

FROM KEMALISM TO NEO-OTTOMANISM: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

The relations between Turkey and Syria has been unstable throughout the years, changing from positive to negative. These changes leave a great puzzle behind and the reasons are often debated by academics. This thesis attempts to comprehensively analyze the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria through the lenses of realism and constructivism and contribute to the scholarly discussions on the subject. The relations between the two countries are chronologically divided into three chapters and the Turkish foreign policy is analyzed through the realist and constructivist hypotheses to shed light on the changes during the 90s to the present-day. The logic between Turkey's foreign policy decisions are analyzed through the logic of appropriateness and logic of consequences, and constructivism is used to explain the construction of national interests of Turkey while realism is used to explain Turkey's quest for power in the Middle East. Congruence analysis is used to analyze to what extent the empirical evidence is in congruence with the theoretically derived hypotheses/expectations while discourse analysis is used to descriptively analyze the Turkish foreign policy practices and the developments in the region.

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Introduction

Turkey-Syria relations have witnessed many transformations throughout the years and the relations between the two countries played and still plays an important role both in regional and international politics. The relations between the two countries were troublesome since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 due to territorial and resource-related disputes. The relations almost hit rock bottom in the 90s only to witness a radical transformation from enmity to amity in the early 2000s. However, as it is known today, the two countries are once again hostile against each other which leaves an interesting puzzle that needs to be addressed in international relations.

This thesis project seeks to extensively explain the changes in relations between Syria and Turkey through shedding light on the motivations behind Turkey's foreign policy actions in different time periods and analyzing the internal and external factors that had effects on these decisions. In common literature, the analysis of Turkey-Syria relations has been focused on realist explanations and overlooks the state identity of Turkey which had a massive effect on Turkish foreign policy decisions towards Syria. These approaches lack two important factors that are crucial in explaining the relations between the two countries; first, is the role of identity, and second, identity's relation with power seeking motivations and vice versa.

The identity part of the subject constitutes the first theoretical framework of this thesis project; constructivism. This research seeks to analyze the construction of the national interests of Turkey to rationally explain the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria. The quest for power constitutes the second theoretical framework which is realism. Following neorealism, Turkey's national interests are explained from the perspective of seeking power in the Middle

East to establish its regional hegemony which, in accordance with the neorealist theory, would grant its security in an unstable region.

In Chapter 1, the theoretical background of the thesis is presented. Compatibility of constructivism and realism is discussed to constitute the theoretical approach that is followed in this research regarding the Turkish foreign policy and Turkey-Syria relations in general. Using prominent realist and constructivist authors' ideas and statements on both defining and arguing the compatibility of the two theories, power and national interests are discussed and it is argued that realism and constructivism provide comprehensive findings than each theory considered alone.¹ In the next subchapter, following Marin Schulz's definition and description, logic of appropriateness (LoA) and logic of consequences (LoC) and their co-existence is presented to the reader. According to Schulz, action without logic is random and senseless.² This assessment shows the need to create logical links between the abstract and the physical which is also the case in Turkey's foreign policy motivations and its practices, as this thesis seeks to extensively explain Turkey's foreign policy actions.

In Chapter 2, the historical background of Kemalism and the political changes in Turkey are discussed in the context of both identity and power related foreign policy goals. During the 90s, the Turkish state identity was under the hegemony of the Kemalist elite, who described Turkey as 'modern, secular, Westernized', their Muslim and Eastern counterparts represented 'backwardness' and a 'threat' to the secular state.³ The Kemalist elite favored rapprochement with the West, especially the EU (European Union) while staying distinct from the East. In

¹ Duncan Snidal and Alexander Thompson, "International commitments and domestic politics: institutions and actors at two levels" (2002) found in Ian Hurd, "Constructivism" (2008): 311.

² Martin Schulz, "Logic of Consequences and Logic of Appropriateness" (2014): 3.

³ Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," (Comparative Politics, Ph.D. Programs in Political Science, City University of New York, 1997): 64.

addition, Turkey had structural and material problems with some of its Eastern neighbors, Syria making the top of the list with such problems like the Water Issue and border disputes regarding the city of Hatay. This identity and structure related issues had decisive effects on Turkey's foreign policy approach to the East and had great implications on relations with Syria as the two countries almost got into war in the late 90s. However, with the election of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) in the early 2000s, Turkey's Kemalist identity experienced a strong change as the conservative-democrat identity of the AKP gained the upper hand against the Kemalists, favoring rapprochement with the East and the introduction of Muslim characteristics to both social and political life. Once this domestic identity change was established, with the SDD (Strategic Depth Doctrine), Turkey pursued a pro-Eastern and pro-Muslim 'neo-Ottoman' foreign policy to become a regional power in the Middle East, which also brought Turkey and Syria closer to each other, switching the relations from enmity to amity.

In Chapter 3, the period from the beginning of the Arab Spring protests in Syria to Russian military intervention is analyzed. In accordance with the realist and constructivist hypotheses, it is argued in this chapter that Turkey's state identity and its regional goals clashed with the Assad regime. This divergence directed the Turkish foreign policy to pursue a regime change in Syria and replace it with the SMB (Syrian Muslim Brotherhood) which would be a crucial step for the AKP's regional role as a leading political party. This transition in Turkish foreign policy is termed as 'neo-Ottoman Adventurism' in this chapter due to the abandonment of some of the SDD's features as well as the economic and political achievements with the Assad regime in the last years. Through the discourses of important leaders, the structural features in the region, Turkey's, Russia's, the Western powers' and Syria's stances on the conflict are presented and Turkey's foreign policy goals, actions, and its consequences are explained.

In Chapter 4, the period from the Russian military intervention and the latest developments regarding Turkish foreign policy in Syria are analyzed. Turkey's foreign policy strategy during this period is termed as 'neo-Ottoman realpolitik' as it is argued that Turkey has acknowledged the realities on the ground and set its goals in Syria accordingly. However, the realist approach also brought a need to reconstruct the Turkish state identity to ensure the appropriateness of the new foreign policy agenda in Syria. In addition, the 'offensive–defensive realism' debate is addressed in this chapter and it is concluded that, from the example of Turkey, one state can pursue both offensive and defensive realism in different time periods regarding the changing situations. At the end of the chapter, predictions for the future in Syria are offered.

In the conclusion, the findings of the research are summarized, the contribution to the literature is reviewed and the suggestions for further research is offered.

CHAPTER 1: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In common literature, realism and constructivism are often regarded and/or portrayed as two distinct approaches to international relations. The main feature of this differentiation lays on the belief that the two theories follow different approaches to international politics, picturing two different worlds, therefore, it is concluded that the two cannot be compatible in terms of research. However, in this chapter, by using different authors and their statements, I shortly talk about the features of the two theories and argue that despite the common tendency to distinguish realism and constructivism from each other, especially in the context of national interests, the two approaches can be formulated in such a way that they become compatible and overlap with each other.

Moreover, I argue that the debate within realism between offensive and defensive realists is, at least in certain circumstances, not overly productive as one and the same state may pursue offensive and defensive realist foreign policies at different times. This thesis seeks to address this argument through the empirical chapters regarding Turkey's political actions which resembles defensive and offensive realism in different situations.

1.1 Realism and Constructivism

The first theory I will discuss is realism. Today, there are two main strands of realism; classical realism and neo-realism. While there are commonalities between the two strands, such as taking the states as the central actor in international relations, the two differentiates in their focal point. For classical realists which are associated with Morgenthau, international politics is shaped by human nature, which is supposedly selfish and greedy. For neo-realists, the central approach to international politics is the anarchic structure of the international system which determines

political actions of states. Since this project aims to analyze Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria with structural factors, the focus will be given to neo-realism.

Kenneth Waltz is the prominent scholar who introduced neo-realism (structural realism) to the literature, where he argues that the anarchic system, which is the understanding that there is no higher authority than the sovereign states in the international system to control, balance or restrict political actions, is central to analyze all international politics.⁴ According to Waltz, the anarchy in the international system forces the states to pursue their national interests to guarantee their survival as he states that the survival is the first step to achieve any goal that there is.⁵ As the anarchical system does not provide given security or survival for any state, the national interests for neo-realists solely depend on acquiring power to improve their chances of survival.

At this stage it is important to clarify what is meant by power, yet, reaching an agreement on what power means is a difficult issue in international relations. There are many conceptual differences, different approaches (means to an end vs end itself) and theoretical debates on power. However, it is not in the scope of this research to address all these debates. I will use Kenneth Waltz's definition of power to demonstrate what national interest and foreign policy objectives mean for neo-realists in general, as both the offensive and defensive realists share the same view of power. Briefly, Waltz equates power with the possession of material resources. Building on Waltz, Brian Schmidt explains these resources as the level of military expenditure, size of the armed forces, gross national product, size of territory, and population.⁶ To summarize it, for neo-realists, military and economic units make the basis of power.

⁴ Brian C. Schmidt, "Competing Realist Conceptions of Power," *Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3 (2005): 527.

⁵ Kenneth Waltz, "Theory of International Politics" (Waveland Press, 1979): 91-92.

⁶ Schmidt (2005): 529.

Yet, another debate derives from the concept of power and the state actors in neo-realism. Also debated as ‘offensive’ and ‘defensive’ realism, the theoretical question can be put as the following; are states power maximizers or security maximizers? The former belongs to John Mearsheimer who argues that the anarchic international system obliges states to maximize their power for their survival. Mearsheimer states “apprehensive about the ultimate intentions of other states, and aware that they operate in a self-help system, states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system.”⁷ Briefly, Mearsheimer believes that the states aim to be the biggest fish in the tank to guarantee their survival. Mearsheimer’s statement is used in this thesis to explain the neo-Ottoman foreign policy of Turkey. As it is described in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the new elite of Turkey followed an active policy in the Middle East to become a regional leader and assure its security against, first, the pro-Western Kemalist elite, second, against the very unstable geopolitics in the Middle East, acting as a power maximizer.

On the contrary, Kenneth Waltz argues that states must be careful with what other states are capable of and therefore should not seek too much power. Waltz argues that states will only seek the appropriate amount of power to ensure their security as he writes “states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it (power)”.⁸ Waltz’s statement can be interpreted as acquiring or the attempt to acquire too much power may cause an imbalance in the international system which may lead to different coalitions and create a total security dilemma, while having too little power may also threaten the existence of the state against other states. The main idea

⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics” (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001): 33.

⁸ Kenneth Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, eds. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 43.

that Waltz presents here is that the states will aim for balance in the international system and this concept is known as ‘defensive realism’ where states are taken as security maximizers.

It is not the aim of this thesis to address the theoretical debates between offensive and defensive realists, nor to focus on testing these two concepts throughout the project. Offensive and defensive realism is simply used in this thesis to show that the same government can follow different strategies at different times. In Chapter 4, it is discussed that the Turkish state went through a revision of its foreign policy towards Syria and the Middle East, prioritizing its own security instead of pursuing regional hegemony which requires toppling of Assad in the first place. Rapprochement with Russia to conduct military operations in the Kurdish controlled northern Syria eventually served to a defensive agenda for Turkey, while the anti-Assad discourse came to a point of non-existence amongst the ruling party elite. I argue that Turkey has acted accordingly with what defensive realists would argue and it (Turkey) aimed to seek an appropriate amount of power to ensure its survival and establish a balance of power in the region, acting as a security maximizer.

The second theory I will discuss is constructivism. According to Samuel Barkin, possibly all self-described constructivists would define the core feature of constructivism as a focus on the social construction of international politics.⁹ The main distinguishing feature of constructivism from realism is the former’s intersubjectivity, which argues that the international politics are a social reality, while the latter sees international politics as a reflection of an objective and assumes a material reality.¹⁰ The social reality reflects upon every aspect of international politics,

⁹ J. Samuel Barkin, “Realist Constructivism,” *International Studies Review*, Vol.5, No.3 (Wiley, 2003): 326.

¹⁰ Ibid.

including national interests which constructivist would argue that the state interests are set through social interaction and it is constructed by the very same social.

How are national interests set through social construction? According to Alexander Wendt, “actors acquire identities-relatively stable, role-specific understanding and expectations about self-by participating in collective meanings” which constructivists argue that these identities are constructed within the social environment of international and domestic politics.¹¹

¹² As it will be discussed in Chapter 2, Turkey’s new state identity also fits into this conceptualization as the new elite in Turkey sets new norms and interests through relations and interactions with international and domestic actors. Finally, to clarify what is meant by social construction of national interests, Alexander Wendt says “500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons” which shows that the perceptions of ‘enemy’ and ‘ally’, ‘threat’ and ‘protection’ are given meanings by the social through history, practice, and identity.¹³

Having defined the relative features of the two theories, a common differentiation in national interests is usually argued in international relations between realism and constructivism, that realism ignores the social and with-it the ideas, and constructivism is a critique of materialism and ignores the quest for power. According to Barkin, both these claims are not true. Barkin states that “many constructivists explicitly accept that power matters in international relations...Wendt, for example, notes that to the extent realism is about power, he too is a

¹¹ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of politics,” *International Organization* (1992): 397.

¹² Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “TAKING STOCK: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4(1) (2001): 398.

¹³ Ian Hurd, “Constructivism,” in Duncan Snidal and Christian Reus-Smit eds. *Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2008): 301.

realist.”¹⁴ The main theoretical issue here derives from the approach that is often adopted in international relations; academics take constructivism as another paradigm that strictly opposes the world view of realism, which naturally includes the debates revolved around the definition of national interests and the ontology of power.

However, on the subject of national interests and power, Ian Hurd argues that constructivism does not ignore power, yet, it focuses on interest formation through the social and questions how power is defined or perceived.¹⁵ Nor does constructivism ignores materialism but it focuses on the meanings that are given to material realities, while realism takes these material interests as given. At the same time, Hurd states that while realists may present national interests as material factors, they do not reject that these factors rest on ideas about needs, such as individual ruler’s presentation of national interests and how they choose policies that will ensure their survival.¹⁶

Duncan Snidal and Alexander Thompson finds both rationalism and constructivism useful when exploring the international institutions’ constraints on states and puts an emphasis on how realism and constructivism can relate to the same matter, yet their emphasis may differ on different features.¹⁷ Snidal and Thompson argue that the combination of the two theories help to achieve important findings than each considered alone to explain the matter.¹⁸ Finally, Samuel Barkin also states that many seminal realist theorists argue explicitly that nonmaterial factors are central to a complete understanding of power and that they realize how complex and

¹⁴ Barkin (2003): 329.

¹⁵ Hurd. (2008): 303.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Duncan Snidal and Alexander Thompson, “International commitments and domestic politics: institutions and actors at two levels” (2002) found in Ian Hurd, “Constructivism” (2008): 311.

¹⁸ Ibid., 312.

multifaceted power analysis can be.¹⁹ Therefore, Barkin concludes that the claims of incompatibility are based on very narrow understandings and preconceptions about the two theories and that constructivist research is as compatible with a realist worldview as with any other.²⁰

The arguments above also constitutes the basis of this thesis research in which the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria from the 90s to the present-day is analyzed through realism and constructivism, first, to show the change in identity and the construction of new national interests in Turkey, and its effects on Turkey-Syria relations, second, to demonstrate the Turkish state's quest for power due to the changing geopolitics and the domestic issues to ensure its survival. I argue that using these two theories provide a comprehensive understanding of Turkey's foreign policy decisions towards Syria and offers valuable explanation to the unsteady relations between the two countries.

1.2 Logic of Appropriateness and Logic of Consequences

As it is discussed above, this thesis seeks to analyze the foreign policy decisions that are made by Turkey towards Syria. LoA (logic of appropriateness) and LoC (logic of consequences) are used in this project to explain the motivations and the logics behind the foreign policy decisions of Turkey. According to Martin Schulz, action without logic is random and senseless.²¹ LoA and LoC makes the fundamental basis to analyze and explain the meanings behind actions, individual or collective. However, just like the realism versus constructivism debate, these two logics of action are also regarded as contrary to each other, which I argue the opposite.

¹⁹ Barkin (2003): 330.

²⁰ Ibid., 326.

²¹ Martin Schulz, "Logic of Consequences and Logic of Appropriateness" (2014): 3.

Before discussing the combinability of the two concepts, I would like to briefly present their definitions. According to James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, action, policy making included, is seen as driven by the rules of appropriate.²² LoA assumes that the actors will act accordingly with their acquired identity as identity determines the rules which the actor is obliged to act relatively during a specific situation. These rules are followed as they are taken as natural, rightful, expected and legitimate.²³

LoC relates to an exclusive focus on expected consequences and is described as the logic of ‘analysis-based’ action.²⁴ From a consequentialist perspective, in an action followed by LoC, the importance is given to self-interests and the expected gains. While LoA can be described as decision making with socially constructed norms and rules in its center, LoC can be defined as a simple cost-benefit calculation.

Due to its focus on identity, LoA is often associated with constructivism in international relations literature, while LoC is regarded as a decision-making perspective that fits into realism. However, as March and Olsen argue, political actors are likely to be held accountable for both the appropriateness and the consequences of their actions.²⁵ What March and Olsen provide by making such statement is reconciling the two logics as they argue that sometimes the actors will get ‘dirty hands’ to achieve desirable results through methods that they take as inappropriate, showing that the actors can follow both logics.²⁶

²² James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The logic of appropriateness,” *Centre for European Studies* (2009): 3.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, “Organizations,” (2nd edn) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) found in Schulz (2014): 7.

²⁵ March and Olsen (2009): 17.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

In addition, Schulz explains the two logics as “...are available for every action; they span the entire space of meaningful action.”²⁷ According to Schulz, an action can predominantly follow one or the other logic and is often a mix of both.²⁸ Schulz also recognizes the shifts between the two logics and argues that -for collective organizations- it can lead to strategic gains and success.²⁹ The shift usually happens when the actor is faced with new situations or when the changes in the current radically transforms the character of the matter.

In the light of these statements, the empirical cases are evaluated both from the perspective of LoA and LoC to show the key insights of Turkish foreign policy decisions in different time periods. In accordance with March’s, Olsen’s and Schulz’s statements on the compatibility of the two logics, it is discussed in this project that the Turkish foreign policy decisions are affected by both LoA and LoC, and during the times of change in political situations, there are clear shifts from one logic to another.

1.3 Hypotheses

The research question of this project is the following; what explains the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria since the 1990s? There are two hypotheses that are presented in this thesis to answer this question. First, is the realist hypothesis regarding the foreign policy of Turkey towards Syria. The realist hypothesis argues that the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria is driven by the quest for regional influence under changing geopolitics in the Middle East.

Second is the constructivist hypothesis. The constructivist hypothesis argues that the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria is at first driven by reconstitutions of Turkish foreign

²⁷ Schulz (2014): 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

policy role identity as pro-Eastern, pro-Muslim state which promotes political, economic and cultural rapprochement with the Arab countries. Once this role identity was established by the AKP, Turkish foreign policy changes can be explained by the persistence of this role identity in the context of geopolitical changes which led to first, amity, then enmity with Syria.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology of this thesis project is based on qualitative research. The research focus and the questions that this project seeks to address requires both theoretical and conceptual debates and an interpretivist research. Congruence analysis approach makes the fundamental part of this research to comprehensively explain the empirical cases that are presented through theoretical frameworks that are developed into two main hypotheses; constructivist and realist. The two theoretical lenses are applied to analyze the empirics in greater depth and providing extensive findings and expectations that creates strong links between the theories and the empirical findings.³⁰

The empirical evidences in this thesis are predominantly a mix of foreign policy practices and discourses. The discourses of Turkish policy makers as President, Primer Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and notable military generals, as well as the Syrian president Bashar Assad, the Russian president Vladimir Putin and the American president Barack Obama and the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are used in this thesis due to their decision making capabilities and relevance to the events that are analyzed in this project. These discourses include statements

³⁰ Thillai Rajan Annamalai, "Congruence Analysis," in Albert J. Mills and Gabrielle Durepos and Elden Wiebe, "Encyclopedia of Case Study Research" (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012)

regarding the foreign policy decisions of each country as well as the political perceptions of each actor and their interpretations of the events related to Syria.

The material for the discourse analysis is gathered from various online newspapers due to the extensive character of the events and their relevance to international and domestic media.

The sources are considered with the extent of information they provide and their representativeness and the relevance to the issues. For the events that attracted the international media's attention, I use The Telegraph, The Guardian and the BBC due to their coverage of the events and their internationality to help English readers understand the discourses that are used clearly. For the domestic media coverage, and by that, I mean mostly the Turkish official's discourses, I use various resources, predominantly using Hürriyet, Sözcü and Sabah as they are the three most circulated newspapers in Turkey with high relatedness to the events.

CHAPTER 2: Enmity to Amity

In this chapter, the historical background of Kemalist Turkey is presented to the reader to briefly summarize the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria during the 90s. Then, the changes in Turkey's state identity and its foreign ambitions with the election of AKP is discussed. The main findings of this chapter are, in accordance with the constructivist hypothesis, how the foreign policy interests of Turkey is changed through the reconstruction of the Turkish identity, and, in accordance with the realist hypothesis, how the neo-Ottoman foreign policy is aimed at becoming a regional power in the Middle East. These changes' effects on the relations with Syria is presented throughout the chapter.

2.1 Kemalist Traditions and the 90s

Kemalism as a nationalistic and pro-Western ideology was the dominant force in Turkish politics during the 90s due to TSK's (Turkish Armed Forces) influence over the Turkish political elite. The ideas and policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish republic, was embodied by the TSK to balance or to dominate the Turkish political elite in order to keep the country within its secular and Westernized principals. The first direct involvement of the army took place in 1960 with a successful coup d'état against the conservative Democrat Party which resulted in the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, for 'trying to destroy the Turkish state's secular ideals.'

In accordance with these principals, the Kemalist status-quo ensured that Turkey remained as a secular and Westernized state, and supported the rapprochement with the West

while staying distinct from the Middle East.³¹ As the Kemalists in the 90s described the Turkish identity as ‘modern, secular, Westernized’, their Muslim and Eastern counterparts represented ‘backwardness’ and a ‘threat’ to the secular state.³² It is safe to say this othering of the Middle Eastern neighbors is rooted in the historical narrative of the Kemalist Republic. Before the country’s establishment on 29 October 1923, Islam was the central ideology and the defining identity in the Ottoman Empire, however, the founding elites of the new Turkish Republic replaced Islam with nationalism, science, and secularism to reach the level of the ‘contemporary civilizations’.³³

The Kemalist ideology and formations have witnessed natural transformations throughout the years due to internal and external factors. In the 90s, two important things have strengthened the Kemalist ideology and the role of the military. First, was the establishment of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and their increasing terror attacks in the 90s, second, was the rise of political Islam under Necmettin Erbakan’s Welfare Party WP (Welfare Party). Kemalists were always concerned with the Kurdish identity as they identified Turkey as a unitary state, in which the citizens are called Turks, thus Kurdish identity was perceived as a direct threat to the existence of the country.³⁴ Since the establishment of the country, with the post-Lausanne borders which included the Kurdish dominated regions of the southeast, Kurdish uprisings were brutally suppressed by the Kemalist state and any sort of rights that were connected to the Kurdish identity was ignored.³⁵

³¹ Suna Kili, “Kemalism in Contemporary Turkey” (Sage Publication, Ltd., 1980): 401.

³² Hakan Yavuz, “Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey” (Comparative Politics, Ph.D. Programs in Political Science, City University of New York, 1997): 64.

³³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography” (Princeton University Press, 2011): 160.

³⁴ Hamit Bozarslan, “Kurds and the Turkish State,” in Reşat Kasaba (ed.) *Turkey in the Modern World*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 342.

³⁵ Ibid.

This conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds living in Turkey eventually evolved into an armed conflict. In 1978, PKK was established under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. Starting from the early 80s, the PKK's attacks against the Turkish state created a strong sense of nationalism in Turkey. With the military's pertinacious demand, state of emergency was declared under Prime Minister Turgut Özal in the Kurdish dominated cities of Turkey that lasted-15-year. The TSK appeared as an antidote for the security problem in the country.³⁶

Another important development in the country was the rising popularity of political Islam. WP was founded in 1983 and could not achieve any significant political success in Turkish politics until the 1991 elections. WP's prominent figure was Necmettin Erbakan, who was already blacklisted by the secular circles due to his Islamic ideals and his participation in the 1980 Jerusalem Demonstrations that turned out to be an anti-Kemalist, anti-Western and radical Islamist demonstrations. These demonstrations believed to have accelerated the 1980 Turkish coup d'état.³⁷ However, in the 1991 general elections, WP reinterpreted nationalism and made an alliance with the Nationalistic Action Party (MHP) and the Reformist Democratic Party (RDP) to win 16,2% and gain 62 seats in the parliament. In the 1995 general elections, WP alone won 21,38% of the votes to become the first party in the elections, which meant Turkey has just elected its first Islamic prime minister.

The 1995 elections were interpreted as a revolt against Kemalism.³⁸ Only two years after the elections, on 28 February 1997 what is also known as the 'post-modern coup' a Turkish military memorandum took place which demanded the resignation of prime minister Necmettin

³⁶ Sezai Özçelik, "Theories, Practices, and Research in Conflict Resolution and Low-Intensity Conflicts: The Kurdish Conflict in Turkey," *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 26(2) (2006): 146.

³⁷ "33 yıl sonra yine Konya'da...". (Vatan, 16 August 2013).

³⁸ Yavuz (1997): 76.

Erbakan with a statement saying, “no steps away from the contemporary values of the Turkish Republic would be tolerated.”³⁹ Due to the pressures from the military and the secular circles, on 18 June 1997, Necmettin Erbakan resigned from his position as prime minister. One and a half year later, in 1999, under the Finnish-EU presidency, Turkey was accepted as a candidate country for full EU membership.⁴⁰

Turkey-Syria relations were in the intersection of this identity crisis and the Kurdish conflict in Turkey during the 90s. The Turkish-Syrian relations were never the best throughout the history of the Turkish Republic. The first issue involving the two countries was the annexation of Hatay in the late 30s. This saw Mustafa Kemal Atatürk passing through Konya and Ulukışla spreading rumors that the Turkish troops were concentrating on the borders of Hatay.⁴¹ On 23 June 1939, Hatay joined Turkey, an event that often-raised political tensions whether the annexation was legitimate or not, especially after the establishment of the Syrian Republic in 1945. Another issue between the two countries that kept its significance was the Waters Issue. Syria’s demand for water to its less fertile lands from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers were refused by Turkey in the 90s, which led to Hafez Al-Assad’s foreign policy strategy to support the PKK to push its neighbor into a common agreement.⁴²

Syria’s decision to accommodate the PKK camps and its leader Abdullah Öcalan was met with fury by the TSK and the Turkish civil bureaucracy. In his opening speech on 1 October 1998 at parliament, prime minister Süleyman Demirel stated, “Syria is openly conducting an ill

³⁹ Bertil Videt Knudsen, “The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics” (2005): 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ Majid Khadduri, “The Alexandretta Dispute” (The American Journal of International Law, 1945): 416.

⁴² Marwa Daoudy, “The structure-identity nexus: Syria and Turkey’s collapse” (Routledge, 2011): 1086.

strategy against Turkey” and “that the patience of the Turks is coming to an end.”⁴³ Demirel’s speech was significantly important as it endorsed the statement that was made by Kemalist general Atilla Ateş, barely a month before Demirel spoke at parliament. In his statement, Ateş, who was then the commander of the TSK made it openly known that “despite Turkey’s efforts to establish good relations with her neighbors, countries like Syria -by supporting Öcalan and PKK- are testing the patience limits of Turkey... Turkey is ready to take whatever measures needed.”⁴⁴

The joint ultimatum from the Turkish side, Turkey’s military alliances with the US and Israel pushed Hafez Al-Assad to expel Öcalan from Syria only for him (Öcalan) to be captured by the Turkish intelligence forces in Kenya.⁴⁵ Syria’s decision to expel Öcalan and his subsequent capture by Turkish officials eased the relations between the two countries which eventually led to the Adana Accords. At the accords, all of Turkey’s demands were met, including a crackdown on the PKK headquarters in Syria, and the matters related to the waters issue.⁴⁶ The Adana Accords transformed the relations into an era of détente between the two countries.

2.2 Election of AKP and New Turkey

On 14 August 2001, the conservative-democrat Justice and Development Party (AKP) was established with visionary and reformist promises that appealed to Turkey as a whole. AKP’s major promise was to successfully get Turkey into the European Union (EU) which required an important process of civilianizing the Kemalist military dominated politics in Turkey.⁴⁷ In the

⁴³ Nazlı Ilıcak. “*Hafız Esad ve PKK.*” *Sabah*, September 18, 2009. URL: https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/ilicak/2009/09/18/hafiz_esad_ve_pkk

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mark Dohrmann. Robert Hatem, “The Impact of Hydro-Politics on the Relations of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria” (Middle East Institute, 2014): 580.

⁴⁶ Malik Mufti, “Turkish-Syrian Rapprochement: Causes and Consequences” (The Washington Institute, 2002).

⁴⁷ Nil Satana, “Civilianization of Politics in Turkey” (Bilkent University Press, 2014).

2002 general elections, AKP became victorious, winning nearly two-thirds of the seats and the newly formed majority government engaged in a Gramscian ‘war of position’ against the military and was behind the major shift of Turkey’s foreign policy which has changed Turkey’s state identity remarkably.⁴⁸

In the first half of the 2000s, AKP was acting accordingly with the Kemalist oriented foreign policy which was pro-Western and pro-EU. AKP’s general president and the newly elected prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was already being criticized by the Kemalist circles for being an Islamist due to his *milli görüş* (national outlook) background and his Islamic speeches during the 90s. However, during the time, Erdoğan has repeatedly stated that he has ‘dressed off the vest of *milli görüş*’.⁴⁹ Erdoğan’s discourse on the EU was also very positive, continuing the tradition of representing Europe as the ‘promised land’ of democracy and said it was the ‘natural direction’ for Turkey.⁵⁰

In the second half of the 2000s, AKP has entered a transformation process of Europeanization to de-Europeanization and the new set of norms and rules are went under a construction.⁵¹ In the 2007 general elections, AKP claimed its second electoral victory with a massive result of getting %46,8 of the votes, which showed that AKP was stronger throughout the society and against the Kemalist circles.⁵² On the other hand, the EU accession talks were processing very slowly and there were major setbacks in conditionalities and agreements. This

⁴⁸ Barış Alp Özden and İsmet Akça and Ahmet Bekmen, “Autonomies of Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey,” (Rowman&Littlefield, 2017): 197.

⁴⁹ “Milli Görüş Gömleğini Çıkardım.” *Yeni Asya*, July 21, 2007. URL: <https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/2007/07/21/haber/h3.htm>

⁵⁰ Senem Aydın-Düzgit, “Foreign policy and identity change: Analysing perceptions of Europe among the Turkish public” (Political Studies Association, 2018): 22.

⁵¹ Buket Ökten, “Shifting from Europeanization to De-Europeanization in Turkey: How AKP Instrumentalized EU Negotiations,” (The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations, 2017): 56.

⁵² Ibid.

situation gave leverage to the Kemalist circles which pressured the AKP for slacking the talks with the EU and argued that the AKP is insincere about the EU promises. Due to the blocked dialogue between Turkey and the EU, and the growing Kemalist threat, the AKP found itself looking for new grounds and alliances, which pointed towards a rapprochement with the East.

To be able to make such flexible foreign policy turn, the AKP had to declare its absolute victory against the Kemalist elite. With a remarkable support from the EU for the necessary democratization and civilianization reforms and the different social groups in Turkey (conservatives, liberals and some of the leftists) who did not want the political affairs to be influenced by the military, the AKP administration was already successful in implementing constitutional and legal reforms between 2002 and 2005 that curbed military influence in legal platforms. However, in 2008, the controversial Ergenekon trials were conducted by the special courts and the police force which resulted with the jailing of Kemalist army officials, journalists and civil bureaucrats for their alleged plans of bringing down the government. These trials which wiped the Kemalist power-structure from the domestic politics were backed by AKP's voter base and the AKP elite showed support for the investigations by making statements such as "Turkey is cleaning out her intestines" and "Turkey is no longer under the threat of military intervention."⁵³

With the Ergenekon Trials, the Turkish politics experienced a deep change. This change is interpreted through the constructivist hypothesis as the transformation in the civil-military relations, or in other words, AKP's victory against the Kemalist status-quo, and the moving away

⁵³ "Ergenekon için kim ne demişti?" *Sözcü*, April 21, 2016. URL: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/ergenekon-icin-kim-ne-demisti-1195230/>

from the EU oriented foreign policy has remarkably changed Turkey's pro-Western Kemalist identity and brought it closer to its Middle Eastern neighbors with its new Muslim identity.

2.3 Neo-Ottomanism and the Revival of Relations with Syria

Since the election of AKP in 2002, Turkey's foreign policy strategy was mostly guided by the former Foreign Affairs Minister and the former Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu's 'Strategic Depth Doctrine' (SDD) became the building block of Turkish foreign policy after AKP's search for new grounds in the Middle Eastern region.

Davutoğlu's doctrine consists both constructivist and realist features. SDD introduces a re-construction of the Turkish foreign policy through a re-interpretation of the Turkish history due to Turkey's geopolitical, geo-cultural and geo-economic place in the world, which eventually moves away from the secularist, Westernized Turkish identity to what is now called as a Neo-Ottoman identity.⁵⁴ In Strategic Depth, Davutoğlu highlights the cultural and historical heritage of the Ottoman Empire, investigates the geopolitical situation of Turkey and suggests a re-interpretation of the Turkish identity where the religion of Islam and history of the Ottoman Empire is given a pivotal role for cultural affinity with the Middle East. As the new Turkish society cherishes this newly defined Ottoman heritage, Davutoğlu believes Turkey has a chance to become a regional power by improving its relations through cultural interaction and promotion of economic development and promote stability in the region.⁵⁵

Davutoğlu and his SDD became the most remarkable figures of the AKP's rule after the party started to distance itself from the EU. Davutoğlu, who was an advisor to Erdoğan in 2003, respectively became the Foreign Affairs Minister in 2009 and the Prime Minister of Turkey in

⁵⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Strategic Depth," (Küre, 2001).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34-36.

2014, proving that he has joined the very privileged group of academics who were given the opportunity to put their theory into practice.⁵⁶

Turkish-Syrian relations were heavily affected by the changes in Turkey that are mentioned in the previous subsection. AKP's first foreign policy strategy, in the light of the SDD was the 'zero problem policy' with neighbors. Although many critics, mostly realists, found the zero-problem policy to be very problematic since solving issues with one country might trigger problems with another, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan succeeded to establish a close relationship with Syria's new president Bashar Assad. From the first day of him (Bashar Assad) in the office, adopting the '400 years of common history' discourse, Erdoğan managed to combine both the constructivist and realist features of the Turkish foreign policy.⁵⁷ Turkey has participated in actions towards political, cultural and economic cooperation with Bashar Assad, mediating the peace talks between Israel and Syria, and championing the Syrian side in the Golan Heights Affairs.⁵⁸ These positive approaches have reached its peak in 2009 when the two countries lifted the visa requirement for touristic visits which boosted both economies. This period also supports the co-existing nature of LoA and LoC as Turkey's norm-based actions also helped it achieve material gains in its relationship with Syria.

Turkey's efforts to improve its relationship with Syria was met with huge sympathy by Bashar Assad as well. First, after his father's death in 2000, Bashar Assad who was known as a modernist was looking for economic partners to implement neoliberal reforms in his country.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy" (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2010): 4.

⁵⁷ Davut Han Aslan and Ömürcahan Elmaç and Şenol Özeydin, "Turkey's Foreign Policy and the Middle East under AKP Rule (2002-2012)" (2016): 8.

⁵⁸ Grigoriadis (2010): 6.

⁵⁹ Daoudy (2011): 1089.

Second, after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Syrian regime feared of being the next target of the US troops and was looking for allies in the region, Turkey, a NATO ally being the perfect fit.⁶⁰

The AKP's reluctance on Turkey's new state identity and its new pro-Eastern foreign policy strategy was deterministic on many occasions on the matters related to Syria. In 2004, Erdoğan rejected an invitation from Israel's Prime Minister Sharon because of Israel's offensive actions against Palestine and visited Syria instead.⁶¹ In April 2005, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer made a visit to Damascus, despite the US and French pressures over Turkey to isolate Syria because of the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri.⁶² While all these actions may seem consequential, with the new set of norms and the pro-Eastern identity its success in improving the relations with Syria, they perfectly fit into LoA as well.

On 15 August 2010, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the following in Gaziantep, Turkey, summarizing the relations between the two countries:

“For years, Turkey has isolated itself, it was isolated by some! What did they say? ‘Turkey is surrounded with three seas and enemies from all angles.’ We came and got rid of this understanding...only 7 years ago, Turkey and Syria were looking at each other as enemies! The two countries almost fought each other! We came, sat down with my *kardeş* (brother) Assad, and talked about the issues between the two countries...and we made Turkey and Syria the brothers of the region!”⁶³

Especially after the breakdown of relations with the EU in the second half of the 2000s and AKP's hegemony over the Kemalist status-quo, Turkey has turned its face to the East, Syria

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Özlem Tür and Raymond Hinnebusch, “Turkey-Syria relations: Between enmity and amity” (Taylor and Francis, 2016): 2.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Emin Çölaşan. “Tayyip Haykırıyordu: Kardeşim Esad!” *Sözcü*, November 22, 2012. URL: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2012/yazarlar/emin-colasan/tayyip-haykiriyordu-kardesim-esad-124950/>

as an important model for strengthening this foreign policy model. The trade between the two countries reached to significant levels, Turkey becoming the biggest trade partner of Syria in 2010 with 2.3 billion dollars while the trade between the two countries was only 797 million dollars in 2006.⁶⁴ President Bashar Assad explained the relations as “the birth of a new alliance based on common interests.”⁶⁵

From a realist perspective, these ‘common interests’ also relate to a security dilemma revolving around the common Kurdish issue which suggests a strong realist orientation in both countries foreign policy decisions. In March 2003, Turkey voted ‘no’ in the parliament to participate in the US-led war against Iraq, which was in accordance with Syria’s decision. In 2004, Bashar Assad made a visit to Turkey and stated that an appearance of a Kurdish state in Iraq would be a red line for Syria and Turkey, pointing to the US’ invasion of Iraq which might result with the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq.⁶⁶ In 2008, Turkey participated in the Trilateral Front with Iran and Syria to oppose the fragmentation of Iraq.⁶⁷ A year later, Syria and Turkey launched their first joint military exercise in Kilis, Turkey and Azaz, Syria.⁶⁸ In the same year, Erdoğan made his historic exit from the World Economic Forum that took place in Davos, Switzerland, blaming Israel for killing babies in the Palestinian beaches, saying that “Davos is over for me.”⁶⁹

Turkey’s transition under the AKP from its Kemalist roots to a Muslim and pro-Eastern identity opened the gateways of the Middle East for the country in contrast with the

⁶⁴ Daoudy (2011): 1090.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1090.

⁶⁶ Tür and Hinnebusch (2016): 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hakan Albayrak. “Türkiye-Suriye orduları ortak tatbikatta.” *Yeni Şafak*, April 28, 2009. URL: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hakanalbayrak/turkiye-suriye-ordulari-ortak-tatbikatta-16498>

⁶⁹ “Benim İçin Davos Bitti” (Hürriyet, 30 January 2009). URL: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/benim-icin-davos-bitti-10886978>

constructivist hypothesis that is offered. Combined with the structural determinants in the region regarding the US hegemony in the Middle East and the rising of the new elite in Syria under the modernist leader Assad, Turkey managed to come closer with Syria, a crucial step for its regional hegemony goals as the realist hypothesis argues. Due to these changes, Syria, a country that Turkey almost got into a war in the late 90s, became one of its most important military and trade partners in 7 years. However, as it will be discussed in the next chapter, the structural determinants in the region started to change in 2011. Turkey's neo-Ottoman identity and its regional goals clashed with the political developments in Syria and eventually led to the breakdown of the relations between the two countries.

CHAPTER 3: Amity to Enmity

In this chapter, the changing geopolitics in the Middle East and Turkey's foreign policy adaptation is analyzed. In accordance with the constructivist hypothesis, the salience on the role of Muslim identity of Turkey is investigated through the discourses of Ahmet Davutoğlu and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In accordance with the realist hypothesis, the Turkish opportunism, or in other words, 'neo-Ottoman Adventurism' is discussed as to achieve its hegemonic goals in the region, Turkey took an aggressive foreign policy direction towards Syria.

3.1 A New Page: Arab Spring and the Changing Geopolitical Game

The wave of revolutions that changed the political structure in the Arab world, also known as the Arab Spring, started when the Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in December 2010. While Bouazizi's self-immolation happened after the state officials confiscated him of his wares, and the humiliating treatment he has received from a municipal official, his suicide did not only reflect the poverty and authoritarianism in his country but also the other Arab countries that were having similar economic and political problems.

The Arab Spring did not only affect the Arab countries that were involved, but the neo-Ottoman foreign policy of Turkey due to its mentioned interest in the region. When the Arab Spring protests first started to take place, Turkey was openly on the side of the protestors in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, leaving a tradition of treating the states as the main actors in international relations. However, when the protests reached to Syria, Turkey faced a huge dilemma.

As it is discussed in the previous chapter, throughout the last 7 years, Turkey already achieved important economic and military improvements with Syria. Turkey's neo-Ottoman foreign policy was praised due to the success in Syria and it played an important role to reinforce the political and cultural change in Turkey. However, as the news of violence in Syria started to spread out, supporting a clearly authoritarian and violent regime would hurt the image of the country vis-à-vis the Arab world and the West.⁷⁰

On the other hand, the regional hegemony in the region was changing as well. With the presence of its NATO ally the United States in Iraq, Turkey could improve its relations with Syria and neutralize itself from engaging in an ongoing balance of power game influenced by sectarian motivations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As the United States' withdrawal from Iraq and the protests against the Assad regime happened almost at the same time, Turkey found a new page in its southeastern borders.

At the first place, the Turkish administration was cautious not to make radical decisions against these changes. Erdoğan, depending on his personal friendship with Bashar Assad decided to pursue dialogue and encourage the regime to make the necessary democratic reforms in the country.⁷¹ An important event happened when then Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu went to Damascus on 9 August 2011 to talk to Bashar Assad on listening to the people's demand and implement reforms. However, after the meeting, Davutoğlu stated, "there is nothing more to talk about with Syria.", which showed that the dialogue option was not working, and the Syrian regime was determined to fight off the protestors.⁷²

⁷⁰ Francesco D'Alema, "The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy" (Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017): 7.

⁷¹ "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Bloomberg'e Özel Açıklamalar." *Bloomberg*, May 12, 2011. URL: <https://www.bloomberght.com/haberler/haber/876526-basbakan-erdogandan-bloomberge-ozel-aciklamalar>

⁷² Birol Başkan. "Turkey and Qatar in the Tangled Geopolitics of the Middle East" (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 91.

Almost a week after Davutoğlu's visit to Damascus, the US President Barack Obama stated that, "for the sake of the Syrian people, Assad has to step down" after hearing the news that the regime forces are shooting down the protestors on the streets.⁷³ In response to the continued violence by the regime forces and the international backlash, finally in November 2011, Erdoğan stated that Assad has to step down.⁷⁴ Erdoğan's statement officially started a new phase in the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria, which was now leaving the zero-problems policy to pursuing a regime change.

3.2 Neo-Ottoman Adventurism and its Motivations

Switching to a new page in the relations with Syria, I argue that the Turkish foreign policy entered a new phase which is also called as 'neo-Ottoman adventurism'.⁷⁵ This adventurism can be basically put as this; the AKP's salience on the Muslim identity grew radically and the AKP government, following strictly realist agenda, decided to organize both external and internal actors in Syria to topple Assad and establish a new geopolitical context where it would be a regional leader.

3.2.1 Internal Actors

The neo-Ottoman Adventurism presents an important overlap between the two hypotheses as the identity and the AKP's material interests aimed at the same direction. Adjusting itself to the changes in the region, Turkey's Muslim identity suggested an important opportunity for Turkey to improve its regional hegemony. Almost all the anti-Assad countries in the Middle East were

⁷³ Scott Wilson and Joby Warrick. "Assad must go, Obama says." *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2011. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/assad-must-go-obama-says/2011/08/18/gIQAelheOJ_story.html?utm_term=.93ef86c6d08c

⁷⁴ "Syria: Turkish prime minister calls for Assad to resign." *The Telegraph*, November 22, 2011. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8906532/Syria-Turkish-prime-minister-calls-for-Assad-to-resign.html>

⁷⁵ Tim Manhoff, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Towards Syria," (Konrad Adanaur Stiftung, 2017): 6.

Sunni Muslim countries which the AKP had natural ties with. Second, given its geostrategic and economic role, and the growing popularity and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East with the Arab Spring, Turkey had a chance to establish a Sunni Muslim political chain in the region which would take Turkey as a role model and a regional leader.

The AKP's closeness and its influence over the Islamic groups, the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, was seen in many instances. In Egypt, the Islamist groups that toppled Hosni Mubarak established four different parties where two of them declared that they have adopted the administrative style and the philosophy of the AKP.⁷⁶ Moreover, the AKP had strong relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood's important figure Mohammed Morsi had close ties with Erdoğan and according to Cengiz Çandar, for a long time Erdoğan's advisors were mentoring Morsi to seize power in Egypt.⁷⁷ Erdoğan was one of the first leaders to congratulate Mursi when he won the presidential elections in Egypt and invited him to the 4th Party Congress of the AKP.⁷⁸ In the congress, Morsi spoke to the AKP bureaucrats stating, "What the AKP has been doing is an inspiration.", praising the AKP's success against the Kemalist tutelage and its support for the Arab Spring as Erdoğan commented on Morsi's speech saying, "It is a sign of our brotherhood."⁷⁹

The AKP gave similar importance to the SMB (Syrian Muslim Brotherhood) as well in deepening its relationship. From the very beginning of the protests in Syria, following a double-barreled strategy, Turkey started to host the Syrian opposition in its borders while trying to

⁷⁶ Bulut Gürpınar, "Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood: Crossing Roads in Syria," *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2015): 28.

⁷⁷ Cengiz Çandar, "Müslüman Kardeşlerin izdüşümü." *Radikal*, July 4, 2013. URL: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz-candar/musluman-kardeslerin-izdusumu-1140320/>

⁷⁸ Gürpınar (2015): 29.

⁷⁹ "Kardeşliğimizin bir nişanesi." *Takvim*, September 30, 2012. URL: <https://www.takvim.com.tr/siyaset/2012/09/30/kardesligimizin-bir-nisanesi>

convince Assad to comply with the protestors' democratic demands. The SNC (Syrian National Council) was established in Istanbul in August 2011 to organize the political leg of the opposition. However, the council was dominated by the SMB (Syrian Muslim Brotherhood) delegates as Turkey was not keen to include the other opposition groups which would have included secular and Kurdish guerilla groups. After all, the SNC turned out to be a Sunni-Muslim dominated council, setting forth Turkey's vision and desires in Syrian politics.

Bashar Assad's remarks also support Turkey's desires on who to replace Assad within Syria. During an interview, Assad blamed Erdoğan for intervening with Syria's internal politics, stating, "He was always so excited about the SMB. He was so interested in them that he cared more about the SMB's problems than the issues regarding the relationship between Syria and Turkey. This has been the real agenda of Erdoğan's foreign policy towards Syria."⁸⁰ Without overstressing the topic, Assad's statement can be interpreted that the cultural integration between the two countries, and the close relationship between the two leaders were, in fact, just a reflection of the material gains as Assad claims that he always knew Erdoğan's priorities.

3.2.2 External Actors

The Turkish strategy to topple Assad depended on international support to establish balance of power in the region against Russia and Iran, who were supporting the status-quo in Syria.

Following the new geopolitical game in the region, Turkey worked towards organizing the Western camp and the Arab League countries into a common action plan. It is seen through the speeches of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu that Turkey followed two different strategies to convince these camps, first, starting a new dialogue through human rights with the Western camp, and

⁸⁰ "Erdoğan ile neden bozuştuk." (Hürriyet, 4 July 2012). URL: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-ile-neden-bozustuk-20911106>

second, a dialogue through the protection of Muslims with the Arab League. This can also be interpreted from the perspective of LoA and LoC, as Turkey's strong salience on the Muslim identity and its material interests at this period overlaps, moving ahead in congruence.

On 6 June 2012, Syrian regime's atrocity in Hama, also known as the Al-Qubeir Massacre, erupted an international backlash, where the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the events as "unconscionable" and stated that "(Assad) must transfer power and depart Syria."⁸¹ In the following day, Ahmet Davutoğlu and Hillary Clinton participated in a joint press conference where Davutoğlu said the following:

"We have investigated the violence that the Syrian regime was doing a long ago, and we had to see that again yesterday in Hama...from our perspective, as an international community, we should organize ourselves around a common plan and send Assad out of Syria."⁸²

Following Davutoğlu's speeches, Turkey's efforts were directed at organizing an international action, with focus on the United States, and convince the anti-Assad countries to take part in 'whatever' that is necessary to send Assad out of Syria. What Davutoğlu meant by necessities became clearer when he was asked if there is a potential military intervention in the agenda of Turkey. In his response, Davutoğlu referenced the events in Bosnia and said, "Just like that night when 8,000 of our Bosnian brothers were killed in 1995, we asked 'why is nobody doing anything?' we are asking the same question in Syria...What is happening in Syria is a

⁸¹ "Syria: It's time for Assad to go, says US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton." *The Telegraph*, June 7, 2012. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9317401/Syria-Its-time-for-Assad-to-go-says-US-Secretary-of-State-Hillary-Clinton.html>

⁸² "Davutoğlu-Clinton joint press conference." (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012) URL: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-abd-disisleri-bakani-hillary-clinton-ile-ortak-basin-toplantisi_-07-haziran-2012_-ist.tr.mfa

crime against humanity and whatever has to be done has to be done, or else, we cannot speak of the mission of the UN.”⁸³

However, followed by the United States’ hesitancy to deploy boots on the ground or in general, to directly involve in the war in Syria, Turkey could not achieve its goals to form a Western coalition force. The United States’ declined Turkey’s request for no fly-zone in Syria nor to deploy ground troops in Northern Syria. This was primarily due to the Obama administration’s ‘leading from behind’ foreign policy doctrine which was highly affected by the failures and costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁸⁴

On the other hand, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan roughened his rhetoric against Bashar Assad and adopted an Islamic narrative. Erdoğan declared Assad as the enemy of the Muslims in Syria. It can be stated that Erdoğan’s main objective was to seek the support of the Arab League and organize a common action plan in the sake of protecting the Muslims in Syria. During his speech in the Turkish – Arab Business Association Forum on 1 December 2012, Erdoğan said the following:

“Our problem is not with the Syrian people. In fact, all the Syrians are our brothers. Our problem is with the tyrannical Assad regime...Assad is competing with his father’s success in killing people, killing the Muslims. His father killed 30.000 Muslims in Hama and Humus, now him, the son has killed 50.000 Muslims passing his father.”⁸⁵

In the Friends of Syria Conference which took place in Istanbul on 1 April 2012, Erdoğan addressed the Arab League stating that there should be a ‘common action plan’ to end the

⁸³ “Davutoğlu’ndan Suriye’ye müdahale sinyali.” *Haber7*, Ağustos 27, 2013. URL: <http://www.haber7.com/dis-politika/haber/1066789-davutoglundan-suriyeye-mudahale-sinyali>

⁸⁴ Muharrem Ekşi, “The Syrian Crisis as a Proxy War and the Return of Realist Great Power Politics,” *Hybrid Warfare Special Issue*, Vol.1, No.2 (2017): 112.

⁸⁵ “Birbirinizi Allah için sevmenizi istiyoruz.” *Habertürk*, December 1, 2012. URL: <https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/799251-birbirinizi-allah-icin-sevmenizi-istiyoruz>

violence in Syria.⁸⁶ Although, the General Secretary of the Arab League Nabil Elaraby stated that he agrees with Erdoğan, none of these statements reached to a level of military intervention like in the United States case.

Turkey's hostile stance against the Assad regime created tensions with Syria's supporters; Russia and Iran. Without overstressing the topic, some of the instances can be summarized into the following. In June 2012, Syria downed the Turkish jet with the claim that it violated the Syrian airspace.⁸⁷ Turkey asked NATO for the Patriot Missiles to be installed in its Syrian borders as a counter-reaction. Iranian general Hassan Firouzabadi stated that such action would trigger the third world war.⁸⁸ Turkey and Russia almost came to the brink of war when the Turkish Air Forces downed a Russian jet for violating the Turkish airspace in November 2015.

3.3 Proxy War and the Failure of neo-Ottoman Adventurism

As it is discussed in the previous subchapter, Turkey was unable to convince the Western and Arab allies in forming a coalition army. Chinese and Russian vetoes in the UN already made it impossible for an international intervention against Syria. Following these developments, Turkey started to host, support and train the Syrian anti-Assad rebels. This period had two important stages; first, the proven incapacity of the FSA (Free Syrian Army) and the emergence of radical Islamist groups, second, the friction between the US and Turkey on which groups to support.

Turkey was one of the major actors in the establishment of the FSA. Turkey hosted and trained the FSA troopers, and with Saudi Arabia, was one of the major economic supporters of

⁸⁶ "Erdoğan'dan Suriye'ye müdahale sinyali." *Internet Haber*, April 1, 2012. URL:

<https://www.internethaber.com/erdogandan-suriyeye-mudahale-sinyali-412410h.htm>

⁸⁷ Mark Galeotti. "Why did it take Turkey just 17 seconds to shoot down Russian jet?" *The Guardian*, November 26, 2015. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/26/russia-turkey-jet-mark-galeotti>

⁸⁸ "Patriot missiles in Turkey threaten "world war:" Iran army chief" *Reuters*, December 15, 2012. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-iran/patriot-missiles-in-turkey-threaten-world-war-iran-army-chief-idUSBRE8BE07K20121215>

the group.⁸⁹ However, as it was proven in the early stages of the Battle of Aleppo and the Battle of al-Bab, the FSA was not a major force to win the battle alone against the SA (Syrian Army) which is backed by Iran and Russia. At this stage, Turkey increased its support to other opposition groups, which were mainly radical Islamists.

However, Turkey's important partner, the United States was not in favor of these radical Islamist groups. In March 2013, the US President Barack Obama stated that he is concerned if Syria is becoming an enclave for extremists.⁹⁰ Couple months later, the United States and Britain suspended non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels after the Islamist fighters seized Western-backed rebel warehouse and acquired their weapons.⁹¹ Yet, Turkey continued to support these radical groups in the hope of toppling Assad and replacing it with a Muslim regime which resulted in distancing Turkey from its Western allies.

Another important regional actor was the Kurdish guerillas in northern Syria. The United States have constantly supported the Kurdish guerillas, especially the PYD's (Democratic Union Party) military wing YPG (People's Protection Units) against the Assad and Islamic forces as they seemed more reliable and away from extreme methods.⁹² Turkey was against the empowerment of the Kurdish guerillas due to the Kurdish conflict in its own borders. In many occasions Davutoğlu announced that Turkey does not want the PYD as its neighbor and there is no difference between the PYD and the PKK in the eyes of Turkey.⁹³ The PYD's empowerment

⁸⁹ Manhoff (2017): 8.

⁹⁰ Ewen MacAskill. "Obama: post-Assad Syria of Islamist extremism is nightmare scenario." *The Guardian*, March 22, 2013. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/22/obama-syria-assad-syria-extremists>

⁹¹ Richard Spencer. "Britain and US suspend non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels." *The Telegraph*, December 11, 2013. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10510498/Britain-and-US-suspend-non-lethal-aid-to-Syrian-rebels.html>

⁹² Manhoff (2017): 9.

⁹³ "Davutoğlu: PYD'yi de vururuz." *Takvim*, October 14, 2015. URL: <https://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2015/10/14/davutoglu-pydyi-de-vururuz?paging=3>

only served to further damage the relations between Turkey and the United States, leaving Turkey in a lonely position in the Syrian conflict.

The main takeaway from this complex proxy war equation for Turkey can be argued as the following; Turkey valued its regional hegemonic goals more than its cooperation and commitment to its Western allies in the hope of replacing Assad with a friendly, Muslim regime in Syria. However, due to the friction with its Western allies on which opposition groups to support and the timely Russian intervention in Syria, Turkey found itself in the losing team alongside with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, while Bashar Assad, with the help of the Russian military, declared his victory against the FSA and other radical Islamist groups by the end of 2016.

Following these events, it can be argued that many countries acknowledged that Assad will remain in Syria, including Turkey. With the new kingmaker on the ground, Russia, the neo-Ottoman adventurism has seen to be failed heavily in Syria. From this period, as it will be discussed in the next chapter, Turkey found itself in a defensive position against the Kurdish and Islamic guerilla groups in northern Syria, going through important realist arrangements in its foreign policy strategy.

Chapter 4: Realpolitik and the Future

In this chapter, the period starting from the Russian military intervention and the latest developments regarding Turkish foreign policy in Syria are analyzed. Turkey's foreign policy strategy during this period is termed as 'neo-Ottoman realpolitik' as it is argued that Turkey has acknowledged the realities on the ground and set both its goals in Syria and its identity rhetoric accordingly. However, the realist approach also brought a need to revise the Turkish state identity as it is argued through the 'offensive–defensive realism' debate, which in this chapter it is concluded that, from the example of Turkey, one state can pursue both offensive and defensive realism in different time periods regarding the situations. At the end of the chapter, predictions for the future in Syria are presented.

4.1 Neo-Ottoman Realpolitik

In September 2015, the Russian foreign policy in Syria changed radically. While the Russian involvement with the war in Syria was mainly limited to supplying the Syrian military with arms and equipment, and economic aid, after Bashar Assad admitted the weaknesses in the Syrian military, Russia decided to support the regime with its air and special operation forces in Syria.⁹⁴

The help from the Russian military brought victory for the Assad regime against the opposition groups such as FSA and ISIL. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, these groups were supported by Turkey (ISIL until 2014). For Turkey, the aftermath of the Russian military intervention in Syria became one of security problem on its borders. First, toppling Assad became an impossible objective for Turkey to achieve due to the Russian presence, meaning that

⁹⁴ "Assad admits Syrian army weakness." *BBC*, July 26, 2015. URL: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02xgs9d>

Turkey now have a hostile neighbor. Second, while YPG was in control of the settlements located on the Syrian border of Turkey, Turkey's direct military options against these groups were limited due to Russia's strict control over the region. To add to the latter, the United States' and the EU's refusal to increase their military presence in the region, Turkey's chances to establish balance of power against Russia and Syria seemed unrealistic.

At this stage, I argue that the neo-Ottoman foreign policy of Turkey went through a realist revision and this period can be interpreted under the light of Kenneth Waltz's 'defensive realism' concept. As it is discussed in the previous chapters, Turkey's foreign policy motivations were set as becoming a regional power in the Middle East, following an active foreign policy in the region to seek more power. First, this was pursued through the reconstitution of the state identity and investing in regional stability through zero-problems policy, later, with the political changes in the region, it aimed to go against the dictatorial regimes, including Syria, to establish a Muslim-democrat political network where Turkey was envisioned to become a role model and the leading country.

However, with the mentioned changes in the region, the neo-Ottoman foreign policy of Turkey took a sharp realist turn in Syria and I analyze this period through two empirical cases. First, Turkey's strong rapprochement with Russia which I relate it to a realist strategy to expand its operational options in Syria. Second, construction of a new form of state identity which revolves around a strong discourse on 'survival' built on the perceived threat from the Kurdish guerilla groups located at the Syrian borders which is highly associated with finding justified grounds in the domestic political sphere to pursue its new foreign policy goals in Syria. While the former suggests a strong shift from the foreign policy role of Turkey and focuses on material gains, the latter shows that the AKP tried to reconstitute the Turkish identity from pro-Eastern,

pro-Muslim to a ‘nationalist state at the defense of its own territory’ to justify the appropriateness of its new foreign policy actions.

4.2 Relations with Russia and Syria

As it was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, Turkey had a problematic relationship with Russia during the Syrian conflict, which went as far as downing of a Russian fighter jet. At the time, ex-prime minister Davutoğlu mentioned that he personally gave the order to the Turkish air forces to shoot down the fighter jet.⁹⁵ President Erdoğan’s reaction was also harsh as he supported the claim the Russian jet violated the Turkish air space and stated that, “Turkey would do the same thing if Russia does the same violation again.”⁹⁶ Vladimir Putin responded to the incident by saying that they have been backstabbed by a trusted ally and will make the necessary actions to protect the Russian air forces in Syria. Soon after Putin’s statement, Russia deployed S-400 anti-craft weapon system to Latakia, Syria, in which Ankara was within the range of the missiles.

The Russian government also retaliated with economic sanctions and restricted the import of certain goods from Turkey and ordered the full restriction of any touristic visit to Turkey. Moreover, Vladimir Putin blamed Turkey for buying gas from ISIL, attacking the international prestige of Turkey, while prime minister Davutoğlu stated that Russia is doing

⁹⁵ “I ordered military to down any jet coming from Syria: Former PM Davutoğlu.” *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 27, 2016. URL: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/i-ordered-military-to-down-any-jet-coming-from-syria-former-pm-davutoglu-102153>

⁹⁶ “Erdoğan meydan okudu: Bugün olsa yine vururuz!” *Internet Haber*, November 26, 2015. URL: <https://www.internethaber.com/erdogan-meydan-okudu-bugun-olsa-yine-vururuz-1490219h.htm>

ethnic cleansing in northern Syria in retaliation.^{97 98} Overall, it can be concluded that Turkey's relations with Russia hit rock bottom at this period.

However, the reality on the ground was clear, Russia had full control over Syria. At the same time, YPG started to gain more territory in the area bordering Turkey and the constraints on Turkey's military operations started to become an alarming problem for Turkey. The main concern for the Turkish government in Syria started to become YPG and its success in gaining more territory in northern Syria. As it is discussed in Chapter 2, the Kurdish conflict has become a structural issue for Turkey and since the breakdown of the ceasefire between the AKP government and PKK, the Kurdish mobilization became the primary security concern. As YPG was close to establish territorial integrity in northern Syria, the possibility of a sovereign Kurdish entity in Turkish borders threatened Turkey and its foreign policy goals.

The AKP's decision to neutralize and further improve its relations with Russia can be interpreted through the realities that are stated above. This shift can also be described as Turkey's recognition of the realities in Syria and its decision to work towards adapting its foreign policy accordingly on purely pragmatic reasons. The new set of goals for Turkey can be listed as Turkey's desire to be present while a new chapter in Syria is opening (since Assad declared its victory) and its determination to control (to some extent) the events in Syria, especially the ones regarding its border security. In the light of these new set of goals in Syria, in June 2016, the Turkish foreign policy entered a rapprochement process with Russia.

⁹⁷ "Davutoğlu: Bombardımanları alçak Rus uçakları yaptı." *Al Jazeera*, February 16, 2016. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/davutoglu-bombardimanlari-alcak-rus-ucaklari-yapti>

⁹⁸ "Erdoğan ve Putin arasında IŞİD petrolü polemiği." *BBC*, November 30, 2016. URL: https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/11/151130_putin_ucak

First important case related to this process is President Erdoğan's phone call to express his regrets for the jet incident to the Russian president Vladimir Putin.⁹⁹ Soon after the phone call, Russia lifted the touristic sanctions on Turkey and the restriction on the imported goods. Another important event happened on 15 July 2016, when Turkey witnessed a failed coup attempt. According to the Turkish media, President Putin was the first leader to call President Erdoğan.¹⁰⁰ A month later the failed coup attempt, President Erdoğan and President Putin met at St. Petersburg as Erdoğan described the meeting as "historic visit, a new beginning."¹⁰¹ In St. Petersburg, the two leaders discussed economic and military cooperation, as well as the future in Syria and Turkey's concerns regarding YPG and ISIL.

Finally, the rapprochement with Russia paved the way for Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016 as Russia recognized Turkey's security motivations. TSK conducted series of military interventions in northern Syria to create a secure corridor starting from the Turkish borders to the Syrian city of al-Bab.¹⁰² The operation was aimed at fighting the YPG militants to prevent them from establishing territorial integrity in the area located at northern Syria and the southeastern borders of Turkey. However, Erdoğan declared that the operation was also aimed at fighting ISIL militants who were "threatening Turkey in northern Syria."¹⁰³ Tim Manhoff argues

⁹⁹ "Turkey sorry for downing Russian jet." *BBC News*, June 27, 2016. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36643435>

¹⁰⁰ "Putin'den Erdoğan'a telefon." *Hürriyet*, July 17, 2016. URL: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/putinden-erdogana-telefon-40150943>

¹⁰¹ Zia Weise. "Erdogan praises 'dear friend' Vladimir Putin in Russian-Turkish détente." *The Telegraph*, August 9, 2016. URL: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/09/putin-and-erdogan-vow-to-turn-new-page-at-meeting-in-st-petersbu/>

¹⁰² Manhoff (2017): 12.

¹⁰³ "Erdogan says Syria operation aimed at IS jihadists, Kurdish PYD." *Al Monitor*, August 24, 2016. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2016/08/syria-conflict-turkey-erdogan-rebels.html>

that the motivation behind Turkey's decision to fight against the ISIL militants was also aimed at showing the international community its commitment against radical Islamists in the region.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, another important shift in Turkish foreign policy has been the one concerning Bashar Assad. The rapprochement with Russia and the war against YPG started to dominate the pro-AKP media and the AKP elites' discourse, while comments about Assad and his future in Syria significantly diminished. In 2018, after Astana Summit with Russia and Iran, Erdoğan made his first in a long-time general assessment regarding Syria and the Assad regime;

“We do not talk about Assad. We are not in favor of militaristic solutions in Syria but democratic, political ones. For this to happen, Syria's territorial integrity must be protected... We are in favor of getting rid of terrorist groups in Syria with ISIL and YPG making top of the list. I wish Syria to solve its problems in the coming elections.”¹⁰⁵

Erdoğan's statement can be interpreted in the light of Turkey's security rhetoric and defensive realism. First, it becomes clear that Turkey's priorities in Syria are fighting YPG and ISIL and clear its borders from these two groups. Second, as Erdoğan declares, Turkey does not pursue a regime change in Syria anymore but step aside from its politics and support stability in Syria. In relation with defensive realism, Turkey's military intervention does not aim to maximize its power in the region but maximize its security as the intervention is not targeted at achieving a full regime change in Syria but have strategic advantage against the groups that threaten Turkey's security. As Waltz argues that states seek appropriate amount of power, same can be argued for Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria since the Russian intervention, Turkey acting as a security maximizer.

¹⁰⁴ Manhoff (2017): 12.

¹⁰⁵ “Biz Esad'ı falan hiç konuşmuyoruz.” *Sputnik News*, September 9, 2018. URL: <https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201809091035112688-erdogan-biz-esadi-falan-hic-konusmuyoruz/>

4.3 A New Identity: Nationalism and the Future in Syria

The investigated shift in Turkish foreign policy is a radical one and is not in contrast with Turkey's former foreign policy strategy. It is discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, that the Turkish foreign policy was constituted with a Muslim identity, followed by a quest for power in the Middle East. The salience on the role identity was deterministic for the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria as it played a major role in first establishing good relations with Syria, second, was one of the key factors in driving relations to a dead-end. Turkey's actions were interpreted through LoA and LoC and it was stated that there was a balance between the foreign policy decisions.

However, during this period, Turkey's actions seemed purely consequentialist as the former hostilities were reconstructed; Russia became a strategic partner and Bashar Assad's rule over Syria is recognized by the AKP. As the AKP's discourse on Russia changed from blames on ethnic cleansing and a threat for the state to strong cooperation, and its discourse on Assad changed from there should be no Assad in Syria to Syria's territorial integrity must be protected, I notice a notable identity change in the domestic politics of Turkey as well. From a constructivist perspective, investigating the alliance between the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) and the AKP, I argue that the AKP started to transform Turkey's identity to make its foreign policy decisions appropriate with the new set of rules and norms, which includes characteristics of a new form of nationalism.

2018 was a remarkable year for the Turkish people as they elected the first president of the republic. Not only the AKP made a political alliance with the far-right nationalist MHP for the elections, Erdoğan's presidential campaign was designed with nationalistic motives. Erdoğan visited military camps, gave speeches about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and introduced the 'Turkey

Alliance' to the domestic politics which stands for a strong unity under the Turkish flag.¹⁰⁶ The situation in Syria played an important role in the development of this new nationalist politics as the AKP-MHP alliance was built upon the common *milli beka* (national survival/security) rhetoric which predominantly derived from the situation regarding the Kurdish formation in south eastern borders.

MHP's general president Devlet Bahçeli used to be one of Erdoğan's and the presidential system's harshest criticizers. During the time of liberal openings regarding the Kurdish citizens of Turkey, Bahçeli has blamed Erdoğan for treachery and declared him the enemy of the Turks.¹⁰⁷ Until the alliance that took place in February 2018, the two leaders exchanged harsh words with each other, and seemed to be in total different world views.

However, as the fundamental Islamism became an internationally infamous ideology due to the extreme incidents in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood's total suppression in Egypt and Syria, and the Islamist involvement in July 15 failed coup attempt caused huge damage in political Islam which, I argue, that effected the AKP's role identity as well. Following the Kurdish mobilization and the failed coup attempt, the two parties, AKP and MHP, seemed to come together upon the mentioned nationalist political features, as the AKP started to leave its Islamist roots and came closer to a new form of nationalism.

The improved relations with Russia and the military operations were also built upon the security rhetoric which was adopted by both AKP and MHP. The Islamist circles in Turkey were critical with the rapprochement with Russia due to Russia's support for Assad and fighting

¹⁰⁶ Faruk Aksoy. "Türkiye İttifakı nedir?" *Yeni Şafak*, April 25, 2019. URL: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/farukaksoy/turkiye-ittifaki-nedir-2050155>

¹⁰⁷ "Bahçeli: Tescilli Türk Düşmanı." *Hürriyet*, October 9, 2013. URL: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/bahceli-tescilli-turk-dusmani-24882406>

Muslim Syrians and Turkmen's in northern Syria. Bahçeli described the rapprochement with Russia as creating alternative alliances against the United States which supports the Kurdish guerillas in Syria and gaining the upper hand against the security threats.¹⁰⁸ Bahçeli's statement also relates to the new set of rules and norms presented by the two parties which includes a strong fight against YPG in Syria, a strong nationalist alliance which will ensure Turkey's security and a suspicious, unfriendly stance against the West as they are blamed to support the Kurdish guerillas in Syria.¹⁰⁹

This reconstruction of the Turkish political identity is essential to understand Turkey's foreign policy actions towards the east, including Russia, and it lights the way for the new debate on the American and Turkish relations, and the future in Syria. The latest development regarding Turkey, the United States and Russia is the agreement between Turkey and Russia on the deployment of S-400s in Turkey, which the United States' strictly opposes due to the NATO obligations. Recently, the United States has given an ultimatum to Turkey to cancel the deal with Russia despite Erdoğan's repetitive statements that the deal will take place.¹¹⁰

Following these developments, it is safe to say that another complex equation in the region is taking place. However, one thing stands clear; Turkey's ambitions in Syria are not over, and it will play an important role in the coming years regarding the region's politics. To make accurate predictions and analysis on Syria's future, the new identity change in Turkey must be analyzed in great depth. Turkey's stance is one of the key factors concerning the region and the

¹⁰⁸ "MHP lideri Bahçeli: Mansur Yavaş çekilmelidir." *Hürriyet*, March 19, 2019. URL: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/mhp-lideri-bahceli-mansur-yavas-cekilmelidir-41155005>

¹⁰⁹ Manhoff (2017): 14.

¹¹⁰ Orhan Coşkun. "Turkey preparing for possible U.S. sanctions over S-400s: minister." *Reuters*, May 22, 2019. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa/turkey-preparing-for-possible-us-sanctions-over-s-400s-minister-idUSKCN1SS0HS>

international politics. Turkey's commitment to NATO nor its reluctance on improving its relations with Russia stands unclear, however, it is certain that Turkey's decisions will have great implications both in regional and international level.

Conclusions

This thesis sought to explain the changes in Turkish foreign policy towards Syria through two hypotheses; realist and constructivist. The realist hypothesis argued that the Turkish foreign policy was motivated by regional hegemonic goals, while the constructivist hypothesis argued that the salience on the state identity determined the foreign policy actions of Turkey.

In Chapter 2, it is concluded that the Turkish identity went through a change due to AKP's domestic rivalry with an ideological opponent and on the international level, the problems it had regarding the accession to the EU. These factors pushed the AKP further to the East and through identity and its regional goals, the Turkish foreign policy towards Syria is structured. As the structural determinants in the region and Turkey's identity were in harmony, the impaired relations went from enmity to amity.

In Chapter 3, it is presented to the reader that the geopolitical context started to change in the Middle East and soon the Arab Spring revolts reached to Syria. As the Assad regime started to use violence against the protestors and quickly demonized by the international community, Turkey faced a huge dilemma. In accordance with the constructivist hypothesis, the salience on the identity and the realist opportunism which sought to replace Assad with the SMB to reach its regional goals, Turkey's foreign policy took a radical change and the relations between the two countries went from amity to enmity.

In Chapter 4, it is discussed that the geopolitical context once again experienced a change, this time with the Russian intervention in Syria. Turkey's options were limited due to the Russian presence and it was under threat by hostile groups such as ISIL and YPG, the latter being the priority of the Turkish agenda. These structural factors pushed the Turkish foreign

policy to enter a phase of rapprochement with Russia on purely pragmatic reasons; Turkey decided to ensure its security in Syria. In addition, it is also discussed in this chapter that while the former state behavior of Turkey was in accordance with offensive realism, during this time period, it is concluded that Turkey's actions resembled defensive realism. Finally, it is concluded that while the Turkish foreign policy was shaped in realist terms, an effort to combine its foreign policy decisions with a new state identity should not go unnoticed. This new identity is described as a new wave of nationalism and it is stated that for accurate expectations regarding the future in Syria, both the realist and constructivist features of the new Turkish foreign policy must be considered.

This research does not claim to explain everything related to Turkish foreign policy towards Syria and the relations between the two countries in general, nor this thesis sought to address or provide a in depth analysis of realism and constructivism. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature revolved around Turkey-Syria relations by following a compatible method of using both realism and constructivism to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Turkish foreign policy. As the realist and constructivist framework provide valuable insights about the subject, only naturally, it also put limits and exclude other findings. An extensive research based on liberal perspective or the consideration of other features of realism and constructivism may reveal surprising results in relation with the conflict in Syria. Overall, this research is open to be carried further.

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