OLD PRINCIPLES, NEW PRACTICES: EXPLAINING THE AKP FOREIGN POLICY

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed office in November 2002, its quite unprecedented foreign policy practices, both in substance and in style, have incited a general debate over the proper explication of the defining characteristics of this 'new' foreign policy, and especially its sources. This article argues that, first, the essential parameter of the AKP foreign policy is the peculiar foreign policy conception of the AKP policymakers. Second, the AKP foreign policy is a synthetic practice of traditional politics with non-traditional means. This new policy heralds a return to the traditional balance of power politics with substantial emphasis on non-traditional aspects of foreign policy.

Eyüp Ersoy*

TURKISH POLICY QUARTERLY

*Eyüp Ersoy is a PhD student at Bilkent University's Department of International Relations, Turkey.

As a result of its overwhelming success in the general elections of 3 November 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed office in Turkey and formed a single party government. Thenceforth, while some scholars and commentators have stressed systemic shifts in global politics as the basic determinant of the AKP foreign policy, others' emphasis in identifying the main source of the AKP foreign policy has been on regional developments. Nevertheless, these sorts of analyses have evinced the propensity to overlook the agency of the AKP policymakers in foreign policy making. In accordance with these analyses, one would have to give an affirmative response to the question of whether Turkish foreign policy would have been the same if the Republican People's Party (CHP) or the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) had assumed the office and formed a single party government. It seems extremely difficult to give an affirmative answer to this question. Accordingly, it is the main contention of this article that the essential parameter of the AKP foreign policy is the peculiar foreign policy conception of the AKP policymakers, the paramount of whom has been Ahmet Davutoğlu, former foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and current Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hence, the usage of the term "AKP foreign policy" –instead of the Turkish foreign policy– in this article.

The first section of the article takes up the characteristics and the hallmarks of the AKP foreign policy. The distinguishing features of the AKP foreign policy will be critically scrutinized since a clear identification and definition of the subject matter is of great import for any argumentation. I will assert that the AKP foreign policy is not completely new since it seems to represent a return to the traditional balance of power politics with substantial emphasis on non-traditional dimensions of foreign policy, such as active use of public diplomacy, civilizational politics, and soft power. In addition, the AKP foreign policymakers have demonstrated a good deal of resolve in proceeding with implementing their foreign policy preferences even when it collides with the policy preferences of its traditional Western allies. In brief, the AKP foreign policy appears to be a synthesis of traditional politics with non-traditional means.

The second part of the paper is a discussion of the objectives of the AKP foreign policy. The ultimate goal is reestablishing Turkey as a "powerful" actor in regional and global politics. To that end, the AKP's proactive diplomacy and assertive foreign policy aims at creating a stable and, if possible, peaceful external environment for Turkey defined in three concentric basins by means of creating

a sphere of influence in Turkey's vicinity. Subsequently, the article argues that the AKP foreign policy makers have succeeded to a great extent in realizing these objectives so far. Examples of relations with three areas of basins, specifically Turkish-Syrian relations, Turkish foreign policy of the Black Sea, and Turkish-African relations are presented in the article to back up this assessment.

The main argument of the paper is that the fundamental factor behind the "new" Turkish foreign policy is ideational; developments in global, regional and domestic politics have facilitated its execution nevertheless. In other words, second-image and third-image variables, although influential in constituting a context for the AKP foreign policy, do not sufficiently explain the changes observed in it, with respect to both its nature and the ways of practicing it. Here, espousing classical realism, this article contents that it is the statesmen who devise and implement foreign policy and, therefore, their understanding of world politics and their perceptions as well as their ingenuity and competence in practicing foreign policy are of paramount importance in understanding their policies and explaining foreign policy of a state.

The conclusion will once again emphasize that the existence of opportunities and adversities, or contextual constraints, extremely significant they may be, does not spontaneously lead to certain foreign policy practices. Deliberate, or perhaps not deliberative, practices lead to certain foreign policy practices, be them efficacious or futile. In short, the existence of options is important. However, it is the choice that is decisive.

New or Newish: Defining the AKP Foreign Policy

As a prominent scholar of Turkish foreign policy observes, "in the Ottoman Empire, the security culture evolved from offensive realpolitik to defensive realpolitik. In the Republic, the defensive non-involvement realpolitik was moderated by the adoption of liberal economic policies and an activist multilateralism in foreign policy in the 1990s."[1] The AKP foreign policy represents a return to the traditional power politics, or realpolitik, but not to the defensive realpolitik, the moderated defensive realpolitik, but to the moderated offensive realpolitik.[2]

[1] Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Fall 2000), pp. 199-216, pp. 215-216. Emphasis in original.
[2] For offensive realpolitik, see, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001). For a discussion of offensive realpolitik and defensive realpolitik, see, Stephen Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 5-43.

In other words, however the conceptions of power, the means of achieving it and the ways of exercising it differ from realpolitik *per se*, power considerations occupy the central place in the AKP foreign policy. More importantly, balance of power, a central hallmark of power politics, is an essential principle in the AKP foreign policy. This unconventional shift from the moderated defensive realpolitik to the moderated offensive realpolitik is quite evident in the theoretical foundations, the discourse, and the practice of its foreign policy. First, in his seminal book, *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], first published in April 2001, Davutoğlu, referred as the visionary behind Turkey's newly assertive foreign policy by *The Economist*,[3] articulates a novel foreign policy doctrine for Turkey based on a "reevaluation of Turkey's geopolitical structure" in which he proposes a strategy in stages based on a politics of basins.[4] In particular, he states, "Turkey's foreign policy strategy towards the next century can be summarized as the rearrangement of relations with power centers in an alternate [*alternatifli*] mode and the formation of a hinterland in/with which longterm cultural, economic and political links are consolidated."[5] In foreign policy terminology, Davutoğlu proposes the creation of a Turkish sphere of influence through balance of power.

In congruence with these theoretical speculations, the discourse of the AKP foreign policy has persistently advocated, usually tacitly though, a moderated offensive realpolitik with an associated identification of a widening area of interest. This sort of identification seems to be crucial for the justification of the AKP's activism in a broadening area of interest. For example, Abdullah Gül, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated in a speech in January 2004 that Turkey's national interests have stretched over very different geographies and areas due to, among others, the geostrategic position of Turkey that cannot be defined with a single geographical region, and that constitutes the intersection point of continents and basins.[6] Gül continues:

> We think that we can protect our interests better with a policy that is not status quo-ist, reactive, and aggressive [but] that is open to the culture of compromise and that encourages positive developments around it. Now, abandoning the psychology of conflict that depends

[3] "Turkey's Foreign Policy: Meeting Ahmet Davutoglu," *The Economist*, 15 November 2007.
[4] Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position] (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2007).
[5] Ibid., p. 118.
[6] Abdullah Gül, *Yeni Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikasının Ufukları* [Horizons of the Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century] (Ankara: T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2007), p. 68.

> on the assumption –"we are surrounded by enemies"–, we have to assume the role of the founding actor of the cooperation and dialogue atmosphere with our surrounding. The ideal of big country can only be realized with such self-confidence.[7]

In other words, Gül argued for a substitution of a foreign policy of moderated offensive realpolitik with the foreign policy of moderated defensive realpolitik for the purpose of making Turkey a major power.

In the practice of foreign policy, the AKP has proven itself a competent performer of balance of power politics. Its performance in the geopolitics of energy is a noteworthy example.[8] In July 2009, the Turkish government hosted the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on the Nabucco gas pipeline and frustrated the Russian government's energy politics since "by skirting Russian territory, the Nabucco pipeline would undercut Moscow's monopoly on European natural gas shipments and the pricing power and political clout that come with it." The next month it concluded several energy agreements with Moscow which included granting Gazprom "use of its territorial waters in the Black Sea, under which the company wants to route its so-called South Stream pipeline to gas markets in Eastern and Southern Europe," thereby frustrating the EU's policy of energy diversification.[9] In each case the AKP has advanced Ankara's interests. In any case, as Daniel Freifeld highlights, in this "great pipeline opera", Turkey has been cast in one of the leading roles;"[10] a role in which the AKP has arguably been successful due to its skillful exercise of the balance of power.

Despite the return to the traditional balance of power politics, the AKP foreign policy has been quite novel with the substantial emphasis it has placed on non-traditional dimensions of foreign policy such as active use of public diplomacy, civilizational politics, and soft power. One interesting example representing a radical deviation from traditional Turkish diplomacy is Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu's visits of villages inhabited by local Turkic peoples in countries he officially visits. On 2 July, for example, during his visit to Lebanon, Davutoğlu visited two villages inhabited by Turcomans, Kuwashra and al-Birkeh.

---

[7] Abdullah Gül, *Yeni Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikasının Ufukları* [Horizons of the Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century] (Ankara: T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2007), pp. 68-69.
[8] For the geopolitics of energy, see, for example, Michael T. Klare, Rising Powers, *Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).
[9] Şebnem Arsu, "Turkey and Russia Conclude Energy Deals," *The New York Times*, 6 August 2009.
[10] Daniel Freifeld, "The Great Pipeline Opera," *Foreign Policy*, No. 174 (September/October 2009), pp. 120-127, p. 125.

Addressing the villagers in Kuwashra, Davutoğlu stated: "We have been together for ages in Gallipoli, the Caucasus, and the Balkans for the future of our lands. From this time on, we will be together. We are at peace so long as you are at peace and in wealth here. Your problem is our problem."[11] Even though, *prima facie*, his visits to two small Lebanese villages seem minor in Turkish foreign policy, as a Turkish journalist indicates, it reflects a major change in the practice of Turkish foreign policy. One dimension of the change pertains to the issue of "external Turks" in Turkish foreign policy. As the Turkish journalist shrewdly observes, "what we see at the Turkoman village of Kuvasra is a dimension of the change that the minister labeled "the culture of diplomacy" in Harijiya [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. The Foreign Ministry takes a great interest in Turks, even if they are in a village in a foreign country. The location is irrelevant-it could be Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq or Lebanon."[12]

Another non-traditional dimension of the AKP foreign policy has been the AKP policymakers' demonstration of a good deal of resolve in proceeding to implement their foreign policy preferences even when they collide with the policy preferences of Turkey's traditional Western allies. One notable example is the non-official visit of Khaled Meshaal, leader-in-exile of the Palestinian organization Hamas, to Turkey in February 2006 on an invitation of the AKP despite the solemn warnings of Israel and the U.S. against the visit and to the detriment of their efforts to isolate Hamas internationally.[13] To sum up, the AKP foreign policy appears to be a synthetic practice of traditional power politics with non-traditional means, especially non-traditional in terms of Turkish foreign policy.

Quo Vadis the AKP Foreign Policy?

The ultimate goal of the JPD foreign policy, as discussed above, is reestablishing Turkey as a "powerful" actor in regional and global politics. Therefore, understanding the AKP foreign policy, in part, entails a discussion of its conception of power. Referring to *Stratejik Derinlik*, the AKP's conception of power can be regarded multidimensional, and arguably differs a great extent from the conventional conception of power in Turkish foreign policy. First of all, Davutoğlu contends that "power parameters of countries should be seen not as single elements independent from each other but as dynamic elements that effect each other with

[11] "72 Milyon Kardeşinizden Selam Getirdim [I have Brought Regards from Your 72 Million Brothers]," *Yeni Şafak*, 30 July 2009.
[12] Abdulhamit Bilici, "New Diplomacy Reflected in Kuvasra," *Today's Zaman*, 1 August 2009.
[13] Serkan Demirtaş, et al., "Hamas Bombası [Hamas Bomb]," *Radikal*, 17 February 2006.

new functions. And these dynamic elements should be taken into consideration with coefficients involving the human element."[14] According to Davutoğlu, history (h), geography (g), population (p), and culture (c) constitute the constant parameters of power while economic capacity (ec), technological capacity (tc), and military capacity (mc) constitute the potential parameters of power. The coefficients, on the other hand, are strategic mentality (sm), strategic planning (sp) and political will (pw). Accordingly, he proposes a simple 'power equation': Power = (h+g+p+c+ec+tc+mc) X (sm+sp+pw).[15]

This comprehensive formula of power is distinct from conventional understandings of power politics especially in its incorporation of non-material factors in the power equation. It would be illustrative to investigate the place and the role of culture as a parameter of power in the theoretical foundations, the discourse, and the practice of the AKP foreign policy. Theoretically, to Davutoğlu, culture is "the most important element that links the constant parameters of power to the potential parameters of power" and is composed of "the psychological, sociological, political, and economic constituents that depend on a world of values that a specific human element (population) produce with its identity and sense of belonging which it possesses in a specific lieu (geography) and in a specific dimension of time (history)."[16] Culture as a parameter of power, in Davutoğlu's understanding, has both internal and external dimensions. In the first sense, Davutoğlu asserts, "the nations with an established cultural structure, which possess a strong sense of identity and belonging and which are able to stimulate psychological, sociological, political, and economic elements with this sense, have the capability to realize strategic initiatives that can be constantly regenerated."[17] In the second sense, Davutoğlu places great emphasis on the concept and the policy of geoculture.[18] Throughout Stratejik Derinlik Davutoğlu introduces several related concepts such as geocultural division line, geocultural depth, geocultural interaction, geocultural crossing, and geocultural fragmentation. As a particular example, he contends that Turkey would be influential over the EU to the extent of its geocultural depth.[19]

---

[14] Davutoğlu (2007), p. 17..
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 23.
[17] Ibid.
[18] For a study of geopolitics and geoculture, see, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[19] Davutoğlu (2007), p. 546.

In congruence with these theoretical speculations, the discourse of the AKP foreign policy has been replete with statements stressing the value and accentuating the role of culture in Turkey's foreign policy. One particular foreign policy discourse is Turkey's syncretistic accomplishments reconciling the values of its Muslim identity and modernization. Addressing the representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in October 2003 in Malaysia, Abdullah Gül, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, shared "Turkey's understanding and the practice of the relationship between Islam and Modernisation." Gul stated that the AKP had put in front of it "a mission to accomplish: We [the AKP] were to prove that a Muslim society is capable of changing and renovating itself, attaining contemporary standards, while preserving its values, traditions and identity."[20] Three years later, in June 20007, addressing this time the foreign political leaders attending the Bilderberg Conference in Istanbul, implying the accomplishment of this mission to a great extent and thereby Turkey's becoming of a role model, Gül declared that "Turkey is setting a very closely watched example among the Muslim world. Indirectly, we [Turkey] are educating our region through exemplary reform and development process. We [Turkey] have become a source of inspiration for intellectuals and politicians in our geography."[21]

In the practice of foreign policy, one example of the AKP's geocultural initiative is the establishment of Yunus Emre Foundation in May 2009. The foundation is, similar to the British Council, Goethe Institute, or the Cervantes Institute, responsible for the management of associated Yunus Emre Turkish cultural centers around the world. In the inauguration ceremony, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu stated: "Being a member of such a deep-rooted and big nation is a source of honor on its own. Today, we have to spread this culture to the world in parallel with an efficient foreign policy."[22] In a similar vein, on the same occasion, the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan announced his belief that "the Yunus Emre Foundation and Yunus Emre Research Institute will boost the promotion of Turkish culture to the world; Turkey should have established such a foundation long ago."[23] Established as a means of boosting Turkey's soft power abroad, the objectives of the Foundation in the words of its current general manager Prof. Ali Fuat Bilkan are "promoting Turkey, its cultural heritage, the Turkish language, its culture and art; fostering friendly relations with other countries; enhancing cultural exchange;...providing services to people abroad who would

[20] Gül (2007), pp. 539-540.
[21] Ibid., p. 224.
[22] "Turkish Universal Culture Will Come Together with Yunus Emre Foundation," *Today's Zaman*, 8 May 2009.
[23] Ibid.

like to learn about the Turkish language culture and arts."[24] Accordingly, several of such centers have been founded in a number of countries like Bosnia and Albania. The center in Tirana, for example, was inaugurated in December 2009 by the Turkish President Abdullah Gül.[25] In brief, the AKP has initiated a significant policy of geoculture embodied by the cultural centers established abroad and administered by states.

The AKP's conception of power in foreign policy, thus, is unconventional and multidimensional. The exercise of the power, on the other hand, aims at a conventional objective of foreign policy: "strengthening its international global position."[26] To that end, the AKP's proactive diplomacy and assertive foreign policy aim at creating a stable and, if possible, peaceful external environment for Turkey defined in three concentric basins by means of creating a sphere of influence in Turkey's vicinity. Davutoğlu identifies "three most important geopolitical areas of influence" that are "near land basins" composed of the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, "near maritime basins" composed of the Black Sea, the Adriatic, Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Gulf, and the Caspian Sea, and "near continental basins" composed of Europe, North Africa, South Asia, the Central Asia, and the East Asia.[27] And he contends that "these basins composed of concentric belts are the geopolitical basis of Turkey's foreign policy strategy [directed] towards its objective of strengthening its international position through gradually broadening its regional areas of influence (*hinterland*)."[28] In can be argued that the theoretical foundation of the AKP's "rhythmic diplomacy" lies in this classification of three basins as the basis of Turkey's foreign policy strategy.

The AKP foreign policy has succeeded to a great extent in realizing its foreign policy objective of strengthening Turkey's position in international politics through gradually forming, if not broadening, regional spheres of influence. Its foreign policy concerning the theoretical foundations, the discourse, and the practice of it, with respect to an area in each basin would be illustrative. In terms of "near land basins", a salient example is Turkish-Syrian relations. The AKP's strategic understanding of the Middle East arguably depends upon the conception

[24] Musa İğrek, "Turkey Opening Its Culture to the World Through Yunus Emre Centers," *Today's Zaman*, 27 May 2009.
[25] "President Gül Lays Foundation for the Turkish University in Albania," *Today's Zaman*, 14 December 2009.
[26] Davutoğlu (2007), p. 118.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

of "strategic triangles". In this conception, the geopolitics of the Middle East is characterized by three concentric strategic triangles. The first is composed of Turkey, Egypt, and Iran while the inner second is composed of Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, and the innermost triangle is composed of Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon.[29] Accordingly, in his detailed analysis of Turkish-Syrian relations, since strained relations with Syria complicate Turkey's position in this geopolitical mechanism of strategic triangles, Davutoğlu suggests an abandonment of "the lack of initiative and lethargy in bilateral relations that cannot fit into any understanding of rational diplomacy."[30] Accordingly, the AKP policymakers have espoused a new discourse in Turkey's relations with Syria. In this new discourse, Syrian leaders, Syria, and the Syrian people have all become brothers. For example, the Turkish Prime Minister, while responding to the questions of Syrian journalists in December 2009, stated: "Our attitudes towards the settlement [of common issues] with my brother Bashar Assad facilitated the process. Both the nations have a past based on history. We are members of a common civilization in terms of religion, culture, and history. These make us brothers."[31] In the practice of foreign policy, the AKP era has witnessed many "first times" in Turkish-Syrian relations. One noticeable example is the Syrian President Bashar Assad's visit to Ankara in January 2004, "which was the first visit to Turkey by a Syrian head of state in 57 years."[32] Another is the first ministerial meeting of the Turkey-Syria high-level strategic cooperation council convened in October 2009.[33]

In terms of "near maritime basins", on the other hand, the Black Sea constitutes an important part in the AKP's foreign policy. Davutoğlu argues that Turkey ought to relinquish its view of the Black Sea as a part of its defense strategy and instead view the Black Sea "a sea lane that will ensure, with a bold policy, Turkey's opening to the East and North Europe on the one side, and to the Caucasus and the Central Asia on the other."[34] In other words, for Davutoğlu, the Black Sea is more of a part of geoeconomics than geopolitics. In congruence with this theoretical speculation, the AKP policymakers have attached more importance to the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and have

[29] Davutoğlu (2007), pp. 353-355.
[30] Ibid., p. 402.
[31] "Başbakan Tayyip Erdoğan'dan Suriye Gezisi Öncesinde Önemli Açıklamalar [Important Statements from the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan on the Eve of His Visit to Syria]," *Vatan*, 21 December 2009.
[32] Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (November 2006), pp. 945-964.
[33] "Turkey-Syria High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council Convenes," *Today's Zaman*, 13 October 2009.
[34] Davutoğlu (2007), pp. 160-161.

stressed in their related speeches and conversations the priority of implementing a variety of economic projects. For example, in his speech in the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the BSEC in April 2007 in Belgrade, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül stressed the determination of Turkey "to finalize the ongoing projects as soon as possible" and indicated Turkey's belief that there was "a huge potential for trade between the Black Sea countries which have complementary economic structures."[35] In the practice of foreign policy, the AKP has strived to increase Turkey's trade volume with the littoral states of the Black Sea. Accordingly, Turkey's trade volume with the BSEC countries rose from ten billion dollars in 2002 to 51.5 billion dollars in 2007.[36]

In terms of "near continental basins", AKP's foreign policy opening to Africa presents an important case. To Davutoğlu, "the passing of the Cold War conditions makes a reconsideration of Turkey's policy towards Africa indispensable."[37] After arguing that disregarding the developments in Africa or exhibiting condescending attitudes toward the continent as a collection of undeveloped countries constitutes an inexcusable frailty for Turkey, Davutoğlu suggests a new African opening concentrating in the first phase on the cultural and economic areas.[38] In accordance with these policy recommendations, the AKP policy makers have repeatedly expressed their intention to advance Turkey's relations with African countries. As an example, speaking in the First International Turkish-African Congress organized by a Turkish think-tank in Istanbul in November 2005, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül expressed Turkey's desire to "be a partner of African peoples, [and] to work with them on the path of regional cooperation, peace, and sustainable development."[39] In the practice of foreign policy, the AKP has carried out quite substantial policies in advancing Turkey's relations with Africa. One example is Turkey's declaration of 2005 as "the Africa Year" and its admission to the African Union as an observer in the same year. Another example is the opening of eight embassies in African countries in 2010 (with an additional 11 embassies in 2011) in addition to its existing 12 embassies in the continent.[40]

---

[35] Gül (2007), p. 702.
[36] "Karadeniz Ekonomik İşbirliği [Black Sea Economic Cooperation]," *Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı*, http://www.dpt.gov.tr/PortalDesign/PortalControls/WebContentGosterim.aspx?Enc=51C9D1B02086EAFBF69CEF5F299AE5B4.
[37] Davutoğlu (2007), p. 208.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Gül (2007), p. 651.
[40] Uğur Ergan, "Yeni Afrika Büyükelçileri Belli Oldu [New Ambassadors to Africa are Announced]," *Hürriyet*, 15 January 2010.

Actors, not Reactors: Agency in the AKP Foreign Policy-making

The main argument in the preceding discussions is that the fundamental factor behind 'new' Turkish foreign policy is ideational; the intellectual sources of the AKP foreign policy and the foreign policy discourse the AKP has adopted have been significantly influential in its practice and in understanding its practice. Developments in global, regional and domestic politics have facilitated its execution nevertheless. In other words, second-image and third-image variables, although influential in constituting a context for the AKP foreign policy, do not sufficiently explain the changes in observed in it, with respect to both its nature and the ways of practicing it.[41] According to classical realism's strong emphasis on the statesmen in foreign policymaking, the contention is that it is the statesmen who devise and implement foreign policy and, therefore, their understanding of world politics and their perceptions as well as their ingenuity and competence in practicing foreign policy are of paramount importance in understanding their policies and explaining the foreign policy of a state.[42]

First, third-tier variables, that is, developments at regional and international level, have constituted a realm to which statesmen engage and in which they perform their foreign policy preferences. For example, the split in Atlantic relations between the U.S. and the EU, or at least some EU states, over issues such as the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 has created considerable space for the AKP policy makers in carrying out a less constrained regional policy, such as in Turkey's relations with Iran. By the same token, recent assertive Russian foreign policy has arguably facilitated, even enabled/compelled, the AKP's return to balance of power politics. In addition, recurrent conflicts in Turkey's vicinity have paradoxically bolstered its role as a "peace broker".

Second, second-tier variables, that is, developments at the national and societal level, have constituted a base upon which statesmen depend as sources of power and legitimacy. The role of the political stability in domestic politics sustained since the inauguration of the AKP government in 2002 and the economic development observed since then as components of "bases of power and legitimacy" for the AKP foreign policy ought to be underlined. One significant aspect of domestic politics related to foreign policy is the success of the AKP in securing

[41] For images in international relations theory, see, for example, Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 17-31.
[42] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 1993).

a large majority of votes in successive elections that has indirectly imparted legitimacy to its foreign policies. Another one is the retrenchment of the military's role in policymaking, both domestic and foreign, which has also shifted the "intactness" and legitimacy of AKP policies.

In international relations theory, first-tier variables are understood in general as individualist sources of war rooted in human nature. Repudiating this argument however does not negate the importance of the individual level as a level of foreign policy analysis. By referring to the works of the "chief architect" of the AKP foreign policy as well as the foreign policy discourse of the AKP leadership and linking these two dimensions of the foreign policy to the foreign policy practice of the AKP, it is argued in this article that the role of statesmen and their own understandings and practices have been crucial parameters in the "'new" Turkish foreign policy.

It should be once again emphasized that the existence of opportunities and adversities, or contextual constraints, extremely significant though they may be, does not spontaneously lead to certain foreign policy practices. Deliberate, perhaps not deliberative, practices lead to certain foreign policy practices, be them efficacious or futile. In short, the existence of options is important. However, it is the choice that is decisive. In terms of "new" Turkish foreign policy, the choices of the AKP policymakers have been decisive in its "construction".