strength of Turkey had been incessantly increasing.[77]

In 1996, Turkey began a series of actions aiming to contain Syria. Firstly, Turkey made it clear that it could resort to the right of using force, if Syria did not revise its policy with regard to the PKK.[78] Later on, confrontations were witnessed between the two countries militaries on the borders. In 1998, Turkey managed to corner Syria after starting its "deterring pressure policy" and severed diplomatic and military communication with Syria.[79] Turkey began undertaking limited military operations against Syrian military units. Despite the Turkish-Syrian agreement to cooperate against terrorism, PKK activity in Syria was not affected.[80] By 1996, Turkey threatened to resort to Article 51 of the UN charter that stipulates a state's right to defend itself militarily against foreign aggression. Turkey repeated its threat again in 1998 and deployed over ten thousand Turkish soldiers to the borders with Syria. The threat to use military force this time had its effect and forced Syria to discuss and accept the Turkish demands.[81] In the same year the two countries signed the Adana Accord agreeing to cooperate on counter-terrorism.[82] This ultimately led to Syria's expulsion of the PKK from its territory.

Thirdly, the Turkish claim on Hatay instigated Syrian feelings of betrayal and Western imperial domination of the region since Turkey's annexation to Hatay in 1939 and

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[77]Malik Mufti, "Turkish-Syrian Rapprochement: Causes and Consequences", *The Washington Institute,* June 21, 2002, accessed April15, 2017.
http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkish-syrian-rapprochement-causes-and-consequences.
[78]Ibid.
[79]Ibid.
[80]Murat Guneylioglu, "The Changing Nature of Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Globalization Perspective," *Boğaziçi Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2011, P 149.
[81]Ibid.
[82]Ibid.

the tensions that remained since then.[83] Based on that Turkey claims that Hatay had been under its authority for over four centuries and thus Turks represent that majority of the population there; as for Syria, the importance of the territory emanates from its importance as a crucial part of the port of Alexandretta and thus important for Syrian business and trade.[84]

2.2 Turkey's Foreign Policy Orientations Toward Syria

Due to these issues, relations between the two countries were not stable and deteriorated to the degree that the two countries were on the brink of war in October 1998. We can summarize general attitudes/perceptions during this period the following:

Firstly, coercive diplomacy, during the 1990s: Turkey employed "coercive diplomacy", which is the threat or the limited use of force to divert an actor from a questionable behavior.[85] Turkey knew that Syrian would be a rational actor who would calculate the positive and negative costs of supporting the PKK.[86] However, the actual change came about due to changes that occurred regionally and globally; losing international support, particularly the USSR, disputes with Jordan, and a drop in oil prices.[87] Turkey put its "coercive diplomacy" to use against Syrian to end the Syrian support for the PKK. Turkey asserted that it has the right to self-defense against any act of aggression perpetrated against its territories or threatened its sovereignty, according to the United Nations Charter.[88] As a result, Turkey fortified its borders, and increased its military presence on the Syrian borders to convey its resolve.

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[83]Suer, P 12.
[84]Ibid.
[85]Damla Aras, "Similar Strategies, Dissimilar Outcomes: an Appraisal of the Efficacy of Turkey's Coercive Diplomacy with Syria and in Northern Iraq", *the Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2011, PP 587.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Ibid.
[88] Aras, Similar Strategies, P 601.

Secondly, countering-alliances, the opposing identities between Turkey's pro-western Kemalist military ideology and Syria's Pan-Arabist/ Baathist ideology were aggravated by the interference and support Turkey received from the US and Syria had from Russia.[89] In the post-Cold War era, the coalitions and alignments in the region got more complicated by Turkey's increased involvement in NATO and its role regionally, particularly in the Gulf War against Iraq and the military and political rapprochement with Israel.[90] Syria took a pragmatic approach in the post-Cold War era, and aligned itself with the US-led coalition against Iraq in 1991.[91] However, the resulting situation created a complex web of allegiances and temporary shifts of strategic orientations; Turkey got closer to the US and Israel, and Syria aimed to balance the increasing Turkish presence in the region, particularly in Northern Iraq.[92] Initially, the Turkish concern was directed toward the spill of Kurdish fighters from Iraq into Turkey. Syria's worries were directed at Israel's increasing aggression from the 1980s to 2000s when Israel occupied South Lebanon. Syria began to provide backing and support for the Kurdish fighters in Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey not out of a shared sense of identity or belonging, but rather to exert pressure on Turkey.[93]

Thirdly, cautious diplomacy, despite all these tensions between both countries, Turkey pursued cautious diplomacy with Syria, as an attempt to solve the pending issues. The "undeclared war" in 1998 ended with the Adana Accord that was signed on October 20, 1998, to terminate the conflict.[94] Relations were normalized after this record and it worked as a base for their security cooperation. According to the agreement, Syria ceased all forms of aid provided to the PKK and expelled its leaders and fighters, mainly Ocalan, from Syria. .

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[89]Daoudy, P 1076.
[90]Ibid.
[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid.

In this period, Turkish interests were paramount, but were also part of its identity. The identity of the Turkish state was constructed by the founders of the republic who started an ambitious project to civilize and modernize Turkey. The Kemalist state was premised on disbanding the Ottoman past and eradicating its traces from the public sphere.[95] Cem posits that Kemalist foreign policies in this era were narrowly conceptualized on the basis of "enemy" and "friendly" nations and separated the country from its historical connections with the Islamic Middle East. He further argues that the Kemalist preoccupation with separating the Western and Islamic worlds was overly strict and not in line with practical realities in Turkey, which he argues is a hybrid of both.[96] Bulent Aras argues that historical imagination influences the choices people make, the challenges they take, and the tendencies, where the imagination is built on the legends, stories, beliefs and the events of the past.[97] On the same line, the relations between Turkey and Syria should in one way explained on the basis of historical relationship between Turks and Arabs.[98]

[95]Zeyona Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey between Secularism and Islamism,* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2010).
[96]Ismael Cem, Turkey in the 21st Century, Speeches and Texts Presented at International Fora (1995–2000) Nicosia: Rustem, P 33.
[97]Bulent Aras, *Turkey and the Greater Middle East*, (Istanbul: TASAM Publications, 2004), P 91.
[98]Ibid.

Chapter Three: Period of Amity (2002-2010)

Turkey succeeded in transforming its disputes and disagreements with Syria into points of discussion. The water problem became a technical issue discussed by experts rather than politicians. Turkey managed to placate Syria's concerns over Turkey's military cooperation with Israel and the border problem was de-escalated with the initiation of new economic cooperation from which Syria benefitted more than Turkey. Economic cooperation opened the door for security cooperation against the PKK and the issue was removed from the table after a series of actions taken by the Syrian regime, like expelling some PKK leaders or handing others over to Turkey. Obviously, Turkey seemed keen on paving more roads of cooperation with Syria rather than conflict, and this resulted in increasing the scope and scale of rapprochement between the two countries. However, in the wider sense of the matter, Turkey's foreign policy approach in dealing with Syria and the subsequent outcome of this approach reveals the axioms of the new AKP Turkish domestic and external policy orientations with an Islamic background and how the Islamist identity played a pivotal role in defining Turkish foreign policy towards Middle Eastern countries, including Syria.

3.1 Strategic Depth Doctrine

Ahmet Davutoglu's book, Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position is one of the most important intellectual works to significantly shape Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP since 2002.[99] In his book, Davutoglu stated that Turkey should correct its mistake represented in maintaining a static position in the region, and play a more proactive role in its surrounding geographical domain: the Balkans, Caucasia, and the Middle East.[100] He adds

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[99]Ahmet Davutoglu, Strategik Derinlik, Turkiye'nin Uluslararasi Konumu (Strategic Depth, Turkey's International Position) (Istanbul: Kure Yayinlari, 2001).

[100]Haitham Aloudah, "Understanding the Sources of Turkish Foreign Policy Change towards the Middle East during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era: An Empirical Examination", (PhD diss, the University of Exeter, 2016), P222.

that Turkey is geopolitically central in these regions; it is not an "ordinary nation-state", rather it is a regional and an international player in its own right. Its outreach is derived from inheriting the "Ottoman geopolitical space" in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus. The book was a blueprint for Turkey's new political orientation even before the AKP was established.

After a cabinet reshuffle in May 2009, Davutoglu became Turkey's Foreign Minister, and he began employing his concept of "strategic depth". Principally, strategic depth is predicated on historical and geographical depth in the wider sense. Hence, Turkey based on its historical legacy and strategic geographical location possesses important, rather paramount, strategic depth in relation to its neighborhood.[101] This depth requires and invokes active engagement regionally based on Turkey's historical and political role in the region.[102] Thus, according to Davutoglu, geographical and historical depth equips the country with the necessary political and diplomatic tools to analyze, evaluate and deal with its surrounding environment.[103] He further elaborates that Turkey lacks real strategic planning that is premised on its historical, geographical and political potential, and this planning is exactly what Turkey's foreign policy needs.[104] Davutoglu, for instance, highlights that Turkey is not merely an old Mediterranean country like Greece or a Balkan country like Romania; rather it combines both at the same time; it is a Middle Eastern and a European country.

It is a mono-religious state with a multi-ethnic population, and the two features harmoniously show the essence of modern Turkey. Religious leadership and imperialism were replaced by multi-ethnicity, religious tolerance and nationalism as the foundations upon

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[101]Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol.42, No.6, November 2006, P 947.
[102]Ibid.
[103]Ahmet Davutoglu, "The Power Turkey Does Not Use is that of Strategic Depth," *Turkish Daily News* June 14, 2001.
[104]Ibid.

which Turkey was established.[105] Davutoglu describes these changes as an inevitable wave of Westernization that cast its shadows on Turkey's foreign policy. However, these changes and this Western wave created certain disturbances and instabilities inside Turkey itself when it wrenched Turkey from "historical continuity".[106] In his perspective, combining historical legacy with geographical depth produces the crucial political regional dynamism Turkey is capable of. The intertwinement of Turkish and Islamic identity not only sustains and thrives on each side's interests, but also marks the possibility of a greater level of cooperation and integration.

Consequently, the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy and Davutoglu's role in that process serves as the background upon which Turkey's foreign policy behavior functioned. Davutoglu sought to build Turkey's foreign policy on two main tenets: Neo-Ottomanism, and Islamism.[107] Neo-Ottomanism represents Turkey's historical depth that it should utilize, while Islamism serves as a unifying factor that attaches Turkey to its new geopolitical depth.[108] The new Turkish elite put these ideals into practice, and began promoting this new vision. Davutoglu took on the charge of the Turkish foreign ministry combining the traits of an academician, a scholar, and an intellectual on one side, and a former diplomat and an experienced practitioner on the other. He drew the main lines of Turkey's new foreign policy which was a reflection of how he read Turkey's regional and external reality and how he also conceived of a logical and attainable role for it.

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[105]Hüseyin Bağcı and Şuay Açıkalın, From Chaos to Cosmos: Strategic Depth and Turkish Foreign Policy in Syria, in *Complexity and Leadership,* eds. Şefika Erçetin and Banerjee Santo, (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014), P 14.

[106]Oinar Bilgin, "Only strong states can survive in Turkey's geography: The uses of geopolitical truths in Turkey", *Political Geography,* 2007, PP 740–756.
[107]Anges Czajka and Edward Wastnidge, "The Centre of World Politics? Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics", 2014, P 3.
[108]Ibid.

Davutoglu was a specialist in civilizational conflict. He argued against the "clash of civilization" and claimed that it promoted Western hegemony over non-Western states by asserting a certain end to historical evolution in which all states are or should be heading.[109] His Islamist identity and convictions shaped his vision, and he began rereading history, examining global politics and looking into Western hegemony from an Islamic and Ottoman perspective.[110] Davutoglu was Erdogan's chief advisor on foreign affairs and the architect of the AKP's foreign policy agenda. He certainly set the tone for Turkey's foreign behavior, and brought in a "multidimensional orientation" with regard to foreign affairs.[111] His vision dominated the making of foreign policy decision, and his approach gained prominence due to desires of then president Abullah Gul and Erdogan's emphasize this approach. Davutoglu's influence and eminence is illustrated in his success in transforming Turkey's status-quo orientation towards regional proactive engagement in its regional environment.[112] This engagement was based on meticulous calculation of Turkey's soft and hard power.

Most interestingly, Davutoglu was forced to step down from his position as the differences between him and Erdogan mounted in 2016.[113] It was argued that, Erdogan expected a more confrontational attitude in foreign policy matters which contradicted with Davutoglu's style, particularly with regard to relations with Europe.[114] Erdogan's ascendency brought Davutoglu's zero-problem policy to an end and constrained Turkey's ability to maintain and reinforce its strategic depth policy. At odds with Davutoglu, Turkey under

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[109]Matthew Cohen, "Ahmet Davutoğlu's academic and professional articles: understanding the world view of Turkey's former prime minister", *Turkish Studies*, 2016, P 533.
[110]Ibid.
[111]Bulent Aras, "The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey*, Vol.11, No.3, 2009, P 127.
[112]Ibid.
[113]John Hannah," How Do you Solve a Problem like Erdogan", *Foreign Policy, June 15, 2016, accessed May 23, 2017. http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/15/how-do-you-solve-a-problem-like-erdogan/.*
[114] Ibid

Erdogan turned to be a "rogue state", a term neo-conservatives and State Department officials employ in regard to states considered "authoritarian", sponsors of terrorism or those pursuing weapons of mass destruction.[115] Supposed links to Sunni extremists have led many to apply this term to the increasingly "authoritarian" government of Erdogan.

3.2 General Turkish Foreign Policy orientations

Turkey built its foreign policy orientations by emphasizing its Islamist vision, which held special significance for the Muslim world in general, and the Middle East specifically.[116] In this part, I explore the main tenets of Turkey's new foreign policy under the Islamist vision of the AKP. Firstly is the establishment of harmonious relations with Syria that was seen as the gate to the Arab world. Second, the manner in which Turkey employed its zero-problem policy as a foundation for new relations with its neighbors. Third, putting the latter policy to work required dismantling the security approach to Turkey's regional problems. This resulted in making Turkey a trustworthy partner and mediator in creating peace and stability in the Middle East.

On the side of relations with Syria, the new Turkish elite conceived of Syria in the light of the historical Islamist past that linked the two countries together.[117] However, this seemingly religious solidarity has been the prism through which Turkey and the AKP particularly, pursued its strategic interests.[118] The AKP saw itself not as merely a part contesting and competing for political power, but more of a movement propagating a

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[115]Dean Andromidas, "Turkey: NATO's First Rogue State," *British Genocide and War*, January 22, 2016, P 49.
[116]Meliha Altunışık and ÖzlemTür, "from Distant Neighbours to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.37, No.2, June 2006, P 245.
[117]Ibid.
[118]Ibid.

moderate Muslim democratic program.[119] Consequently, the AKP has rejected the war in Iraq, showed a considerable amount of anti-Americanism, viewed Iraq and Iran as potential allies to counter the Kurdish presence and aspirations in Iraq.[120] The latter point Assad played on adeptly by affirming that during his visit to Turkey in January 2004"a Kurdish state would be a "red line", not only as far as Syria and Turkey are concerned, but for all the countries in the region."[121]

The Syria example underscores an important aspect in Turkey's foreign policy that was greatly and successfully used regionally later on: the zero-problem policy. Turkey ventured to establish itself as a main power in the region, either by promoting economic and regional integration or by mediation.[122] In this vein, Davutoglu initiated his "zero-problem policy" aiming to settle all possible or pending problems with Turkey's neighbors.[123] As a result, Syria was seen as an entry point to the Arab world, and the change of leadership on both sides opened the way for a more profound and improved rapprochement that the Pax Adana (1998) had allowed.[124] The emphasis of the post-Islamist AKP government on the relations with Syria has to be more attributed to what has been described as "constructivist reasons of identity dynamics.[125]

The leadership of Erdogan marked an important transformation in the Turkish foreign policy for that matter. He acknowledged, for example, that there were wrongs committed

[119]Soner Cagaptay, "A Turkish Rapprochement with Middle East Rogue States?", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* June 9,2014, available at: http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-turkish-rapprochement-with-middle-east-rogue-states
[120]Ibid.
[121] Gerald Robins "The Anti-Federalist Society: Why Turkey, Iran, and Syria all have Worries about Iraq's new federalist outlook", *the Weekly Standard*, January 28, 2004, accessed May 12, 2017.http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-anti-federalist-society/article/4895.
[122]Daoudy, PP 1085-1086.
[123]Ibid.
[124]Ibid.
[125]Warning and Kardaş, Ibid, P 131

against the Kurds and that the time has come to grant them their right to express their culture and identity. The wave of democratization and the reduction of tensions that accompanied the first years of Erdogan's premiership has been a major factor in redefining Turkey's friends and enemies.[126] This domestic change that took place in Turkey reflected a bigger change in its relations with its neighbors, particularly Syria.[127] This was evident when the Turkish Prime Minister saw a larger room for cooperation between both countries in the issue of water, and signaled Syria's right in utilizing water further more than what was agreed on between the two countries.[128] In 2004, the Turkish Prime Minister signaled that the water issue should not be a problem between the two countries. He acknowledged Syria's right for further usage of water.[129]

Thus, the water issue became merely a technical issue rather than a political or a sovereignty problem.[130] The issue became a discussion between technicians from both countries on how much water should or could Syria use. This "win-win approach" indicated the depth of the transformation that took place in Turkey domestically and regionally and explain the change and the remarkable cooperation with the Syrian regime.[131] Syria handed over two leading PKK members to Turkey and expelled another five based on Turkey's request.[132]

Moreover, with Turkey's new approach, Syria was encouraged to delve into strategic and economic cooperation with its powerful northern neighbor and renounce its regional

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[126]Bülent Aras and Rabia Polat, "From Conflict to Cooperation: De-securitization of Turkey's Relations with Syria and Iran", *Security Dialogue,* October 1, 2008, PP 503-504.
[127]Ibid.
[128]Ibid.
[129]Erol Kalkan, "The Europeanization of National Politics and Change in Foreign Policy: Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy in the EU Accession Process", (PhD diss, University of Kent, 2015), P 179.
[130]Ibid.
[131]Aras and Polat, P 504.
[132]Ibid.

isolation, especially with the depletion of its oil reserves and revenues.[133] Easing tensions between the two countries led to an increase in trade ties and networks between the major cities of Aleppo, Damascus and Anatolia, and hence the two signed over 50 protocols that increased their interdependencies.[134]

Cooperating with Syria demonstrated the active engagement and multidimensionality that characterized AKP foreign policy.[135] These characteristics manifested themselves in Turkey's aspiration in becoming an important mediator in the region. Its diplomacy towards Iran, the war in Iraq, the Palestinian problem, all turned Turkey into a good friend to all sides.[136] For instance, Turkey played a major role in brokering the ultimately unsuccessful peace talks between Syria and Israel between 2006 and 2009.[137] Then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert requested Turkish mediation, and the Syrian president, Assad, welcomed the Turkish role.[138] Turkey also played a role in bringing about the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2006, and in settling the tensions between Iraq and Syria after the bombings that took place in Baghdad in 2009.[139]

Turkey's mediation between the Israelis and the Syrians paved the way for starting indirect peace talks between the two sides. Assad requested Turkey's involvement, and the former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert welcomed the Turkish initiative.[140] Turkey initiated a "shuttle diplomacy" between the two sides which was concluded in announcing the indirect

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[133]Hinnebusch and Tur, PP 104–108.
[134]Ibid
[135]Kalkan, P 180.
[136]Ibid.
[137]Ibid
[138]Ibid
[139]Ibid
[140]Abdullah Özturk, "Turkey's Relations with Syria in the Context of the Kurdish Issue: 1980-2014", (MA diss, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, 2014), P 56.

peace talks in 2008.[141] However, despite the impressive success of the Turkish diplomacy, which resulted in five rounds of peace talks, nothing was achieved and no agreement was signed as the war in Gaza and the election of a far-right government in Israel halted the process.[142]

The regional developments that took place in the early 2000s and Turkey's role then created a chance for Turkey to establish and engage in a web of interdependencies in the region through; trade, energy, foreign direct investment, and transportation.[143] The state began promoting bigger scope and scale of interaction and cooperation across the region. In the early 2000s, Turkey started an important phase in its regional relations.[144] It agreed on lifting visa requirements with Syria, and signed 51 protocols in different sectors such as trade barriers, economic cooperation, irrigation, agriculture and investment.[145] Turkish exports to Syria grew by 300$ million in 2009 and the lifting of visas filled the streets with tourists.[146]

As a result, Turkish popularity reached its peak in 2010 mainly with Erdogan's personality, which attracted great appeal in the Arab world in general, and Syria in particular. Turkey succeeded in creating a new image of itself among Syrians, and Arabs generally, by referring to common culture, history and identity between the two countries.[147] The appeal of the Turkish model and Turkey as a country was at its height in 2009 and 2010, according to a survey done by the Turkish Economics and Social Studies foundation reaching 87 percent

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[141]Ibid.
[142]Ibid.
[143]Kadri Renda, "Turkey's Neighborhood Policy: An Emerging Complex Interdependence", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.13, No.1, 2011, P 104.
[144]Ibid.
[145]Ibid.
[146]Ibid, P 176.
[147]Joshua Walker, "Turkey's Time in Syria: Future Scenarios", *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, No.63, May 2012, P 2.

and 93 percent of approval in 2008 and 2009 respectively.[148] These numbers fell steeply in 2011 after the revolution began.

The AKP's adoption of a Middle Eastern identity, with Islam at its heart and as a core value, which emanated from its new Turkish leadership marked a turning point. Erdogan and Davutoglu invested heavily in the geographical, historical and cultural proximity between Turkey and its Arab neighbors. Erdogan in a visit to Damascus mentioned that he could not differentiate between Syrian and Turkish faces and dubbed the Syrians brothers. While Davutoglu saw the Middle East as an important frontier where Turkey had to take the lead, create markets, drive the wheel of progress and solve the problems that had risen in the region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.[149] The rise of the AKP and with it Davutoglu's "zero-problems approach" redefined Turkey's identity and interests, and underlined Turkey's bid for leadership in the region, including the cordial relations Turkey established with Syria. Not just that, Turkey benefited greatly from its strategic location as a key gate to the Gulf and became immensely concerned in playing an active role in solving the disputes taking place in the region, like the Israeli-Syrian dispute and the Syrian-Saudi dispute, which all reflected Turkey's ambition to fill the power vacuum in the region and to position itself as the main actor in the region.[150]

On the other side, the rise of the AKP and political Islam influenced the perception of Turkey in the Arab world. Turkey's sound economy and democratic political model made it an epitome the Arab world would seek to imitate.[151] Turkey's success in reconciling Islam and democracy or secularism and religion marked Turkey's unique character in the Middle

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[148]Ibid.
[149]Hinnebusch and Tur, P 210
[150]Ibid.
[151]Çaglayan Çetgn, "Explaining the Change in Turkey's Identity Question in the European Union Accession Process: A Levels of Analysis Approach", (MA diss, Istanbul Bilgi University, 2011), P 75.

Eastern world.[152] The image of Turkey as a model reached its peak when the Turkish parliament refused to let the US use Turkish territory for a second, northern front to invade Iraq in 2003.[153]

The war on Iraq is an important incident that showed the transformations Turkey's foreign policy was going through. In an attempt to counter the US usage of Turkish airbases to strike Iraq, Turkey's previous Prime Minister, Abdullah Gul began a serious diplomatic initiative that started from Damascus to assert Turkey's rejections of the war on Iraq, and how the decision was a result of old political calculations and agreements that Turkey could not disregard.[154]

The AKP's perception of Turkish identity refashioned Turkey's interests and threats, its perception of allies and foes, thus Syria, for example, was seen as an ally, and hence we can see how the AKP affirmed itself in a complete contradiction to the traditionalist Kemalist vision, in the end coming to outright challenge it.[155] The traditionalist Kemalist vision, in AKP's perspective, severed Turkey from its "religious and civilizational *umma* identity by subordinating it to an ethnic/secular/ national one".[156]

The AKP saw itself to be functioning according to Turkey's actual potentials and popular aspirations; its vision consistent with the country's historical and geographical depths.[157] Another revealing moment was the international diatribe against the Syrian regime

[152]Ibid.
[153]Ibid.
[154]Ibid.
[155]Ahmet Han, "Paradise Lost: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy and the Case of Turkish-Syrian Relations", ed. Raymond Hinnebusch, *Turkey-Syria Relations between Enmity and Amity* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), P 58.
[156]Hakan Yavuz, "Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey", (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), 2009) P 209.
[157]Han, Ibid.

in the backdrop of the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri.[158] Turkey maintained a neutral position in the case, and dealt with the matter as mere accusations until conclusive evidence is presented.[159] These moments show the two sides in how Turkey perceived its role regionally. On the one side, Turkey's Ottoman legacy begot a sense and a responsibility towards the Middle East, and awarded Turkey with some kind of exceptionalism in the region.[160] Meaning, Turkey's destiny and future lies in its integration (or reintegration) in its surrounding neighborhood. [161] On the other side, notions of brotherhood, shared religion, culture and traditions all create a profound sense of belonging and proximity between the peoples of the region.[162] The AKP worked well on entrenching this Islamist essence in its foreign policy to channel Turkey's reentrance and re-integration in the Middle East.

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[158]Walker, Ibid, P 2.
[159]Ibid.
[160]Han, P 59.
[161]Ibid.
[162]Ibid.

Chapter Four: Period of Regime Change (2011-Present)

The Syrian uprising in March 2011 was the watershed after which a new phase in the relations between the two countries started. While the Syrian regime cracked down on the opposition, Turkey supported the opposition and hosted them. Turkey's position marks an important and new shift from its zero-problem policy with its neighbors toward a proactive foreign policy, where one of its manifestations was the pursuit of regime change by force. The underpinnings of this shift denoted two points: how the Syrian uprising helped define Turkish identity, and how the conflict between interests and identity was resolved by deeming identity the major factor defining Turkey's foreign policy behavior under Erdogan's leadership. In this chapter I intend to explore the reasons behind the end of the rapprochement between Syria and Turkey.

4.1 Turkey's Stance from the Syrian Uprising

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011, Erdogan once again attempted to convince Assad to rapidly begin a set of political reforms; however, the Syrian regime was slow in responding to any of these calls. In the wake of the protests against the Syrian government, Davutoglu visited Syria on August 9 and presented three important suggestions: lifting the state of emergency, providing the Kurdish population with a national identity, and stopping any form of official or unofficial violence against the protesters.[163] The Syrian regime did not respond to any of these calls made by the Turkish leadership. In November 2011, the Turkish stance with regard to the Syrian crisis shifted, and Turkey adopted an aggressive discourse and openly called for regime change in Syria and that Assad should step down.[164]

[163]Bağcı and Açıkalın, P 20.
[164]Ibid.

Understandably, relations between Turkey and Syria collapsed quickly. Turkey became the primary sponsor of the Syrian opposition, and the Turkish borders became a "safe haven" for the Syrian opposition to operate and for the Turkish civilians to escape the conflict.[165] By 2012, the level of deterioration in the relations between the two countries got worse when Syrian forces shot down a Turkish fighter jet, while Erdogan himself described Syria as a "terrorist state".[166] The situation on the ground gradually changed when Assad succeeded in attracting significant support from the Syrian population and the uprising turned into a civil war.[167]Consequently, Turkey's support for the opposition was transformed into support for sectarian strife, as Turkish intervention broke with all codes of international law.[168]

Turkey set as its primary objective in Syria the toppling of Assad. Turkey, also, considered the emergence of ISIS and other Jihadi groups as side effects to Assad's holding on to power. Yet, Turkey failed to convince the US or Europe of the need to take action to militarily intervene in the situation there.[169] Turkey even suggested the establishment of buffer zones in Northern Syria as a part of solving the crisis, and to serve as a hub for refugees and the opposition, but did not receive a positive response.[170] While Turkey remains the rebels' most potent supporter, the West considers Turkey's action to be a miscalculation

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[165]Turkey's diminishing policy options in Syria, *Strategic Comments,* Volume 22, April 2016, accessed May 15, 2017.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13567888.2016.1176719.
[166]Loannis Grigoriadis, "Learning from the "Arab Spring": Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux", *Middle Eastern Studies Programme*, working paper No.32, February 2013, P 8.
[167]Ibid.
[168]Ibid.
[169]Aron Stein, *Turkey's New Foreign Policy: Davutoglu, the AKP and the Pursuit of Regional Order,* (London: Royal United Service Institute, 2014), PP82-83.
[170]Erol Cebeci and Kadir Üstun, "The Syrian Quagmire: What's Holding Turkey Back", *Insight Turkey,* Vol.14, No.2, 2012, P 17.

that worsens the situation and ignores the more pressing problems that need serious attention: ISIS.[171]

The Western focuses on the threat and danger posed by ISIS and other Jihadi groups marginalized the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime. As the civil war reached its third year, the Kurds became the spearhead in fighting these groups in Syria and Iraq. Hence, Kurdish insurgents were supported both by the US and Russia. Assad benefited from this situation and allowed the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) to operate freely, train, and recruit new fighters in northern Syria and that region gained a semi-autonomous situation, which was perceived negatively by the Turkish government. [172] While the Turkish government and military continued with its attacks on Kurdish targets, Turkey permitted arms transfers from Turkish territories to other Jihadi groups in Syria (especially Al-Nusra Front) to boost the Syrian opposition and more importantly to counterbalance the PYD.[173] These developments prove that the complications posed by the crisis in Syria engage Turkey in a multi-sided conflict.[174] Thus, despite Turkey's support for the Sunni majority in Syria and more importantly its refusal to officially categorize ISIS a terrorist organization; Nonetheless, ISIS declared Turkey to be one of its enemies, thereby forcing Turkey to consider more carefully the support it provided to Sunni groups.[175]

With the influx of large floods of Syrian refugees into Turkey, among them significant numbers of Syrian ex-military personnel, who were seen as a potential nucleus for

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[171] Suat Kiniklioglu, "What Does Turkey Want in Syria and Why?" *Centre for Security Development and the Rule of LAW*, 2016, P 2.

[172] Zenonas Tziarras, "Shifting the Balance against ISIS, or Why Turkey Changed its Mind", *The Europe Levant Observatory*, July 24, 2015, P3.

[173] Altunışık and Tür, Ibid.

[174] Tziarras, P3.

[175] David Philips, "Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey Links*," Huffpost,* 11 September 2014, accessed May 27,2017.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html.

a Syrian opposition force.[176] Arms smuggling and deliveries were dispatched to the Free Syrian Army, which was composed of Syrian ex-military, however, Islamist groups were firmly established by the time this was undertaken.[177] One of the important outcomes of this policy, particularly the Islamist feature of resistance, was the appearance of Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda linked jihadist group that came to the fore in the Syrian insurgency.[178] However, as the price for the increasing size and number of Jihadi groups at Turkey's southern border heightened, Turkey recalculated its situation and after long negotiations with the US, Turkey agreed to join the International Coalition against ISIS in Syria.[179] Heavy airstrikes were launched from Incirlik airbase in Turkey, and the Turkish government thought pragmatically to search for allies to solidify its lone position against many enemies, especially as Turkish security concerns escalated all through 2015 and even more so in 2016.[180]

By 2016, the situation on the ground changed drastically and Turkey found itself in a vulnerable position, facing a Russian-backed Syrian regime and American-backed Kurds in addition to ISIS that has already attacked Turkey repeatedly.[181] Turkey's biggest concern is the emergence of a Kurdish dominated autonomous region at its southern borders; in order to prevent the rise of Jihadi or Kurdish pockets in this region and secure the borders Turkey

[176]Christopher Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid from C.I.A.," New *York Times*, March 24, 2013, accessed May 19, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/armsairlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.
[177]Faysal Itani and Aaron Stein, "Turkey's Syria Predicament", *Atlantic Council, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East*, Issue Brief, May 2016, P 3.
[178]Ibid.
[179]GulTuysuz and Zeynep Bilginsoy, "Turkey joins coalition airstrikes against ISIS in Syria", *CNN*, August 29, 2015, accessed May19, 2017.
http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/29/europe/turkey-airstrikes
[180]John Cappello, Patrick Megahan, John Hannah, and Jonathan Schanzer,"Reassessing U.S. Military Deployments in Turkey After the July 2016 Attempted Coup d'État", *Foundation for Defence of Democracies,* August 2016, P 9.
[181]Asli Aydintasbas, "With Friends like These: Turkey, Russia, and The End of an Unlikely Alliance", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Policy Brief, June 2016, P 10.

launched operation Euphrates Shield.[182] Consequently, the process of negotiating a peace deal with the PKK came to an end, and establishing security in the southern-eastern region became the main objective. As a result, the PKK redirected its previously external activities and carried out a number of fatal attacks in the southern-eastern regions of Turkey as well as Istanbul and Ankara. The permeability of the borders remains a thorn in Turkey's side with regard to the Kurds or even ISIS.[183] On the Syrian front the situation was even more complex. With Assad and his entourage remaining in power, Turkey's original desire to effect regime change had become confused by the ongoing nature of the conflict.[184]

Under Erdogan's leadership and through his focus on the identity card, Turkey was a major participant in forming the Syrian opposition. The extent and expanse of Turkish involvement led the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change comprised of the non-Islamist Syrian opposition- to accuse Turkey of sectionalizing the opposition and militarizing the conflict in Syria.[185] Erdogan adopted a Sunni perspective from the beginning of the Syrian uprising, and thus Alawis were deemed as non-Muslims and the Baath regime was seen as representative of Alawis.[186] On the other hand, Kurds were conceived of as a threat to Turkey's national interests and identity, and a decisive rejection of any form of political autonomy characterized Erdogan's position.[187] Moreover, as Turkey helped found the Syrian National Council in Turkey, the council in turn propagated the notion that Syria is

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[182]Ibid, P 11.
[183]Ibid.
[184]Aslı Ilgıt and Rochelle Davis, "The Many Roles of Turkey in the Syrian Crisis", *Middle East Research and Information Project*, January 28,2013, accessed May 21,2017. http://www.merip.org/mero/mero012813.
[185]Tannas Michel and Günter Seufert, "Turkey's failed pursuit of hegemony in the Middle East: Three periods of Turkey's independent foreign policy", *Center for Conversion and Peace Research Institute Frankfurt,* December 2016, P 84
[186]Ibid.
[187]Ibid, P 85.

only an Arab country and rejected to recognize the political status of the Syrian Kurds, and both fought against any nationalist demands made by the Kurdish population.[188]

The situation in Syria puts Turkey in a trap. As the military balance between the regime and the opposition keeps on changing, and the prolongation of the fight between the two, Turkey is faced with ever-greater risk. From one side, Turkish support for the opposition appears fruitless as the situation on the ground shifts in the favor of the regime, and the support for the opposition seems to be having negative impact on Turkey's relations with Iraq, Iran and Russia.[189]Also, the crisis in Syria harms the Turkish economy especially for the towns, cities and provinces bordering Syria.[190]

4.2 The Role of Turkish Identity and Interests

The "zero-problem" Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and Syria in particular, has dramatically changed since the Arab Spring. The wave of change that accompanied the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising in particular rendered the traditional approaches to analyzing Turkish foreign policy obsolete. The rise of the AKP governments, especially Erdogan's leadership, initiated an ambitious Turkish regional project that is premised on a Turkish-Islamist identity. This identity reshaped Turkey's interests and threats, friends and enemies. Turkish relations with Syria are a prime example of this as they have rapidly declined after the phase of rapprochement between them, and the Turkish position changed to advocating the overthrow of the Syrian regime.

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[188]Ibid.

[189]Bayram Balci, "Does the Syrian Crisis imply the end of the Turkish dream in the Middle East", *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, 2012, P 9.

[190]Ibid.

Turkey's position towards the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition is based on its adherence to democracy and its ideals, together with concern for human rights.[191] Observers commented on the influence of the Sunni-Muslim and Neo-Ottoman identity latent in the AKP's discourse and political practice toward the Syrian uprising. For example, Taşpınar attempted to show the connection between Turkey's neo-Ottomanism and its Sunni-Muslim sympathies.[192] The Ottoman legacy was a central force that the Turkish elite relied upon by referring to Sunni-Islam as the unifying factor back then and now between the Turks and the Syrians.[193]

Erdogan played a significant role in propagating the propinquity between the Turks and the Syrians (and the Arabs in general), and thus his position and discourse deserve greater attention. Erdogan asserted that despite Turkey's hands being tied, Turkey stands on the right side of history by supporting the Syrian uprising, international law, human rights, Islamic values and democracy.[194] Erdogan adeptly gathered all these concepts together to elaborate how Turkey's Islamist ideology does not stand in contradiction with democracy, human rights, or international laws, and against authoritarianism and barbarism.[195] Erdogan and Davutoglu focused on Turkey's Islamist identity that is the aspiration and the unifying factor for the people of the Middle East.[196] In their view, Turkey has become the model the people of the region do not merely want to imitate, but more importantly want to coalesce with; Turkey's depth could initiate a wave of change the Middle East has always been longing for.[197]

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[191]Özlem Bagdonas, "Reading Turkey's Foreign Policy on Syria: The AKP's Construction of a Great Power Identity and the Politics of Grandeur", *Turkish Studies*, 2014, P 143.
[192]Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey Strategic Vision and Syria",*The Washington Quarterly,* 2012, P 128.
[193]Ibid.
[194]Ibid.
[195]Ibid
[196]Özlem Bagdonas, P 144.
[197]Ibid.

With the rise of moderate Islamists across the region in the beginning of the Arab Spring, a valuable opportunity came to corroborate Turkey's soft power and expansion in the region. Hence, Assad was viewed as an obstacle for Turkey's interests, and thus Turkey destroyed its relations with Syria; a move that was logically calculated not only out of Turkey's Islamist orientations, but also interests.[198] The Arab spring in general, and Syrian uprising particularly, intersected with Turkey's regional and economic ambitions and goals.[199] By that, Turkey abandoned its zero-problem policy and headed toward forceful regime change in Syria, which would pave the way for Turkey's expansion in the region.[200] Simultaneously, Turkey viewed the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region with great empathy, and anticipated that their rise would be an integrative force getting the peoples of the Middle East under the rising, Islamic Turkish leadership.[201] The AKP aimed at exporting the Turkish model with its Islamic-Sunni-democratic character that would strengthen Turkish-Islamic identity inside and outside Turkey, and reinforce Turkey's role as a regional power player against its rivals in the region.[202]

Prior to the Syrian conflict, Turkey tried to exert its influence through soft power and international institutions, rather than through direct military intervention.[203] In pursuit of this strategy, Turkey operated under a strategy of issue linkage where other area issues are used to affect the targeted agenda. In the wake of the Syrian conflict, this strategy changed and Turkey tried to construct its agenda around military solutions, particularly by summoning the

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[198]Daoudy, P 1079.

[199]Meliha Altunisik and Lenore Martin, "Making sense of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East under AKP", *Turkish Studies,* 2011, P 569–587

[200]Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroglu, "Bordering on Terrorism: Turkey's Syria Policy and the Rise of the Islamic State", *Foundation for Defence of Democracies,* November 2014, P 7.

[201]Ibid.

[202]Daoudy, P 1080.
1075.

[203]Athanasios Manis, "The Middle East at Breaking Point: Turkey's neighborhood policy and the need for enhanced soft power", *Middle East Research Institute*, Policy Note, January 2015, P 3.

support of NATO allies.[204] Idiz posits a constructivist explanation for Turkish motivations by suggesting that Turkish engagement with the "Arab Spring" was informed by the success of Sunni opposition under the Muslim Brotherhood.[205] The collapse of well-established regimes led to Turkish cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood regimes, which took power in Tunisia and Egypt.[206] Turkish cooperation with Hamas and Syrian opposition, rather than Shiite groups, like Hezbollah or Shiite opposition in the Gulf are further proof of this shift in strategy.[207]

As such, it is arguable that Turkish foreign policy in this period seeks to take advantage of these patterns of cooperation in the post-Assad era by forging relationships with geopolitical actors that share a baseline ideology with AKP Turkey.[208] The AKP seems to be operating on the anticipation that the Assad regime is falling sooner or later and will be replaced by a balance of power based on ideological alliances, and Turkey is working on creating an axis of its own in Syria.[209] However, the problem stems from the geopolitical arrangements in the region. While the Shiites shared ideological affinity with Iran, the Sunni opposition shared greater affinity with Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the support provided by the Saudis is far greater than that provided by the Turks.[210]

[204]Kaan Kormaz and John Rydqvist, "Turkish Getup?-Ankara's Syria Policy Dilemma," *Swedish Defense Research Agency, the Asia and the Middle East Security Program*, March 2015, P 2.
[205]Semih İdiz, "The Muslim Brotherhood Ascends," *Hürriyet Daily News*, September 14, 2012, accessed May 22, 2017.
http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-muslim-brotherhood-ascends.aspx?pageID=238&nid=29304.
[206]Burak Özpek and Yelda Demirağ , "Turkish foreign policy after the Arab Spring: from agenda-setter state to agenda-entrepreneur state*", Israel Affairs*, 2014, P 334
[207]Ibid.
[208]Ibid.
[209]Ibid.
[210]Osman Gultekin," Inquiry on Pan-Islamist Feature of the Recent Turkish Foreign Policy with Constructivist Perspective" (Paper presented at ECPR General Conference, Montreal, University of Montreal, June 2015), P8.

Turkey, in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, pledged to bring about regime change in Syria. It began arming and training the rebels, and also allowed them to operate within its borders, and to establish their headquarters in Istanbul.[211] Turkey's determination to support the rebels in Syria helped emphasize its Sunni identity approach to the Syrian conflict.[212] As identity became more and more important, Turkish foreign policy was redefined along identity lines and its hostility was not simply directed at the Syrian regime, battle Shiites oppressing Sunnis in Syria or in Iraq.[213]

Evaluating Turkey's foreign policy could be a difficult task to undertake. Yet it is important to underscore two important aspects: The ambivalence that marked the core concept of Turkey's foreign policy strategy, and the gradual centralization in the decision-making process with regard to foreign policy matters. First, Turkey's foreign policy behavior has been heavily criticized in academic, political and journalistic circles. Tensions with Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, not to mention countries outside the Middle East signaled what was described as the move from "zero problems with neighbors" to "zero neighbors without problems".[214] Murison claims that Turkey's zero-problem policy is not properly defined and hence equivocal, because problems between states always and will always exist and foreign policy is about managing these problems and differences for the greater good, but to completely remove these problems seems far-fetched and more of an ideal hope than a realistic policy agenda.[215] Moreover, zero-problems does not clarify which problems we are

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[211]Charles Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A decentralized Insurgent Brand", *The Brookings*, No.25, November 2016.
[212]Toni Alaranta, "Turkish Troops in Syria: Is it all about the Kurds from No won?",*The Finish Institute of International Affairs*, February 2017, P 3.
[213]Ibid.
[214]Özgür Özdamar, Toygar Halistoprak and Erkam Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring", *Uluslararasıİlişkiler*, Volume 11, No. 42 Summer 2014, P 106
[215]Alexander Murinson, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century", *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 97, September 2012, PP 24-25.

talking about, short-term problems or long-term ones, issues related to security or also matters related to the economy. Öniş agreed on the ambivalence of the concept and added that this policy does not tell us whether we are trying to reach no problems on the basis of self-interests or on an ethical base.[216]

Second, the transformations that took place in Turkey's foreign policy reflect the discrepancy between Erdogan's perspective to foreign relations and Davutolgu's vision. Despite the fact that Davutolgu was the architect of Turkey's foreign policy with the advent of the AKP, Erdogan gradually began taking over the decision-making and decision-taking processes in foreign policy related matters.[217] Firstly, he began to undertake the foreign minister's role himself by establishing direct contacts and intensive communication with other foreign leaders.[218] Second, his foreign policy decisions were premised on his domestic agenda; meaning his nationalist conservative agenda inside Turkey framed his foreign policy decision regionally and internationally.[219] Henceforth, Erdogan's vision was primary defining element in Turkey's foreign policy decisions, which meant that such decisions gained constancy and uniformity since they relied on Erdogan's personality, yet they lacked institutionalization; the negotiations that takes place within an institution to reach the maximum benefit.[220]

4.3 Erdogan's Leadership Style

Erdogan's influence over the politics of Turkey attracted a lot of attention towards his leadership style. His character was viewed by some observers as "aggressive" and "forceful"

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[216]Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.14, No.3, 2012, p.61.
[217]Bulent Aras, "Turkish Foreign Policy after July 15", *Istanbul Policy Centre*, February 2017, P5
[218]Ibid.
[219]Ibid.
[220]Ibid.

and that his character tends to favor confrontation and rivalry. Others viewed him as a "pragmatic" and "charismatic" leader capable of inspiring his followers.[221] Turkey under his leadership seemed to be rowing against high currents sometimes and at other times he seemed to have established Turkey as a proactive key player in the region. The question then is how to reach an account of Erdogan's worldview and how it shaped his foreign policy choices. It is worth mentioning that Turkey's political transformations cannot be based only on Erdogan's personality, however, the process of democratization and the attempt to join the EU solidified the notion of civilian power in Turkey and increased the rejection of the old politics style that characterized Turkey before the rise of the AKP.[222] As one analyst mentioned "…he has been dominant in both the domestic and the foreign policy of Turkey (...) There is no AKP or related movement but rather the hegemony and dominance of Erdogan."[223]

Domestically, Erdogan, based on his aggressive and forceful character, made significant transformations and the pace of democratization until 2012 was astounding. His character was also reflected on foreign policy matters were Turkey departed from maintaining the status quo regionally and adopted a proactive policy behavior. However, his character tends to magnify his abilities and this was evident, for example, in his attempt to define Syria as a solely Arab state sponsored by Turkey and belittle the existence of other groups inside Syria and moved to deny the Kurds any political status, which triggered a wave of massive violence that the PKK perpetrated inside Turkey. Another more revealing example was his gradual takeover of the foreign relations file and neutralizing of Davutoglu;

[221]Soner Cagatay, "The Dream of a New Turkey", *Newsweek,* August 9, 2008, accessed May14, 2017.
http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-dream-of-a-new-turkey.
[222]Gorener and Ucal, P358.
[223]HakanYavuz and Nihat Ozcan "Crisis in Turkey: the Conflict of Political Languages," Middle East Policy, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2007, P 124.

this transformation demonstrated Erdogan's aversion to consensus. Erdogan's move against Davutoglu and their disagreements highlighted how Erdogan dislikes consultation and negotiation that characterizes institutional decision-making. This means that Erdogan's admissibility for criticism or questions is very low and close to absent.[224]

Erdogan's powerful position in Turkey and large domestic support base have emboldened him, which allows him to exert a more influential and powerful role regionally and internationally.One analyst remarked that as Erdogan's power grows domestically his strength internationally decreases.[225] In a similar fashion, noted that from 2009 on Erdogan became more aggressive and vociferous, he lashes out at everyone openly from the Turkish opposition and the Kurds to the EU, IMF and the US.[226] This conforms to the idea that Erdogan's personality is assertive and does not yield to barriers and hurdles; instead he forces his way through problems and obstacles rather than building consensus or reaching agreeable solutions. A logical consequence for this trait is that Erdogan always rules out nonconformist voices and ideas, and this shows that Erdogan is a kind of leader that only trusts what he knows and believes in and tends to shape the environment according to his inveterate beliefs.

On the Syrian front, Erdogan's leadership seems to redirect Turkish politics from an interest-based orientation and toward an identity-based policy. His identity approach makes him focus more on attracting followers and believers for his views as a measure for his political gains and success, and this means that loyalty becomes the main and most important factor for the regime. Thus, and based also on his tendency to amplify his and Turkey's

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[224] Gorener and Ucal, PP357-359.

[225] Pinar Tremblay, "Will the US-Kurdish deal force Turkey back to PKK negotiation table?"*Al Monitor,* April 2017, accessed May 22, 2017. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/turkey-united-states-trump-decision-arm-kurds-can-be-costly.html.

[226]Gareth Jenkins, "Turkey's Proposed Constitutional Changes and Erdogan's Forever War", *The Turkey Analyst,* December 2016, accessed May 21, 2017. https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/570-turkeys-proposed-constitutional-changes-and-erdogans-forever-war.html.

powers beyond any realistic calculations, he stands in contradiction with Russia and the US over the course of action in Syria. And while the US and Russia support the PYD and YPG, and both approve some sort of cultural autonomy for the Kurds, Turkey rejects that but it is not clear how Erdogan could bring about his desired objectives in practice.

Analysts expect that his confrontational attitude will isolate Turkey in Syria, and leave it without cooperation with the US and Russia.[227] Moreover, Iran seems to have effective cooperation and organization with Russia and hence together they succeeded in marginalizing Turkey. Erdogan had the belief that he will be shaping the new Syria which comes in line with his perceptions that he controls the environment, his insensitivity to political context and belief that he could push his way through obstacles and hurdles.[228] With Erdogan's insistence on regime change in Syria, he transformed Turkey from a non-sectarian mediator in regional issues into a country with a sectarian agenda.[229] Erdogan's miscalculation was made more apparent by the entrance of Saudi Arabia into the conflict. The superior financial and military support offered by the Saudis was reinforced by their greater ideological affinity with Sunni opposition.[230] Erdogan's worldview turned Turkey from a Middle Eastern model and a regional power that is connecting the East and West into a "rogue state".

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[227]Semih Idiz, "Erdogan's Foreign Policy leaves Turkey in the doldrums", *Al-Monitor,* May 2017, accessed May 21, 2017.
http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/turkey-gives-impression-of-beleaguered-country-all-fronts.html
[228]Gorener and Ucal, P 375.
[229]Michael Rubin, "Turkey's Sectarian Agenda", *Al Aalem*, November 11, 2012, accessed May 21, 2017. http://www.michaelrubin.org/12550/turkey-sectarian-agenda.
[230]Gonul Tol, "Erdogan's Syria Frustration", *The Middle East Institute*, September 2013, accessed May 22, 2017.
http://www.mei.edu/content/erdogans-syria-frustrations.

Conclusion

The purpose of my research was to develop a conceptual analysis for the relation between identity and interests within the frame of Turkish foreign policy orientations towards the Syria. Conceptually, this research is built on the constructivist claim that identity and interests are interdependent, where identities formulate interests, and the pursuance of interests alters the environment in which meanings and identities are shaped.

Building on this framework, I argue that identity is a crucial point of reference for comprehending recent developments occurring in Turkish foreign policy. For this purpose, I acknowledged the role of the transformations that took place in Turkish domestic politics, and more importantly the function of agents in conceiving of the state's role.

This study primarily analyzes the leadership style of the Turkish president, Erdogan and to a lesser extent, the role of Turkey's former foreign minister Davutoglu, in reconfiguring Turkish foreign policy. Focusing on their roles during the ascendency of the AKP in Turkish domestic politics and again after the Syrian uprising in 2011. Therefore, I employ a tri-level analysis in looking at the reconfiguration of Turkish foreign policy. First, how the rise to power of the AKP in Turkey inaugurated a new grand strategy regarding foreign policy which stands in contrast with previous Kemalist status quo orientations. This period marked a more proactive style in conducting foreign policy matters. Second, how the Syrian uprising initiated complex regional effects, and gave rise to the influence of identity (or identity-politics) in shaping foreign policy decisions of Turkey. Third, how to analyze the leadership style in Turkey, mainly of Erdogan, and the development of new roles of the Turkish leadership in directing Turkish foreign policy, especially after the Syrian uprising .

The aim of this research is not to follow the chronological evolution of Turkey's foreign policy agenda; rather I trace the role of the social dimension in structuring Turkey's

new foreign policy objectives. To that end, I Investigated how the Turkish elites conceptualization of Turkey's regional role changed, not merely as a result of the Turkish state interactions, but also as a result of the changes in Turkish perceptions and predispositions whether on the elite level or the ordinary domestic level. I also distance myself from those researchers who study Turkish foreign policy from a purely ideological perspective. Instead, I underline the constant interplay between identity and interest in explaining Turkey's foreign policy behavior. The Turkish leadership invested heavily in fashioning a foreign policy that incorporates Islamic and western values as a way of presenting Turkey as a bridge between the East and the West; this hybrid Islamic model of interstate relations combines both the modern and the traditional to form an Islamic universalism.

Following this line, the main research question this study undertakes is: "to what extent could Turkish foreign policy be explained through an identity-based approach? How did the Turkish state manage its regional interests with an identity-based foreign behavior? Was identity the decisive factor in the Turkish foreign policy related decisions, or was it merely one amid other determinant factors? In answering these questions, the Turkish-Syrian relation's before and after the Syrian uprising constituted my case study .

In my evaluation, even though, Turkey did not adopt an anti-western position even after Erdogan's consolidation of powers, neither did Turkey attempt to withdraw its proposal to join the EU. However, the development of the new Turkish identity took its own course. Turkey promoted a kind of "Islamic Universalism"; it did not see Islam in opposition to modern western ideals, such as democracy, free market, human rights…etc. However, the Arab Spring in general, and the Syrian uprising in particular, forced the Turkish elite to re-conceptualize its priorities and interests in the region. This re-conceptualization was based mainly on the supremacy of identity and the norms that ensued from the importance placed

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on identity, on the other hand, pragmatism in Turkey's foreign policy clearly receded. As for the way Turkey managed its interests I seek to analyze the transformation that occurred in the Turkish leadership style. Turkey at first managed to create a balance between identity and interest. Decision-making with regard to foreign issues was negotiated at an institutional level to guarantee the achievement of the best result that could serve Turkish interests. Thus, even though the rise of the AKP to power in Turkey indicated a new vision for foreign policy, Turkey's interests were calculated and cannot be described as determined solely by identity.

However, the transformations that happened in Turkey domestically and Erdogan's strengthening of his power took the substance away from the decision making process and identity became the major factor in determining Turkey's foreign orientations. Lastly and interconnected with the previous point, I reached the conclusion that identity was a major factor in defining Turkey's foreign policy after the rise of the AKP to power and the new vision introduced by Davutoglu, however, decisions regarding foreign issues took other matters into consideration as well. But the changes that occurred after the Syrian uprising and Erdogan's domination of the political scene were reflected in the prioritizing of identity over all other factors regarding foreign policy decisions.

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