

Paradigm Shift in Turkey's Foreign Policy

KEMAL KOPRULU
Chairman
ARI Movement

The Turkish government has disregarded European values and Western interests in many of its recent foreign policy maneuvers. Often the justification put forth at these junctures is the sensitivities of Turkish society, reflected in opinion polls. The guiding principle of recent years' foreign policy of zero problems with neighbors may in theory sound good but, in practice, this approach has many shortfalls. It does not serve Turkey's overarching aim of European Union integration, nor does it contribute to the spread of democratic values from Turkey to its neighbors. There are indeed many fragile balances in the neighboring regions of Turkey, especially in Eurasia and the Middle East. However, Turkey could both manage its public sensitivities and its pivotal geostrategic position without alienating its allies, raising questions about its motives, confusing its public, and causing long term detriment to the country's strategic interests. Not doing so is either the choice or the mismanagement of the government, and often a mixture of both.

185

Turkey has enjoyed a decade of legislative reforms driven by the EU integration process that started with the acceptance of Turkey as a candidate country at the EU Helsinki Summit in December 1999. Substantial economic growth for five years following 2002 was made possible due to the post-crisis restructuring of the Turkish economy in 2001. This period coincided with the spreading of the global economic bubble as increasing levels of funds were available for emerging markets. The rights of young people were expanded with the minimum age to run for parliament being lowered from 30 to 25, a new penal code granted women more protection against domestic violence and sexual violation, and Kurds enjoyed official TV broadcasts in Kurdish for the first

KEMAL KOPRULU is a founder of the ARI Movement and served as its Chair for 10 years (1995 -2004). He held a managerial position at Citibank and served as Senior Vice President of Interbank. He serves on the advisory board of Turkish Policy Quarterly.

Copyright © 2009 by the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*

time. But is this sufficient to conclude that young people, women, and Kurds have advanced opportunities or are more comfortable and free in their daily life? There are serious discrepancies that complicate the picture. Indeed, the glass is half empty.

Because Turkey embodies profound contrasts on many levels and has been changing rapidly, deeply contradictory conclusions are being drawn around the world, and in Turkey itself, about the direction of the country. There is a stark polarization and a general confusion about how to read Turkey's transformation. The objective data taken into account, such as economic figures, legislative reforms, or opinion polls might be the same, but due to the diversity of the country, social, cultural, and political trends taken as fundamental and determinant may differ. Moreover, material can be found to back up opposing judgements.

Since 2005, worrisome trends have been taking place in Turkey, which have often escaped the radar screen of the West. However because of its recent unpredictable moves in foreign policy, more questions have been raised in the international arena about Turkey's direction. To understand the paradigm shift in Turkey's foreign policy, it is imperative to factor in the style of management of the political leadership and understand how this leadership manner affects public opinion.

CULTURE AND POLITICS - THE RISE OF MISRUST AND POLARIZATION

186

In recent years, a number of research polls have been conducted in Turkey to measure cultural/social trends and perceptions. The majority of these polls have shown Turkish society to be highly divided, intolerant, and emotionally reactive. Trust of others is low, leading from heightened vulnerability to conspiracy theories and manipulation by religious and political currents, particularly among the young generation. Social trends of such nature render it unlikely that Turkey can sustain the international roles and responsibilities it has taken upon itself. A highly emotional and polarized society also offers a much more challenging setting in which to solve serious domestic problems, such as the Kurdish problem.

Yilmaz Esmer, a reputable professor at Bahcesehir University, conducted a nationwide survey in Turkey throughout April and May 2009, gauging social perception trends on issues ranging from tolerance, threats, and feelings about foreign countries to current affairs, religiosity, trust, and happiness. The results, published in a report titled "Radicalism and Extremism" were alarming in terms of negative perceptions of Western countries. In this study, 86 percent of respondents said the United States seeks to divide and weaken Turkey. A question about priorities of values reveals only 13 percent claiming democracy is the most important value, with religion being 62 percent and secularism 16 percent. The results are consistent with other such polls in recent years.¹

For example, 33 percent of Turks believe that violence toward women can be justified and 61 percent of Turks think women should obey their husbands.

"Being Different in Turkey" is a survey that was conducted by Professor Binnaz Toprak of Bosphorus University in December 2008. Her results demonstrated that: "Turkey is neither in a position to complete its European membership bid, nor in possession of a functioning liberal democracy."² Toprak's research reveals similar negative trends in terms of discrimination and intolerance. The World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Index report for 2008 ranks Turkey 123rd out of 130 countries, after Iran, Syria, Malaysia, and Kuwait.³

The WEF Gender Gap Index for 2009 shows that trends continue to worsen with a ranking of 129 out of 134.⁴

Due to insufficient checks and balances, an environment of intimidation and authoritarianism is spreading in the country.

Two chronic problems in Turkey are the political system and the lack of a balance of powers, which together result in a structure that is unable to ensure rule of law or accountability. Maintaining the current system serves the interests of the occupants of power positions. Once in power none of the authorities have followed through with promises to reform the political system in Turkey, including the political party law and the election system.

Separation of powers is weak due to the entrenched nature of the the judiciary system and the executive branch.⁵ This is why two critical court cases in Turkey are managed with entirely different principles. The ongoing trial dubbed "Ergenekon," which began as a legitimate case against deep-state activities in the last decade maintains the full support of the Turkish government and moves without interruption.⁶ In contrast, the courtcase coined "Lighthouse" (*Deniz Feneri*), where a German court implicated individuals close to the government, moves forward fitfully.⁷ Due to insufficient checks and balances, an environment of intimidation and authoritarianism is spreading in the country. A single power government of an extended period only compounds the problem.

Threats on freedom of press have become a systematic problem. September 2009—when the Turkish government levied a tax fine of \$2.5 billion on the largest media conglomerate in Turkey, Dogan Holding—was a wake up call. This was the peak of a series of political moves designed to weaken the Dogan media, including calls for boycotts of their newspapers by senior government officials.⁸ This case sparked criticism from institutions such as the European Union and Reporters Without Borders.⁹ This attack effects critical economic issues such as direct foreign investment and political risk. Replying to a question about this case during his visit to Turkey in October 2009, U.S. Congressman Robert Wexler, Chairman of the U.S.-Turkish Caucus in the House

of Representatives, said U.S. business circles were worried that the investment climate in Turkey was becoming unfriendly.¹⁰

Given the heavy agenda that Washington is facing at this time including Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and its image in the Muslim world, the United States is unlikely to get involved in controversial Turkish domestic issues. It is thus ever more important at this juncture that the European Union perform the checks and balances which internal structures simply cannot accomplish in Turkey. Turkish society needs Brussels to be proactive in breaches of rule of law, deficiencies in democratic processes, intimidation of opposition voices, and violation of freedom of press and expression.

SHIFT IN APPROACH TO TRADITIONAL ALLIANCES: THE UNITED STATES, NATO, AND ISRAEL

Turkey was a critical member of NATO from 1952 onwards, playing an important role within the Western block in the confrontation with the former Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey's alignment continued to be oriented towards the West. The Turkish-U.S. relationship was labeled a "strategic partnership" by former president Bill Clinton in 1999. That year, the United States was instrumental in the capture of Turkey's most wanted terrorist and provided critical support for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceylan oil pipeline, the first such project which launched Turkey on the road to becoming a transit energy hub. Also, Clinton was instrumental in convincing European leaders that Turkey should be given candidacy status. The trilateral relationship between the United States, Turkey, and Israel developed throughout the 1990s and became an integral dimension of Turkey's foreign and security policy.

A decade later, several geopolitical assumptions drive the Turkish government's decision to strengthen relations with neighboring countries like Russia and Iran, despite contradicting Western interests. One assumption is that Russia, Iran, and other powers will become stronger and that U.S. power will diminish in this region. Another assumption is that the United States faces pressing problems in the international arena for which it needs Ankara's collaboration, thus Washington will have to continue supporting Turkey's government. The third assumption is that Turkey can gain the upper hand in its dealings with the West due to its ability to steer the troublesome regions in its vicinity—particularly the Middle East.

Driven by a lack of conviction that Turkey can ever become an EU member and a closer affinity to Middle Eastern culture, the government is transforming Turkish foreign policy on the basis of the assumptions noted above. The Turkish government maintains what it perceives as "constructive ambiguity" about its vision and strategy. The absence of transparency creates insecurity in the populace and baffles Turkey's allies.

The perception that the West, and in particular the United States, employs double standards has existed in Turkey for many years and provides a foundation for the shift in foreign policy. Turkey has been on the short end of certain hypocritical approaches on issues ranging from the European Union and Cyprus to Iraq. The widespread feeling of being kept at the door of the European Union and discriminated and exploited by the West to serve their interests has created a society prone to vindication. Sympathy by the Turkish government to countries like Russia and Iran that challenge the United States is based on perception of joint experiences of having been wronged by the West. According to this world view, Turkey is on the side of righteousness and principle. This rather shallow modality of thought neglects to factor in that methods these countries often advocate and practice, domestically and internationally, are not peaceful nor principled.

Between 2003 and 2007, anti-U.S. sentiment in Turkey was widely attributed to the policies of the Bush administration. However, this incomplete assessment neglected the significant role of Turkey's domestic politics. The government allowed conspiracies about the United States to be circulated despite being based on blatantly incorrect information. U.S. favorability in Turkey was allowed to plummet, and the lack of effort by the government to reverse this trend appears intentional. The high unpopularity of the United States in Turkey provides the government leverage during negotiations with Washington, where such polls can always be utilized as a "trump card."

Despite President Barack Obama's successful visit to Turkey in April 2009, the new Pew Global Attitude Projects poll announced in July 2009 that favorability of the United States in Turkey rose only from 12 percent in 2008 to 14 percent in 2009. This 2 percent increase comes after U.S. favorability plummeted from 52 percent in 2000 to a low of 9 percent in 2007, the lowest rating in Pew's survey. Although the Turkish government clearly has political power, capabilities, and outreach capacity to effect public opinion, it allows public opinion to formulate and then emphasizes societal currents as a justification for foreign policy choices. In essence, the government's interests are aligned alongside the direction that public opinion is taking. In light of these forecasts and assumptions, anti-Americanism is not deemed a harmful trend by the government. Nor is this viewpoint uncommon. Anti-U.S. sentiment is shared by members of the military, media, and rising business interests; across the entire elite sphere this trend is combined with skepticism about the West in general. It is very rare in Turkey that there be such a consensus on any issue as there presently exists regarding anti-Western sentiments.

The government has prioritized the consolidation of its power within Turkey and maximization of power throughout the region. The aim is to ensure that Washington and Europe need the collaboration of Ankara to be effective in the regions neighboring

Turkey. To contribute to this end, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which has its roots in Islamic orientations, has made gaining the trust and admiration of the Arab street a priority. For the AKP, public opinion in Turkey and the Arab street is a means for advancement of longer term political goals of becoming a regional leader in the Middle East. The fact that the Arab street frequently undermines its rulers works to the advantage of AKP.

Two incidents earlier in 2009 display this approach of the AKP toward foreign policy. In January, two months before the local elections of March 2009, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan used the annual World Economic Forum platform in Davos to further his domestic political goals. Erdogan, whose team had been the instigator of this panel to begin with, argued with Israeli President Shimon Peres on the wrongs

Any negotiations conducted should have been done in a professional manner and behind closed doors, not in front of the Turkish public.

of the Gaza War. After tensions mounted, he staged a dramatic exit from the panel, saying that he would never come back to Davos events. When Erdogan returned to Turkey, thousands mobilized at the airport to greet him and hail him as a leader that

scolded Peres and Israel. The Davos incident was used as a recurring theme in the local election campaign of AKP. Furthermore, the incident resonated strongly in the Arab world. Muhammad Nur in Lebanon's *Al Safir* newspaper wrote "Erdogan proved once again that he is more Arab and human than most Arab rulers."¹¹ Erdogan successfully used an international economic platform to win not just the sympathy of the Turkish public, but the broader Arab street as well.

Similarly, during the NATO Summit in April 2009, Erdogan threatened to veto the appointment of Danish Prime Minister Anders Rasmussen as the new General Secretary of NATO based on issues irrelevant to NATO. The subsequent debate in Turkey targeted NATO as a means of social vindication, and pulled NATO into a religious confrontation. This selection process of a new NATO chief displayed a widening values gap between Turkey and Europe. Erdogan's argument of discussing this issue with Muslim leaders who pressured him against the appointment played to the Arab street.¹² The objective should have been to concentrate on NATO's values, needs, and shortcomings and contribute to its new strategic concept. Based on negotiations of criteria that were reported in Turkey to have been brokered by Obama, Erdogan lifted his objection and approved Rasmussen as the new general secretary.¹³ But the damage was done and Turkey lost credibility. The fact that this awkward situation was Obama's first direct experience with the Turkish government did not leave a positive first impression. Any negotiations conducted should have been done in a professional manner and behind closed doors, not in front of the Turkish public.

Although incidents like Davos and the NATO leadership crisis raised many questions in Washington, Turkey did not lose U.S. support. In his first bilateral trip outside North America, President Obama came to Turkey soon after Davos and right after the NATO summit. In his remarks to the Turkish Parliament on 6 April, 2009, he emphasized that Turkey is "a part of Europe" and "a critical ally".¹⁴

Mediating regional conflicts is a self-declared objective of AKP's foreign policy and it allows them to spin their so-called regional influence. Turkey had played the role of mediator in the Israeli-Syrian indirect peace talks that began in 2007. Syria postponed the talks in September 2008 as Israeli elections were nearing. In the aftermath of the Gaza War and Davos, Turkey's role as mediator began being questioned by high level Israeli officials. When talks of reopening negotiations began again, the AKP government lobbied for the role.¹⁵ But Davos had deeply wounded the Turkish-Israeli relationship. The new Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has since closed the door on Turkey's mediator role.¹⁶ Turkish cancellation of joint military exercises with Israel in October 2009 has left the bilateral the relationship frail.¹⁷ Erdogan clearly cited public opinion as the reasoning behind this decision by saying deciding was "in accordance with his people's conscience."¹⁸

The NATO ordeal lasted several days but this short span seriously damaged relations with Germany, France, and Denmark. Olli Rehn, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement said that a Turkish veto of Rasmussen would damage its EU process.¹⁹ In the intermediate term, these types of actions may lead to a reorientation of partner nations for Turkey, not due to simply the way Turkey sees other nations, but also because of how other nations view Turkey.

SLIDING COMMITMENT TO EUROPEAN FUTURE

In 2004, the EU membership goal was a uniting factor in Turkish society with nearly 80 percent support. In Esmer's research of 2009, 76 percent of Turks express conviction that the EU intends to divide Turkey, and 81 percent believe the European Union's mission is to spread Christianity at the expense of the Muslim world. However, it is under Turkish leadership that popular opinion of the European Union went from nearly 80 percent to well below 50 percent. Although there may be a tendency by the government to blame the opposition, the governing party instigates all headlines regarding the European Union.

Each time high level Europeans criticize Turkey, AKP politicians react with negative rhetoric about the European Union. Turkey-skeptic approach of leaders like French President Nicolas Sarkozy needs to be put in context. Instead of emphasizing emotional outbursts about the European Union not wanting Turkey, a responsible

political elite should explain the value of inclusion, drawing on experiences of other countries, and calling for reason and continued commitment. The AKP government is aware that stressing negative rhetoric results in an emotionally charged, volatile public. Erdogan's remarks of connecting mistakes made by the European Union not resulting in a "doomsday for Turkey" are examples of the extremes taken. He goes on to state that "Turkey is no more a country whose agenda is set by others."²⁰ Turkey's EU agenda was set by the European Union a long time ago with Turkey's bid for membership; and the agenda is a joint agenda.

Turkey is becoming less secular and more unpredictable—neither of these trends is consistent with EU integration prospects. The AKP does not have the incentive to take the necessary steps to fully implement the requirements of EU integration. Between 2003 and October 2005 the AKP did a commendable job on the EU reforms required for integration and served as a catalyst pushing for a solution to the Cyprus problem. But the EU-oriented agenda of the AKP changed drastically right after negotiations began in October 2005, and Turkish energy and commitment to the EU process has waned. Most EU observers point to the 2004 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, which upheld the ban in Turkish universities on the headscarf, as the critical turning point for AKP's EU enthusiasm. Erdogan criticized the Court's decision saying that this was an issue to be decided by the Ulema (Islamic scholars).²¹ Most of AKP's foreign policy inconsistencies, contradictions, and unpredictability started after EU negotiations were attained. Erdogan's first Brussels trip after attending the December 2004 EU Summit was four years later in January 2009, hardly a sign of commitment.²²

If and when the AKP feels its short term interests are served by the European Union, EU integration will conveniently pop up on the agenda. In GMF's 2009 Transatlantic Trends survey, EU support for Turkey's membership is 19 percent, down from 30 percent in 2004. Over the next decade, Turkey needs to increase this number by 30 percent in order to create a better opportunity for membership. For the last five years, had Turkey been concentrating on affecting the EU street, the level of support could have been well above this percentage. The AKP government, confident that Turkey does not need to integrate with the European Union to be an important regional player, is assuming the European Union will need Turkey if they are to be a global strategic player.

POLICIES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

THE CAUCASUS, RUSSIA, AND ENERGY

The unpredictability of AKP places relationships with neighboring countries at risk as short term movements in public opinion can dramatically alter decision-making. The

government does not prepare the public for what needs to be done and it also fails to explain the processes involved. When forced to take steps backward, frequently public opinion is a way out.

One of President Obama's main points during his visit to Turkey in April 2009 was concerning the reconciliation efforts between Turkey and Armenia. This century old problem, recently inching towards normalization, stems from massacres of Armenians in 1915 under the Ottoman rule and is complicated by Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan, Turkey's ally, in the early 90s. While in Turkey, President Obama made his position on the Armenian "genocide" issue clear and underlined the immediate need for a solution. Because Turkey closed the border with Armenia in 1993 as a response to Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory in and around the Nagorno Karabakh enclave, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan harshly criticized Turkey for not com-

Relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have been scarred.

municating its plans in a straightforward manner. Erdogan reacted by flying to Baku and said "without the occupation ending, the gates [between Turkey and Armenia] will not be opened."²³

Justification for this interruption of Armenian-Turkish reconciliation was based on public support for Azerbaijan. However, its intention of maintaining a closed border until the Karabakh conflict was resolved and unclear, especially with regards to the Turkish public. Turkey increased the perception of its unpredictability not only in the eyes of the United States and Armenia, but also of the Azeri and Turkish societies. Aliyev knew Turkey's weakness with regard to public opinion and he used this to his advantage. The release, on 31 August, of two protocols between Turkey and Armenia outlining concrete steps that would lead to normalization of relations did not dissipate the ambiguity either. It requires parliamentary ratification to be implemented, which is likely to hinge on progress in the resolution of the Karabakh conflict.²⁴ The subsequent signing of bilateral protocols, between Turkey and Armenia, on 10 October were unprecedented and historic but the hurdles remain the same.²⁵ This process may well result in a closer Azeri-Russian partnership which may disrupt regional balances. In any case, relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan have been scarred.

In August 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia, Ankara hurriedly put together a proposal for a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform."²⁶ Modeled after past proposals, this initiative had an important difference: the European Union and the United States were left out of it. Moreover, before going to Moscow to discuss this idea, Turkey failed to inform Washington, a leading stakeholder of the war and a key ally of Turkey in the region for the past two decades. Ultimately President Sarkozy of France brokered the peace agreement between Moscow and Tbilisi, and Turkey's attempt to

be the facilitator was unsuccessful. During this turbulent period, Turkey was careful not to criticize Russia for its actions and did not side with Georgia either.

In August 2009, one year after the Georgian war, 20 protocols and agreements were signed between Erdogan and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin during Putin's state visit to Ankara. These agreements and projects, if realized, will elevate the already deepening relationship between Turkey and Russia to a new level. Turkey and Russia have become true strategic allies.²⁷ This relationship has developed well beyond economic and energy collaboration to incorporate political and security/military dimensions. One reason for this alignment is that Turkey perceives NATO presence in the Black Sea as a threat to its own influence, which is ironic given Turkey's NATO membership.

Energy is undoubtedly a critical component in Turkey's foreign policy objectives. Turkey was a tough negotiator regarding the benefits it would derive from the U.S. and EU-backed Nabucco energy pipeline, a project that was designed to bypass Russia by bringing natural gas from the Caucasus and Central Asia to Europe, passing through Turkey. Nabucco was signed by the partner nations in July 2009, and its estimated completion is 2014.²⁸ Turkey used the process of Nabucco as a bargaining chip, threatening to withdraw from the project unless the European Union opened the Energy chapter for negotiations.²⁹ Turkey also pushed for privileges in amounts and prices of the gas. At the same time, it made overtures to Russia and Iran for both to join Nabucco. Although Turkey eventually agreed to sign Nabucco, the government's behaviour during negotiations exacerbated its partners' frustration.

Russia's alternative to Nabucco was the South Stream project, which aims to preserve Russia's 25 percent share in Europe's gas market. These two projects offer different visions as one contributes to the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics with gas reserves, and the other consolidates Russian dominance of the market in this part of the world. During Putin's visit to Ankara, just one month after Nabucco's signing, Turkey signed off on an agreement in support of South Stream.³⁰ The satisfaction of Western partners and strategists that Nabucco has clipped Russia's domination of European natural gas sources was short-lived.

POPULISM AND PECULARITIES IN POLICIES TOWARDS THE ARAB WORLD, IRAN, AND CHINA

In August 2008, Turkey was the first NATO member to formally invite the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In November 2008, Prime Minister Erdogan, in a speech at Brookings Institute in Washington, said that countries that ask Iran to drop nuclear weapons should get rid of their own nuclear arsenal and called for "total nuclear disarmament."³¹ In a clear contradiction of traditional Turkish policy, he went on to explain that Iran's desire for nuclear weapons was normal for any country in their position. This also helps explain why, when asked in the 2009 Transatlantic Trends

survey how Iran's nuclear program should be dealt with, 29 percent of Turks responded that they "accept that Iran may acquire nuclear weapons," as opposed to 8 percent of Europeans. Support for diplomatic pressure on Iran is three times lower in Turkey than in Europe.³² This will become a tool for AKP to defend its policies toward Iran.

After the Iranian elections in June 2009, the Western world closely watched as demonstrations erupted and claims of fraud increased. Turkey, in contrast to Western leaders, immediately extended official congratulations to Ahmedinejad.³³ The AKP once again lobbied to mediate talks between Western powers, Russia, and Iran on the nuclear weapons issue.³⁴ Despite a persistent effort of almost one year, this mediation effort failed as the talks were held in October 2009 in Geneva. The Turkish government efforts to become Iran's supporter against Western mistreatment has reached a high point as Erdogan claimed in October 2009 that the Iranian leader was his friend and close ally.³⁵ A clear strategy for Iran has been implemented for several years now.

Turkey makes ambitious claims about being an "insider" and having soft power in the Middle East and Eurasia. However, Turkey was unprepared for the breakout of war between Georgia and Russia.³⁶ And caught off guard with what happened in the aftermath of the Iranian elections. The government would be more able to pursue its ambitious agenda if it were to widen the circle of people who contribute expertise to Turkey's foreign policy making. During the first term of AKP's government, from 2002 to 2007, the party was criticized for excluding key foreign ministry officials from critical decisions. Though this criticism has subsided, there is still a deficit of empowered individuals with foreign policy experience in the party ranks. Foreign policy is largely run by a few individuals, which is not sustainable for such a multi-dimensional foreign policy agenda, especially if these policies produce problems.

After claiming in 2006 that what happened in Darfur was not a genocide and remaining silent while Iranian forces killed demonstrators in June, the Turkish prime minister reacted strongly to the Chinese government for a crackdown of the Turkic Muslim Uyghur minority in China.³⁷ The 2 million-strong Uyghur ethnic group has faced years of discrimination from the Han Chinese and recent riots and police brutality had left almost 200 Uyghurs dead. Erdogan deemed the incident "a form of genocide," and the minister of trade called for a boycott on Chinese goods.³⁸ The incident was assessed as follows by a Turkish journalist:

"If there is one thing we should not do, it is to not leave foreign policy to the hands of "domestic political arguments" and to the winds of heroism. If we do this, Erdogan's foreign policy line, which gives the impression that he was inspired by mostly internal politics, will possibly create harmful effects."³⁹

Internal politics once again was directly responsible for flawed foreign policy decisions. Upon reactions from China, Turkey had to soften its tone but relations with

China were strained.⁴⁰ After China's strong reaction, and as Turkey found itself alone in the international community, the issue practically disappeared from the Turkish agenda.⁴¹ The mismanagement of this issue has limited Turkey's hand and will affect any future complications that may occur in this region between Turkey and China.

The AKP government has also differentiated itself from past governments in its dealings with terrorist groups. Turkey has for decades had a strict no-tolerance approach to terrorists. There were two very good reasons for this. First, it was in line with the values of the Western alliance to which Turkey belongs. Secondly, it was because Turkey had been suffering from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) since the early 1980s, and warning allies not to legitimize the group by establishing direct contact with them.

In March 2006, the AKP hosted Khalid Mashal, a senior representative of the terrorist group Hamas, which had won a victory in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. The Middle East Quartet—the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia—declared that Hamas must put down arms, recognize Israel, and recognize international agreements signed to date by Palestine to be recognized as an elected party.⁴² The intervention of Turkey at such a delicate stage was seen as undermining this international effort that was in effect. There was tremendous criticism to this invitation from the United States, European Union, and Israel.⁴³

This action also caused extreme discomfort in Egypt where the radical Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an extension, threatens the sitting government.⁴⁴ The Palestinian Authority was also undermined because president Mahmoud Abbas was in the process of managing the Hamas factor with careful coordination with the West and Egypt. The AKP justified this move by pointing to the elections where Hamas was a victor and thus should be treated as an elected representative of Palestine. In fact, Prime Minister Erdogan has recently called on Obama to “redefine” what it means to be a terrorist.⁴⁵

During the last five years, an informal bloc of nations led by Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have increased their cooperation levels to stave off what they perceive as an Iranian threat to regional balances.⁴⁶ This group in general has been sympathetic to Western interests. The Iran-led bloc includes Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others and is considered “anti-Western.” With its actions and positioning in the Middle East, the AKP government has tipped the balance of these two groups in favor of Iran and against Western interests. Examples of this include AKP's support for Hamas, sympathy for Iranian nuclear weapons ambitions and declaring new strategic investments while sanctions are being weighed.⁴⁷

Egypt and Turkey have for years both had regional ambitions that have created a rivalry but in recent years relations have become quite tense as the AKP government undermined Egypt regarding their fragile negotiations with Hamas. Although ten-

sions have been kept below the radar by the AKP government, problems with Egypt prevented Turkey from backing a prominent opinion leader, Zulfu Livaneli, to become the new head of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). U.S. foreign policy circles came forth with the idea earlier in 2009 and suggested to Turkey that Livaneli be nominated by the government for the post of Director-General that was opening up in September 2009. The relevant actors in the United States backed Livaneli's nomination and made this clear to Turkish officials. Egypt was sponsoring its own candidate, Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, and AKP did not wish to strain relations even further and did not back Livaneli for this prestigious position.⁴⁸ This period also coincided at a time when Turkey was formally asking Egypt to join mediation efforts led by them between Hamas and Fatah.

The irony of Turkey hosting Khalid Mashal, who is in political asylum in Syria is that the last time a terrorist which concerned Turkey was also in political asylum in Syria. In 1998, the leader of the terrorist group PKK was, at the time, Abdullah Ocalan, and the Turkish government threatened Syria with a military operation if he was not removed. In striking contrast to previous policies, Mashal was issued a visa into Turkey by the governing party. Another interesting note is that Turkey was the first NATO member to host President Bashar Assad of Syria on a state visit after the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005. The UN Security Council issued passed a resolution in October 2005 calling for Syrian cooperation in the Hariri assassination. Assad visited Turkey in 2007. In October 2009, Turkey and Syria signed multiple agreements which included decisions to expand security and military cooperation.⁴⁹

It is noteworthy that Erdogan is not so lenient to those he deems "connected to terrorism" in Turkey. From July 2007 until August 2009, the leader of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), Ahmet Turk, waited for his request for a meeting with Erdogan to be honored while Erdogan put forth two criteria before he would agree to meet: First, DTP was to declare the PKK as a terrorist organization and condemn its actions. Eventually Erdogan took a step back and met Ahmet Turk in August 2009, even though Turk had not condemned PKK.⁵⁰ It would have been proper had Erdogan set the same standards for Hamas and waited for some kind of change of policy before embracing them. Hamas was embraced without preconditions by AKP due to success in elections but the same principle was not applied by AKP for DTP and Turk.

In March, 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudan's president Omar al-Bashir. Turkey, not being a party to the ICC, not only chose to ignore the warrant, but the first foreign visit of al-Bashir after the indictment was to Turkey. This was al-Bashir's second visit to Turkey in just over one year. By condemning the ICC action, Turkey joined a group of nations and organizations such as the African

Union, Arab League, Iran, China, and Russia.⁵¹ The AKP government's support of al-Bashir was incomprehensible and certainly not in line with Turkey's mission as a holder of a rotating seat at the UN Security Council.⁵²

LOOKING AHEAD


If Turkey's foreign policy moves and public opinion indicators are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, overall patterns can escape an observer. However if analyzed over time and across issues and regions, trends emerge. The style of political leadership combined with public opinion formation and tendencies support these trends and patterns. Domestic trends of increasing authoritarianism should also be factored in as public opinion continues to drive foreign policy decisions.

AKP is not positioning itself in favor of the transatlantic bloc or as a means to anchor Turkey to the West. Their goal is to minimize U.S. and Western influences within this region. The AKP government never intended to fully pursue EU integration nor do they want a strategic relationship with Washington. Washington seems to accept AKP as a reliable partner in the region, but this approach could stem from the fact that they have a lot on their plate and may not see many alternatives. But Washington will see that dealing with the AKP in the future will become more difficult if AKP realizes its regional goals. Washington must also factor in that they risk losing, for the long-term, even more of Turkey's traditional Western stakeholders.

For the next decade, Turkey's future hinges on public opinion in the EU countries. European public opinion is the most critical determinant of whether Turkey's EU integration process will be able to continue. Instead of spending so much capital on winning the Arab street, the Turkish government needs to expend more effort on winning the EU streets. A decade-long process of EU-oriented democratization combined with increases in per capita income should foster a rise in confidence in democratic values, European models of governance, and more favorability towards international institutions. Turkey's priorities are becoming more religious-based and society is highly divided as intolerance rises. The levels of polarization clearly display unhealthy trends and will make tough domestic decisions difficult. The role and empowerment of women in Turkey should expand but is regressing. A Turkey that has been part of the UN, IMF, NATO, and other institutions for the last 50 years should embrace international challenges with self-confidence and decisiveness. But anti-Western sentiments spurred by strong anti-Americanism is gaining momentum at all levels of society.

Turkey is being mismanaged. Its priorities need to be reorganized and energies need to be utilized in more efficient ways. Going forward, Turkey needs to concentrate on four main areas which can be dubbed the 4 "E"s: the European Union, the Turkish

economy, education, and the environment. Turkey needs a comprehensive and sustainable long-term strategy for improving its image in the European Union. The Turkish government has to give up its Islamic populism and focus on creating a proactive EU agenda which is in line with the national goals of the next decade. In as much as the ruling party's power is not directly affected, pro-EU approaches may appear and then disappear. The government does an excellent job of changing and implementing laws that do not directly influence their power and delay reforms and implementation of issues that would curtail their influence. The EU process is also a critical means to a better and more balanced society.

There needs to be a long term continuous and sustainable dialogue and cooperation between the West and all levels of Turkish society including politicians, military, media, civil society, women, universities, and high schools. Multiple champions of issues are necessary with regard to U.S. relations, EU integration, NATO, history of the Western alliance/institutions, and common goals and values. 

NOTES

1. Polls conducted by the German Marshall Fund have revealed high anti-Western tendencies in Turkey, available at www.transatlantictrends.org/trends.

2. Nicolas Birch, "Turkey: Secular Turks Face Growing Discrimination," Eurasianet, 23 December 2008, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav122308a.shtml>.

3. Gender Gap Index 2008: Turkey, http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/ggg08_turkey.pdf.

4. Gender Gap Index 2009: <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/report2009.pdf>

5. The EU Progress Report 2008 discusses the inspection system and the Higher Council of Judges and Prosecutors—both of which are problematic in terms of separation of the executive and judiciary.

6. Gareth H. Jenkins, "Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation," Johns Hopkins University Central Asia Caucasus Institute, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/0908Ergenekon.pdf>.

7. This is a case where a German court implicated individuals for embezzling 16 million euros of humanitarian funds through suitcases of cash to a pro-government media group in Turkey. The head of the Supreme Board of Radio and Television, Zahid Akman, was directly implicated in the case and asked to resign by Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, but Arinc was not successful. Akman actually was allowed to finish his term in July 2009 and still remains a Board Member. M.K.Kaya, "Turkish Political Corruption: the AKP, too?" Johns Hopkins University Central Asia Caucasus Institute, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080926A.html>.

8. Asli Aydintasbas, "Turkey's War on the Press", *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 September 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203917304574414503346981992.html>

9. James Neuger, "Turkey Warned by EU on Press-Freedom Fight with Dogan", *Bloomberg.com*, 14 October 2009, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601085&sid=aCr8VHD3u8SE>. And for criticism of Reporters Without Borders Yasemin Esmen, "Turkey Slips to Bottom One-Third for Press Freedom", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 20 October 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-among-the-last-one-third-for-press-freedom-2009-10-20>

10. Daniel Steinvorth, "A New Direction for Turkey?" *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,606900,00.html>.

11. "Arabic Press Praises Erdogan," *BBC News*, 31 January 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7860328.stm.

12. James Joyner, "Erdogan Says Rasmussen Pick Would Damage NATO", March 30, 2009. <http://www>.

acus.org/new_atlanticist/erdogan-says-rasmussen-pick-would-damage-nato

13. Saban Kardas, "Turkey Reaches Compromise Over New Head of NATO," The Jamestown Foundation, 6 April 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34820.

14. Remarks by President Obama to the Turkish Parliament, 6 April 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Obama-To-The-Turkish-Parliament/.

15. Saban Kardas, "Erdogan Offers Turkish Mediation in Israeli-Syrian Talks," The Jamestown Foundation, 23 July 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35305&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=d45e47f26c.

16. Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu: Turkey can't be Honest Broker in Syrian Talks", October 18, 2009, http://www.indymedia-letzebuerg.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33046&Itemid=28

17. Caroline Glick, "How Turkey was lost to the West", RealClearWorld.com, 16 October 2009 http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2009/10/16/how_turkey_was_lost_to_the_west_97269.html,

18. Daniel Steinworth, "The Sad State of Turkish-Israeli Relations", 19 October 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,655974,00.html>

19. Ian Trainer, "Bitter Turkey Finally Lifts Veto on Danish PM as NATO Chief," *The Observer*, 5 April 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/05/nato-eu-denmark-turkey>.

20. "Erdogan: EU Process Failure is not a Doomsday for Turkey," TurkishNy.com, 20 July 2009, <http://www.turkishny.com/en/english-news/11901-erdogan-eu-process-failure-not-a-doomsday-for-turkey.html>.

21. "Will Clinging to the EU and Ataturk save the AKP?" Johns Hopkins University Central Asia Caucasus Institute, 23 April 2008, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080423A.html>.

22. Klaus Jurgens, "Refinding the Midas Touch: Prime Minister Erdogan Goes to Brussels," Today's Zaman, 3 January 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/columnists-163042-refinding-the-midas-touch-prime-minister-erdogan-goes-to-brussels.html>.

23. "Prime Minister Erdogan puts Baku's Armenia Concerns to Rest," Today's Zaman, 19 May 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=175222>.

24. "Turkey, Armenia to Launch Talks on Diplomatic Ties," Today's Zaman, 4 September 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-185769-100-turkey-armenia-to-launch-talks-on-diplomatic-ties.html>.

25. Sabine Freizer, "The EU-Turkey-Cyprus Triangle: Football Diplomacy", 15 October 2009, International Crisis Group, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6348>

26. "Turkey and the Georgia War: A Bungled Security Initiative," Johns Hopkins University Central Asia Caucasus Institute, 29 August 2008, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/080829B.html>.

27. "A Decade Under Putin Makes Russia a Strategic Partner for Turkey," Today's Zaman, 9 August 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-183444-a-decade-under-putin-makes-russia-strategic-partner-for-turkey.html>.

28. Rob Verdonck and Steve Bryant, "Nabucco Gas Pipe Accord Signed as Europe looks beyond Russia," Bloomberg.com, 13 July 2009, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601102&sid=aAYsOpaMUP40>.

29. Saban Kardas, "European Energy Security and Nabucco Occupy a Central Place in Erdogan's Brussels Trip," The Jamestown Foundation, 20 January 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34377.

30. Vladimir Socor, "Putin Entices Turkey with Grander Version of South Stream", Aug. 10, 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35390

31. "Erdogan Visits the US," The Jamestown Foundation, 17 November 2008, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34132.

32. "How to Deal with Iran's Nuclear Program," Transatlantic Trends, September 2009, www.transatlantictrends.org.

33. Barcin Yarcinanc, "Turkey Opts for Ahmadinejad," HurriyetDailyNews.com, 17 June 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/opinion/11881212.asp?yazarid=289&gid=260>.

34. Fulya Ozerkan, "Turkish Role Questioned in Iran Nuclear Issue", 14 September 2009, <http://www>.

- hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=success-of-turk-role-over-irans-nuke-row-in-question-2009-09-14
35. Robert Tait, "Iran is Our Friend, says Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan", 26 October 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/26/turkey-iran1>
36. Michael A. Reynolds, "Turkey's Troubles in the Caucasus," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 4 (2008).
37. Cengiz Aktar, "Turkey-UN Security Council Candidate for 2009-10," *Acturca*, 21 March 2008, <http://acturca.wordpress.com/2008/03/21/turkey-un-security-council-candidate-for-2009-2010/>.
38. "Troubles Across Turkestan," *The Economist*, 16 July 2009, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14052216.
39. Cengiz Candar, Neither 'Almost Genocide' nor Turkey on the 'Evil Axis', 16 July 2009, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 15 July 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/h.php?news=neither-8216almost-genocide8217-nor-turkey-on-the-8216evil-axis8217-2009-07-15>
40. Turkey, Another Axis of Evil?, 10 July 2009, <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/commentary/2009-07/445195.html>
41. Igor Torbakov, Matti Nojonen, "China-Turkey and Xinjiang: A Frayed Relationship", 5 August 2009, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/china-turkey-and-xinjiang-a-frayed-relationship>
42. Palestinian Parliamentary Elections in 2006, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/palestine/pa-elections2006.htm>
43. U.S. Congressman Robert Wexler Interview with CNN-Turk, 10 April 2006, http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statement_041006a.html
44. Khaled Hroub, "Pressures on Hamas in Reconciliation Talks," April 2009, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=22929>
45. Temper Tantrums, 5 February 2009, http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=682266&story_id=13059789
46. Qatar, Mauritania Cut Israel Ties, 17 January 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/01/2009116151135307776.html>
47. Los Angeles Times Editorial, "Turkey Flirts With Tehran", 31 October 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/editorials/la-ed-turkey31-2009oct31,0,803841.story>
48. Special Tribunal for Lebanon <http://www.globalpolicy.org/international-justice/international-criminal-tribunals-and-special-courts/special-tribunal-for-lebanon.html>,
49. Fulya Ozerkan, "Turkey Confident to Intensify Military Ties with Syria", 14 October 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-syria-intensify-military-ties-2009-10-14>
50. Y. Kanli, "Erdogan, Turk and Sahin," 6 August 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=erdogan-turk-and-sahin-2009-08-05>
51. Emrullah Uslu, "Why Does Turkey Love Omar al-Bashir?", 6 March 2009, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34671
52. Turkey was voted into the UNSC as a nonpermanent member in October 2008 by the UN General Assembly for the 2009-10 term. For further reading: Akif Kirecci, "Turkey in the UN Security Council", 21 January 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=164686>