

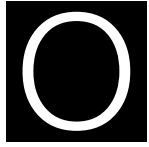
THE EFFICIENCY OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

The recent claims that Turkey pursues a policy of Neo-Ottomanism are unfounded and misleading. Turkey's involvement in regional tensions and conflicts is merely aimed at contributing to solutions and providing assistance to foster peace and stability in its surroundings. Furthermore, Turkey, as a society comprised of communities with different ethnicities and cultures, benefits from the experience of multiculturalism and therefore has the capacity to provide fair and rational guidance to its neighbors in their internal affairs, as well as their bilateral relations with each other.

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ver the past decade, Turkey's power and efficiency have been demonstrated in the international arena regarding various matters of concern and interest. In the eight years led by the AK (Justice and Development) Party government, Turkey has played an effective role in many issues as a regional powerhouse, and has already become a center of attraction.

The visions of our party for both domestic and foreign affairs are intertwined as an inseparable unity, and underlined by the Prime Minister and the Chairman of AK Party Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the following statement:

“The best advice I could give to my fellow politicians is that they shall not engage in politics for the sake of gaining power, and shall always bear in mind that, as politicians, they should be the sole guardians of justice and freedom.”

Within this framework, Turkey, under the AK Party leadership, is committed to reform, justice and stability in the pursuit of its domestic and foreign policies. Furthermore, the common pattern of “interests before values”, a widely articulated notion in international politics, is strongly rejected by the AK Party. Hence, Turkey has demonstrated that a foreign policy based on fundamental values and ethics is not only possible, but also effective.

Turkey bears an unmatched responsibility and is a strong arbiter across its region due to its geographical position and rich historical heritage. As the paragon of stability in a region where deep conflicts and instability wreak havoc, Turkey, in line with its principles and goals, cannot merely focus on its internal affairs and disregard the tensions and challenges across its neighborhood that spans the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East. With the conviction that sustainable stability requires also the internal harmony, prosperity and peace of neighbors, Turkish foreign policy is based on the principle of win-win formulas, not zero sum games.

As the heir of an empire that successfully ruled over the entire neighborhood for hundreds of years, Turkey is in a unique position to fully comprehend and provide solutions for the deeply-rooted issues across the region. Notwithstanding its uniqueness with this regard, Turkey, however, does not intend to rule over others. The recent claims that Turkey pursues a policy of Neo-Ottomanism are unfounded and misleading. Turkey's involvement in the regional tensions and conflicts is merely aimed at contributing to solutions and providing assistance to peace and stability in its surroundings. Furthermore, Turkey, as a society comprised of communities with different ethnicity and cultures, benefits from the experience of multiculturalism and therefore, has the capacity to provide fair and rational guidance to its neighbors in their internal affairs, as well as their bilateral relations with each other.

Stability within its borders is the merit on which Turkey bases its increasing influence across the region and throughout the world. Having won the last two elections consecutively, the ruling AK Party has provided stability by pursuing progressive, wise and reformist policies since 2002. Turkey has finally acquired the good reputation it deserves by reaching a status worthy of the 21st century in all aspects of politics, economy and culture.

Within the short period of the last eight years, Turkey has become the 16th largest economy in the world and sixth largest in Europe, and all the predictions about the country signal the continuing growth of its economy. Economic stability achieved through increase of productivity and exports, and development in areas such as public health, education and transportation, has not only contributed to the prosperity and quality of life of our citizens, but also set a praiseworthy example to other countries in our neighborhood.

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Trade with our neighbors has been on the increase, especially after visa restrictions with many were mutually lifted. The improvement of economic relations also promotes the enhancement of other communication and interaction channels between countries. Turkey’s economic success also serves as an example for its neighbors, which are heavily affected by the global economic crisis. Our neighbors have been attempting to emulate and integrate the systems and models that we have successfully implemented; one example is our neighbor Syria, which is working to liberalize its banking system by analyzing the model utilized in the Turkish banking sector and trying to integrate this model into its system.

The rise of democratic efficiency is another milestone in Turkey’s development. With the improvement of fundamental rights and liberties for citizens, our people seek justice against inequality and advocate their rights with more courage and self-confidence. Freedom of expression, the main ground for people of different ethnicity and cultures to live in harmony, is a prominent part of the set of democratic values advancing in Turkey. The new constitution, which is planned to be rewritten in 2011, will lay the foundation for an even more pluralistic, democratic, modern, esteemed and free Turkey.

It is a fact that internal affairs have effects on foreign policies. However, it would be misleading to regard Turkish foreign policy as a mere reflection of its domestic affairs. The foreign policy parameters of the AK Party government aim at justice and stability, and promote Turkey's role in the world as an influential, supportive and consultative actor.

Turkey's transformation from a passive bystander to an active and effective actor with regards to foreign affairs has been labeled as Neo-Ottomanism by those who still perceive politics through the codification of "interests." However, Turkey does not have an imperial vision and does not envision a future based on hegemonic goals. Our path guided by justice and peace is not for the sake of domination; it is to see our neighbors and the rest of the world experience the very same stability that we have achieved in our country.

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Turkey's constructive and fair foreign policy approach, which is based on values and not on interests, has transformed bilateral relationships between countries in line with a transition from a "win-lose" notion to the "win-win" concept. Only policies that are shaped by common values can constitute peace and stability in the region. Our relationship with our neighbor Iran, which some still widely insists on criticizing and misinterpreting, is a case in point. We received similar reactions and prejudices when we first established communication channels with our other neighbor, Syria. However, since then it has been

proven that our relationship with Syria is successful and constructive. In fact, the West, whose ties with Syria were seriously disconnected, has also started to take steps to restore and maintain a permanent relationship with Syria. Therefore, our initiative with Syria has resulted in beneficial development for both countries and has also helped Syria resist being regarded as an isolated country, and to avoid being treated as a country under unpleasant influences from foreign powers.

The ties we have been trying to establish with Iran are no different than the ones we managed to construct with Syria. Despite the fact that each country has different stance, points of view and manners regarding various matters, countries should establish interaction via diplomatic channels based on common values. Had Turkey not taken such an initiative with Iran, the threat of war against Iran

could have had disastrous effects for the whole region. A war that is more destructive and destabilizing than the Iraq War would deeply wound the region and cause irreversible consequences for the whole world. Turkey, with the principle of keeping diplomatic ties open at all times, has maintained its diplomatic relationship with Iran; hosted and mediated between Iran and the West in order for their tense relationships not to turn into conflict. Such efforts on our side will continue ceaselessly for the common interests of the region and the rest of the world.

Our proactive foreign policy approach has led Turkey to engage in politics in a wise manner, taking fair and rational steps when interacting with our neighbors and with other countries. We signed protocols with Armenia based on the principle that “it is a mistake to leave the negotiation table”. The current criticism that there has not been any concrete progress since the signing of the protocols is not constructive. The most important fact here is that there is a concrete equation and a road map on the table for the relationship to normalize. This pause does not eliminate the existence of the protocols; and with these protocols, diplomatic channels have been established, which are still open.

In conclusion, Turkish foreign policy with the merits of stability, win-win strategy, “values over interests” principle and a proactive approach will remain a center of attraction throughout the world. With the fundamental principles and values at its core, Turkey will continue its brave and positive initiatives to secure peace, harmony and security across its region.