



## FROM “STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP” TO “MODEL PARTNERSHIP”: AKP, TURKISH – US RELATIONS AND THE PROSPECTS UNDER OBAMA

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### Abstract:

This article aims at analyzing Turkish-US relations from a strategic perspective. It underlines firstly, the elements of continuation in US foreign policy under the Presidents Clinton, Bush Jr. and Obama. Secondly it looks at the “change” in Turkish foreign policy under the AKP since 2002. It sees the Iraqi War as a turning point in the demise of the strategic partnership. The developments in its aftermath can be considered as a path to the formation of what would be named by Obama as a “Model Partnership”. It contends that the prevailing determinants of relations stem in the US case from security concerns, while for the AKP it serves its policy of omnibalancing. The article questions the content of the “Model Partnership”, as well as the risks facing the sustainability and context of Turkish-US relations, which have traditionally been a cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy, amidst Turkey’s domestic debates, regional dynamics and the challenges facing Obama administration.

**Keywords:** US, Turkey, AKP, Obama, Turkish foreign policy, Turkish-American Relations, Strategic Partnership, Model, Partnership, omnibalancing.

### Resumen:

*Este artículo analiza las relaciones Turquía-EEUU desde una perspectiva estratégica. Destaca primero, los elementos de continuidad en la política exterior de los EEUU bajo los presidentes Clinton, Bush hijo y Obama. A continuación considera el “cambio” en la política exterior turca bajo el AKP desde el 2002. Ve la guerra de Irak como un punto de inflexión en el fin de la asociación estratégica, mientras que los desarrollos posteriores representarían la vía hacia la formación de lo que Obama denominaría como una “Asociación Modelo”. Se sostiene que los factores más determinantes de la relación proceden por parte de los EEUU de una preocupación por asuntos de seguridad, mientras que para el AKP, sirven a su política de “equilibrio múltiple”. El artículo cuestiona el contenido de la “Asociación Modelo”, así como los riesgos a que se enfrentan la sostenibilidad y el contexto de las relaciones Turquía-EEUU, que han sido tradicionalmente una pieza básica de la política exterior turca, en medio de los debates domésticos de Turquía, las dinámicas regionales y los desafíos a la Administración Obama.*

**Palabras clave:** EEUU, Turquía, AKP, Obama, política exterior turca, relaciones turco-americanas, asociación estratégica, asociación modelo, equilibrio múltiple.

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## 1. Introduction

When on 20 January 2009 Barack H. Obama swore as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, *Obamaphoria* that has been sweeping the streets of the globe, perhaps more than it was sweeping the streets of US, has already reached to a level of Utopia –*Obamatopia* for some. It was perhaps best represented by the headline of the Croatian newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* that called the ‘new America’ of Obama as *Obamerika*.<sup>2</sup> Behind the lexicon lied the hopes of the world beyond the United States that was full of expectations from an Obama Presidency. After two terms of George W. Bush Presidency, which was for many characterized by war, unilateralism, a self-righteous attitude and even arrogance, and marked by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and an evangelical rhetoric; an undeniable amount of people was quite positive of the “change” Obama asked American people to believe. There was hope for the return of a responsible and respectful US to the international arena that was aware of the need for, and willing to apply, self constraint.

Obama has represented an opportunity for the US and the rest of the world to make it up. The identity of the new President, his roots, his semi-Muslim family, the diversity that he has been brought up with, his continuous emphasis on the change he promised to bring was like a long awaited fresh breathe that the international society was waiting for. The situation was the same in Turkey. Obama was a heartily welcomed opportunity for many pundits from all ends of the political spectrum. On the date of 4 November 2008 when Obama was elected the Turkish newspapers were ‘hailing the chief’ with much enthusiasm and saluting him as the embodiment of the “American dream”.<sup>3</sup> Cengiz Çandar, a journalist with a long record of tracking US-Turkish relations said before the elections that “from whichever angle you approach the matter Obama’s election would be good”<sup>4</sup>, was avowing after Obama’s election victory as “the victory night of humanity”.<sup>5</sup> In his article in *Zaman*, the prominent pro-government daily, with close ties to the Gülen movement which enjoys close links to the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP* in Turkish), Hüseyin Gülerce was writing that “thanks to Obama the world is renewing the credit it has given to America”. Gülerce was also expressing the expectation that “the black man in the White House may turn the face of America and the world to white”.<sup>6</sup> On the pages of mainstream *Hürriyet*, the newspaper with the largest circulation figures in the country, Cüneyt Ülsever was enthusiastically congratulating the American people for “giving a lesson to all of us with their decision [to elect Obama]”<sup>7</sup> while the influential chief editor of the said newspaper, Ertuğrul Özkök, was praising America as “the land of dreamers who are also capable of making the dream come true”.<sup>8</sup> Soli Özel of *Sabah* called the election of Obama as a “hope for the possibility, not only America, but the entire world to be a better place”.<sup>9</sup> As such, Obama represented genuine hope to mend the tarnished Turkish – American relations. All the euphoria that was reflected on the pages of the Turkish, and for that matter

<sup>2</sup> For the Obama lexicon surrounding the election campaign and beyond see, “Barackisms: From Obamaphoria to Bamelot”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 2008.

<sup>3</sup> “Amerikan Rüyası: Bir siyah milyonların oyuyla Başkan seçildi” [American Dream: A Blackman has been chosen the President receiving the votes of millions], *Radikal*, 6 November 2008, Aslan, Ali H.: “Amerika ‘değişimi’ seçti” [America choose change], *Zaman*, 6 November 2008,

<sup>4</sup> Çandar, Cengiz: “Ya Obama, ya Irkçı Mucize” [Either Obama, or racist miracle], *Referans*, 4 November 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Çandar, Cengiz: “Yes, we can: İnsanlığın zafer gecesi!” [Yes, we can: Humanities night of victory] *Radikal*, 6 November 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Gülerce, Hüseyin: “Obama: Kader noktasında bir siyah başkan” [Obama: A Black President at a critical juncture], *Zaman*, 6 November 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ülsever, Cüneyt: “Amerikan Seçimleri (III)” [American Elections [III]], *Hürriyet*, 6 November 2008

<sup>8</sup> Özkök, Ertuğrul: “Bir Kürtü seçer miydiniz” [Would you have voted for a Kurd], *Hürriyet*, 6 November 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Özel, Soli: “Siyah derili Başkan” [Black skinned President], *Sabah*, 6 November 2008.



international press, seems to be all the more justified when one thinks of Obama's own words in his pre-presidential book *The Audacity of Hope*. After all, in the chapter outlining the contours of his foreign policy approach Obama has been referring to "legitimate aspirations of other peoples" or expressing that *at least some* US policies has served to nothing but undermining the credibility of America and "...made for a more dangerous world".<sup>10</sup> This was an undeniable difference in tone compared to the rhetoric of Bush years marked with the self-righteousness, reaching to the level of arrogance at times, characterizing the messages of Washington. What is more, Obama also seemed to have a strong understanding of the fundamental change that the world politics has gone after 9/11. In other words, as far as the foreign policy of the United States was concerned he seemed not to be trapped in the parameters and arguments of the Clinton years.<sup>11</sup> He was underlining that the optimism about "...once the Cold War ended that Big Macs and the Internet would lead to the end of historical conflicts," was wrong and, there should be a realization, "...that in the short term, at least, democratization might lay bare, rather than alleviate, ethnic hatreds and religious divisions –and that the wonders of globalization might also facilitate economic volatility, the spread of pandemics, and terrorism".<sup>12</sup>

As such, Obama has given hope to the world that he not only was going to change the atmospherics of the Bush years but bring about a thorough understanding of the challenges of our time and genuine multilateralism. It seemed that he was also straightforward. When talking about what US foreign policy should look like he was referring to Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman, all of whom were leaders who have emerged as order builders through ideals or multilateral mechanisms. He wrote: "Without a well-articulated strategy that the public supports and the world understands, America will lack the legitimacy – and ultimately the power – it needs.... We need a revised foreign policy framework that matches the boldness and scope of Truman's post-World War II policies, one that addresses both the challenges and the opportunities of a new millennium, one that guides our use of force and expresses our deepest ideals and commitments". He continued, "I don't presume to have this grand strategy in my hip pocket".<sup>13</sup> Whether or not he has it now as the President of what still is the strongest nation on earth in almost all aspects of military might, political influence and, despite all, economic size, is a question whose answer is important for all humanity as well as for the Turkish- American relations *per se*. There are also other questions that are more directly linked to the fate of the said relations which are central to the subject of this paper, like: when it comes to issues pertaining to foreign policy decision-making, especially on priorities and interests determining the outcomes of such a decision-making process, is there really a difference between the Presidents of the US, especially that of Clinton, Bush and Obama? How much really has changed in Turkish-American relations since Barack Obama has assumed the Presidency? What is the JDP governments' understanding of Turkish foreign policy and the positioning of the relations with the US within its context? What are the elements of continuity and change, as well as divergence and convergence, in the bilateral relations of the two countries? Perhaps most importantly, what are the prospects and risks lying ahead? These are the questions on which the rest of this study will focus.

<sup>10</sup> Obama, Barack H., (2008): "The World Beyond Our Borders" in *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, New York, Vintage Books, p. 331.

<sup>11</sup> After summing up briefly, at the time widely shared, expectations on what American foreign policy was expected to look like, Obama concludes the paragraph with a clear expression of the change 9/11 brought. Obama, *Op. cit.*, pp. 342 – 343.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 357 – 358.



## 2. Obama: “the Change” in US Foreign Policy

Unlike George W. Bush, Barack Obama’s presidency was born amidst what was arguably one of the most heated debates on US foreign policy since the war in Vietnam. Unlike Obama, Bush Jr. had been fortunate enough to inherit a presidential agenda that was not infested all over with an array of foreign policy urgencies. Despite the controversies surrounding his Presidency at home, including a process that could have ended in his impeachment, Bill Clinton was a popular US President abroad. Even though it was criticized as “soft-headed multilateralism”<sup>14</sup> by its critics from the neo-conservative circles, Clinton’s overall policy of consensus building with the international institutions and multilateral mechanisms was generally appreciated by the international public opinion. His decisions of using force in the Balkans in 1995 and, back again in 1999, Haiti in 1994, Sudan and Afghanistan in 1998 and even in Somalia in 1993, were not much contested by the international public opinion, if not welcomed. His promotion of peace in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and in the former Yugoslavia as well as his handling at the time of the North Korean nuclear ambitions through a negotiated settlement, seemingly convincing Pyongyang to postpone its nuclear arms program, was over all appreciated by the international society. He also reached crucial disarmament agreements with former states of the Soviet Union; Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan on their ex-Soviet nuclear arsenals. He was after all the President who restored US diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995 and visited the country in the year 2000.<sup>15</sup> As he left the office, despite the impeachment episode tainting his presidency, Clinton became the second most popular American president with a 66 percent approval rating.<sup>16</sup>

Bush Jr., as he was running for the presidency against Vice-President Al Gore, didn’t show much enthusiasm to debate foreign policy issues. That can be said to be in part because of the above mentioned Clinton score as well as his self-admitted inexperience in foreign policy issues. During the race between Gore and Bush Jr., issues of foreign policy seemed not to be Bush’s selling point.<sup>17</sup>

However in his major campaign speech on foreign policy there were clues of how he would approach international affairs. On a bilateral level, there was no doubt as to the countries Bush gave prominence: China and Russia. It can be said that, during this period US foreign policy priorities were dominated mainly by issues of globalization and worries on containment - this time focused not on territory but of nuclear capabilities.<sup>18</sup> However, it seemed, both the issues concerning globalization and nuclear proliferation were more or less

<sup>14</sup> Kagan, Robert and Kristol, William: “A Distictly American Internationalism”, *The Weekly Standard*, vol.5, no. 11 (November, 29, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> For an assessment of Bill Clinton’s foreign policy see Sale, Richard (2009): *Clinton’s Secret Wars: The Evolution of a Commander in Chief*, New York, Thomas Dunne Books.

<sup>16</sup> Saad, Lydia, “Bush Presidency Closes with 34% Approval, 61% Disapproval”, *Gallup* (January 14, 2009), at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113770/Bush-Presidency-Closes-34-Approval-61-Disapproval.aspx>. “Franklin D. Roosevelt had the highest rating with 72 % approval as he has passed away”, Job Performance Ratings for President Roosevelt; Start:08/04/1937 End:12/01/1944”, *Roper Center Public Opinion Archives*, at [http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/roper/presidential/\\_webroot/\\_presidential\\_rating\\_detail.cfm?allRate= True&presidentName=Roosevelt](http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/roper/presidential/_webroot/_presidential_rating_detail.cfm?allRate= True&presidentName=Roosevelt).

<sup>17</sup> Concerning foreign policy Bush reportedly said of himself; “I’m smart enough to know what I don’t know.” Woodruf, Judy and Morton, Bruce: “Bush Lacks Gore’s Foreign Policy Expertise”, *CNN.com*, 24 June 1999 at <http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/06/24/president.2000/foreign.policy/>.

<sup>18</sup> In his speech Bush referred to China directly 21 times in 14 paragraphs and Russia 20 times in 11 paragraphs. In contrast Pakistan was cited once, Europe was brought up five times –Eurasia 6- and Turkey was not mentioned at all. Bush, George W., “A Distinctly American Internationalism”, Reagan Library, California, 19 November 1999 at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm>.



going in line with the interests of the United States. One can confidently comment that as he took office there were no pressing, “clear and present danger” intensity issues before President Bush that actually allowed him the luxury of addressing foreign policy issues with broad tautologies like “the world we live in is still a world of terror and missiles and madmen. And we're challenged by aging weapons and failing intelligence,”<sup>19</sup> without having to worry much about the toll it may take.

On the other hand Obama inherited a very different legacy. Issues of foreign policy were at the top of the agenda during the presidential campaign of 2008. At least, mainly because of the looming effect of the war in Iraq,<sup>20</sup> there was somehow unprecedented focus on the question of whether or not foreign policy would be a major defining factor on election victory.<sup>21</sup> What is more, apart from the direct effects of foreign policy, which was a subject Republican candidate John Mc Cain seemed stronger in relation to Obama according to the polls carried out in the US,<sup>22</sup> on the outcome of elections, in an unparalleled manner, the world public opinion was interested in the outcome of the Presidential race and had a personal preference for Obama.<sup>23</sup> At the time it was almost truism to say that, “the next president face[d] a bewildering array of foreign policy challenges”.<sup>24</sup>

However, the main question remains, what was the real difference in the expressed perception on the priorities of US foreign policy between Obama and Bush? In search for an answer to that question, one has to be able to compare the approach of Bush Jr. with that of Obama when it comes to their respective understanding of the US foreign policy priorities, and principles guiding them. For doing that we may compare and contrast two texts. In Bush's case the Reagan Library Speech that was quoted earlier may provide an adequate text. For Obama, reflecting the *zeitgeist* mentioned earlier, there is a relative abundance of material three of which will be referred to: his speech on foreign policy delivered at Chicago's DePaul University in October 2007, his article that appeared in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine as part of the Campaign 2008 series in July/August 2007 issue and excerpts from his book *The Audacity of Hope*.

Wrapped up within the black vs. white, good vs. evil rhetoric, that will later become characteristic of the Bush Jr. years, Bush underlines his priorities as: Providing for security of

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<sup>19</sup> Woodruff and Morton, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Iraq was topping the “Most important issues” list of the voters with 42% and 43% in the categories of National Adults and Registered Voters respectively in a Gallup Poll. “Election 2008 Topics and Trends”, *Gallup.com* at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/17785/Election-2008.aspx#7>.

<sup>21</sup> This was more the case before the housing crisis followed by global financial crisis hit the American voters. For an illuminating discussion on the topic see, “The Impact of Foreign Policy in the 2008 Election” [Rush Transcript; Federal News Service], January 31, 2008, at [http://www.cfr.org/publication/15396/impact\\_of\\_foreign\\_policy\\_in\\_the\\_2008\\_election\\_rush\\_transcript\\_federal\\_news\\_service.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/15396/impact_of_foreign_policy_in_the_2008_election_rush_transcript_federal_news_service.html).

<sup>22</sup> “Election 2008 Topics...”, *op. cit.*, at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/17785/Election-2008.aspx>. Even Hillary Clinton, then to become Obama's Secretary of State, was warning the American public on Obama's inexperience as they were running for the Democratic ticket saying “We have seen the tragic result of having a president who had neither the experience nor the wisdom to manage our foreign policy and safeguard our national security,” Helman, Scot: “Clinton: Be wary of Obama on foreign affairs”, *Boston Globe*, February 26, 2008. However, this remark, and many other polemics regarding foreign policy that took place during inter and intra candidate debates, can also be seen as yet another evidence of the prominence of foreign policy during the campaign.

<sup>23</sup> That ratio was “at least 2 to 1” in favor of Obama in the “key Middle East countries”, including Turkey where 22% of the respondents said they would have voted for Obama is just 8% for McCain. Fakhreddin, Hihad: “Obama Favored in Key Muslim Countries”, *Gallup.com*, October 21, 2008, at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/111235/Obama-Favored-Key-Muslim-Countries.aspx>.

<sup>24</sup> “The Impact of Foreign...”, *op. cit.*





the US citizens and homeland; fight against terrorism; non-proliferation; securing nuclear arsenal to stop the risk of smuggling of nuclear material and weapons, nuclear disarmament especially of Russia; modernization and reorganization of American military; fight against weapons of mass destruction (WMD); respect for cultural and political diversity in, and even for regime preferences of, foreign countries! He continuously underlined the exceptional “purpose”, “destiny” and position of the US as “a peaceful power” and idealizes what he contends as ‘American’ values and ideals (democracy, political freedom, free markets, free trade). He warns against “isolationism” and “protectionism” that forms the basis of a “temptation” of “withdrawal” and calls for determination to show “leadership” and not get “drifted” away by the events. Bush argues that the U.S should seek ways of prolonging its dominant position as this will be done by expanding the sphere of “democratic peace” hence, categorically benign. He calls for being ready to flex the military muscle when necessary as well as underlining the importance of public diplomacy efforts. Bush also talks about multilateral institutions and emphasizes the importance of developing alliances while actively supporting the existing ones -especially North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) but also bilateral ones. When it comes to diplomacy, Bush says, he is for the continuation of the peace process in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

During his 2008 campaign Obama’s approach can’t be said to be much different from pre-presidency George W. Bush.<sup>26</sup> There was fierce criticism of Bush policies, especially in Iraq, to be sure and almost no mention of China. However, apart from issues of terrorism which has a natural dominance for the obvious reasons, similar subjects like the need for American leadership, prioritization of the security of the US citizens and homeland; a readiness to use military force when necessary; nuclear proliferation; smuggling of nuclear material and weapons; WMDs; modernization, “revitalization” of American military; nuclear disarmament –though with the much more assertive target of seeking a “world in which there are no nuclear weapons”. He also underlines the exceptional position of the US amongst the historical major world powers as “a light of justice” that is “called to provide visionary leadership”. He also warns against isolationism and underlines the opportunity to extend the duration of US’s dominant status in the power hierarchy of the international system. Obama also declares public diplomacy to be an effective and necessary tool and pledges to restore US’s image. However, understandably, his main concern is the Islamic world, not Russia. He commits himself to the renewal of existing alliances, first and foremost NATO – and building new ones – and also to the continuation of the Middle East peace process. He also underlines the need for upholding the American values of justice, free trade, democracy, decency. Obama does underline respect for the cultures and political preferences of “the world beyond [United States’] borders” and promises for a world where the US will do everything to secure that the peoples of other nations will make these preferences “free of fear”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Bush, “A Strictly American...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> For the texts analyzed here see; Obama; “The World...”, *op. cit.*, Obama, Barack: “Renewing American Leadership”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, no 4, ( July /August 2007), pp. 2 – 16. Obama, Barack: “Barack Obama’s Foreign Policy Speech”, Council of Foreign Relations, *Essential Documents*, October 2, 2007 at <http://www.cfr.org/%20publication/14356>.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that the idea of “American exceptionalism”, that is, “United States as a special case “outside” the normal patterns and laws of history” is the source of a deeply rooted rhetorical theme in the US domestic –intra-continental- and foreign politics. Tyrrel, Ian: “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 96, no. 4 (Oct., 1991), pp. 1031-1055. (Emphasis in the original.) It is almost always –though not openly mentioned- a very strong theme referred to in political discussions. It is clearly traceable along the discourses of both Presidents Bush and Obama. See also Lipset, Seymour Martin (1996): *American Exceptionalism: A double Edged Sword*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, pp. 31 – 32. Together with the understanding of “Manifest Destiny” that the US, as dictated by



There are of course certain differences between the two Presidents. Most importantly that Obama is not a rejectionist of dialogue. Obama is “willing to talk to all nations, friend and foe”, and shows an un-Bush sympathy for environmental issues. There is an undeniable variation in the list of referred countries, and also Obama puts heavy emphasis on issues of Iraq, Al-Qaeda and terrorism. This should be regarded as normal and reflective of the legacies that both Presidents inherit -Bush from Clinton and Obama from Bush. The differences, as much as they exist, between the Bush and Obama approaches seem to be of style rather than of content. Preferences on mechanisms are ordered differently but, the desired outcomes are quiet similar - even in tone at times.

Actually, as Zinn’s argues Bush clearly was not “a dramatic departure” in terms of foreign policy.<sup>28</sup> Obama’s public diplomacy strategies, as well as his tone and preferred style of establishing dialogue with other countries might be regarded as different. Nevertheless as of the time of writing there is no clear cut evidence that he does represent a “dramatic departure” in content and strategic aims neither from Bush nor from Clinton. Moreover one of his close aides resembled Obama to George H. W. Bush, the father. Meant obviously as a compliment this ‘back to the future’ comment, even though it might be positive for the US for the advancement of “American interest” obviously does not necessarily mean a structural positive development for other countries in the system. In that form, an Obama “touch” would not ease the distress on foreign policies of other nations for any categorical reason or lift international tensions by taking third party interests into considerations.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as Stephen M. Walt says, “Obama has little choice but to be “cold-blooded” about advancing US interests”, given the situation of the American and world economy and “two ruinous wars, and an America whose international image had been tarnished”. Charles Kupchan labels him as a “consummate pragmatist”.<sup>30</sup> When relied upon, none of these comments, all coming from veteran observers of American foreign policy are in themselves harbingers of a foreign policy that is coercion free or excludes unilateralism. Taking into account in retrospect what has been said and done by earlier Presidents – most recent of which is Bush’s initial foreign policy framework as displayed in the Reagan Library speech and the events following 9/11 and Bush foreign policy- it is hard not to be as “cynical” as Gideon Rose, when he commented that “you can't really trust the vast majority of things that politicians say during

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“providence”, should expand, first to the West of the North American continent, but which then transformed into an idea that the US had a destiny to consecrate other countries with American values, more or less along the lines exemplified in both Bush and -although with a difference of tone- Obama. For the idea of “manifest destiny” see, Merk, Frederick (1996): *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation*, Boston, Harvard University Press; Mead, Walter Russell (1987): *Mortal Splendor, American Empire in Transition*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., and Also, Zinn, Howard: “The Myth of American Exceptionalism”, Myths About America Lecture, MIT, March 14, 2005, at <http://mitworld.mit.edu/video/258>, and Luce, Henry R.: “The American Century”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1999), pp. 159 – 171 (exact copy, originally published in *Life* February 17, 1941).

<sup>28</sup> Zinn, “The Myth of...” For through discussions of the subject and its reflections on foreign policy see Mead, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> That is a comparison done by the White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. Emanuel said, “ If you had to put him in a category, he’ s probably more realpolitik, like Bush 41...He knows that personal relationships are important, but you’ ve got to be cold-blooded about the self-interests of your nation. “ Baker, Peter: “ Obama Puts His Mark on Foreign Policy Issues” , *The New York Times*, April 23, 2010. For a more comprehensive discussion on that debate see “ George H. W. Obama?” , *Foreign Policy*, April 14, 2010 at

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/14/george\\_hw\\_obama?page=0,0](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/14/george_hw_obama?page=0,0).

<sup>30</sup> “George H. W....”, *op.cit.*



the campaign, or rather those things that they say don't necessarily bear any relation to the actual policies they would put in place".<sup>31</sup>

We have to mention here that the tendencies of continuity in US foreign policy are much stronger today than elements of change -as was the case in the past two decades if not longer. One could have tracked the notion of unilateralism even in the Clinton administrations' approach to foreign policy crisis. In its National Security Strategy document of 1999, Clinton, the paradoxically 'hailed and damned' champion of multilateralism, has underlined his readiness for unilateral action on four different places.<sup>32</sup> Multilateralism was referred to as a pragmatic approach, an instrumentally reasonable way of handling the issues, because it "offer[ed] a comparative advantage [as] it [was] more cost effective than unilateral" action.<sup>33</sup> Obama too does refer to unilateral action as a "starting premise".<sup>34</sup> When speaking about multilateralism, he seems to base it's preferableness to the sense that it makes on pragmatic terms rather than a principled concern on legitimacy.<sup>35</sup> In the light of the words of Obama, and actions and declarations in the case of Clinton and Bush Jr., there is ample reason to comment that there is much element of continuity and commonality in the approaches of all three presidents when it comes to their perceptions of the dynamics of the international system, the position of the US in the world, the purpose of US and its foreign policy. The differences between the Presidents seem to be conveniently understandable and almost reducible to the structure of the system and nature, context and conditions of the specific incidents. In that form it is perfectly possible to make sense of all variations on pragmatic terms, rather than in targets and aims of US foreign policy under this or that President. This is not to say the Presidents' approaches are identical, free of a personal touch that affects the decision on priorities or choices on ways and means.<sup>36</sup> However, it clearly means that neither Obama, nor his personality is in itself reason enough for a fundamental "change" of goals and aims for the US foreign policy.

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<sup>31</sup> "The Impact of...", *op. cit.* Rose points out two reasons for that phenomenon both of which seem to be as relevant for Bush as it is for Obama and perhaps for any other decision-maker for that matter. First the actual decisions are not made by the leaders alone and at the campaigning stage you really do not know who exactly will be the members of a team addressing a certain foreign policy issue. Second, definitely no one knows with certainty what would be the actual issues and crises and in what kind of a strategic context they would take place.

<sup>32</sup> "A National Security Strategy for A New Century", *National Security Council*, Washington D.C., (1999).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Obama, *The Audacity...*, p. 364.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 364 -367. It should also be noted that, as mentioned, Obama received a lot of criticism for risking a soft and inexperienced approach to foreign policy and security matters. Under the circumstances one can think that Obama had little choice during his campaign but prove he could be as tough as anybody. This issue still seems to loom on his presidency. However it is also important to be reminded that he also criticizes "liberal objectives" as "they hardly constitute a coherent national security policy," drawing a clear line on where he stands. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>36</sup> Comforting for academicians we can even say that these differences bring about a possibility for differentiation between the theoretical schools that provide the best explanation for a President's or an administration's foreign policy, too. Nevertheless differences on the theoretically most powerful and explanatory approach doesn't indicate and account for a categorical difference in the goals and aims.





### 3. AKP: “Turkey’s Transformers” and Foreign Policy

In their *Foreign Affairs* essay on Turkey, Morton Abramowitz and Henri Barkey define AKP as “Turkey’s Transformers”.<sup>37</sup> They elucidate the matter commenting, “In recent years, Turkey has earned kudos from the international community for its economic dynamism, its energetic and confident diplomacy, and its attempts to confront some of its deepest foreign policy problems, such as in Northern Iraq and Cyprus.”

Aside from the crude ideological distinction that Abramowitz and Barkey draw it is indeed hard to deny their comment on the activism that Turkish foreign policy showed under the AKP. It has been widely argued that Turkish foreign policy since 1930s has showed three basic elements of continuity. These elements of continuity are sometimes referred to as basic principles that Turkish foreign policy is run by. Feeding each other these are:

- A pre-occupation with security deriving from its geostrategic position -at the level of a “paranoia”<sup>38</sup> that is dubbed by some as the “*Sevres Phobia*” emanating from the way that its predecessor Ottoman Empire has demised.
- An unquestioned western orientation with roots in the philosophy of the Kemalist revolution and later reinforced with the explicit Soviet threat to its territorial integrity following World War II, -that is also criticized heavily by the left during the Cold War and later by political Islamists, especially vocally after the demise of the Soviet Union, and labeled as one dimensional.
- A positioning as a status-quo power, as a result of which, critiques say Turkey was condemned to pursuing reactive strategies against developments concerning its foreign policy.<sup>39</sup>

It is contended that, “the foreign policy of every single state is an integral part of its peculiar system of government and reflects its special circumstances”.<sup>40</sup> Turkey is no exception to the

<sup>37</sup> Abramowitz, Morton and Barkey, Henri J., “Turkey’s Transformers: The AKP Sees Big”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol 88, no. 6, (November/ December 2009), pp. 118 – 128. In their essay, drawing a rather overly generalized and simplified picture of the debate completely ignoring the nuances that are very important on the process and outcome of the current debates in Turkey, they comment that; “There are two camps. The first, and largest, group, which includes center-right politicians, liberals, and the religious, fully supports the AKP.... The other camp is primarily composed of staunch secularists, the military and civilian bureaucratic elites, and various types of nationalists.” *Ibid.*, pp. 118 – 119.

<sup>38</sup> Fuller, Graham E. (2010): *Yeni Türkiye Cumhuriyeti [The New Turkish Republic]*, Istanbul, Timaş, p.43.

<sup>39</sup> For detailed discussions of these principles as well as their critics and analysis of underlying systemic, social and institutional dynamics see Oran, Baskın and Uzgel, İlhan (2009): “Türk Dış Politikasının Teori ve Pratiği”, in . Oran, Baskın (Ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt 1 1923 – 1980 [Turkish Foreign Policy: From the War of Independence to Present Facts, Documents, Comments, Volume 1 1923 – 1980]*, 15<sup>th</sup> Ed., Istanbul, İletişim Yay., pp.19 – 93. Aydın, Mustafa(1999): “Determinants of Turkish foreign policy: historical framework and traditional inputs”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp.152 — 186. Sönmezoğlu, Faruk, “Türk Dış Politikasında Sapma Olduğu Söylenemez [It Can’t Be Said that There is a Diversion in Turkish Foreign Policy], Özdal, Habibe, Dinçer; Osman Bahadır and Yegin, Mehmet (eds.) (2009): *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası, Cilt 1 [Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy, Volume 1]*, Ankara, USAK Yayınları, pp. 114 – 137, especially pp.114 – 122. Aydın, Mustafa: “The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, And Turkey’s European Vocation” in Nonneman, Gerd (ed.) (2005): *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies*, New York, Routledge, pp.197 – 222.

<sup>40</sup> Frankel, Joseph (1963): *The Making of Foreign Policy; An Analysis of Decision-Making*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 1.



rule. The basic fundamental characteristics that are listed above as determinants of foreign policy of Turkey are dependent on the firmly held beliefs of the traditional decision making elites, sometimes referred to as the establishment, of the country.

As the “traditional decision making elites” I refer to what could be termed roughly as a hegemonic block that has determined Turkey’s political landscape and affected the decision making process from the establishment of the Republic in 1923 to 2002 at varying degree.<sup>41</sup> Even though the consensus within the block started to loosen following the military coup of 1980, and especially during the Özal years (1983 – 1989 as Prime Minister and 1989 – 1992 as President),<sup>42</sup> until AKP’s major election victory of 2002 the traditional decision making elites were largely in control of the foreign policy decisions in the country.<sup>43</sup> As such, foreign policy was one sphere of politics where the consensus of the traditional decision making elites was most rigid and strong. The strength of the “elements of continuity” was such that foreign policy was frequently called and regarded as “state policy”. Denoting the unchanging, stable, consensual character of the policies, attributed them “*a priori*” legitimacy that defies any change in the governing party or coalition.<sup>44</sup> This situation was underlined with the “relative autonomy”<sup>45</sup> of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signifying the gatekeeper status of the diplomats.

This consensus rested on a set of shared values especially on the character of the regime as a secular, western oriented democracy and a certain reading and interpretation of history and to an extent the international system. As it came to power the AKP challenged this consensus from the onset, continuously and relentlessly defending that the preferences of the traditional decision making elites do not reflect the genuine desires of the population. Trying to replace the traditional block with one that had formed around itself, perhaps nowhere else the challenge was as strong and as intellectually polished and founded as the area foreign policy.

Based on a 2001 book that has been written by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was after the 2002 elections appointed as the chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, AKP

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<sup>41</sup> As I use the term the traditional decision making elites are composed of, at the core military and civilian bureaucracy –especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and judiciary- supported intellectually by an outer circle of academicians and intellectuals including some members of the press and a third tier formed by mainstream politicians of the right and left.

<sup>42</sup> I have to underline that even though Özal years were somehow idealized in terms of the development of Turkish – US relations the individual affect and weight of Özal’s influence in it should not be underestimated. The traditional decision making elites did not always share Özal’s approach on the extent and depth that he had forced. It should not be forgotten that General Necip Toruntay, then Chief of Turkish Armed Forces General Staff has resigned in what many believed to be a silent protest to Özal’s policies *vis a vis* the Gulf War in December 1990 just before his retirement. He was not alone. Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Ali Bozer and Safa Giray had also resigned under similar circumstances earlier, within the span of seven days in October 1990, in what could be accepted as another display of the tradition of consensus on foreign policy within the establishment.

<sup>43</sup> It may well be argued that until the end of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s term in 2007, followed by the elections that resulted in AKP’s landslide victory of 46,5%, the perceptions and preferences of the traditional decision making elites stayed to be an important factor in the decision making process. Hence the hold of the traditional decision making elites were, to an extent, still important in the foreign policy making process. This led to a situation where AKP was called the “government” but not the “ruler”.

<sup>44</sup> Examples pertaining to this understanding are abundant Cyprus policy until 2002 being just one.

<sup>45</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of the sources of “relative autonomy” and observations supporting the comments I make concerning the traditional decision making elites and their solidarity interdependence see Oran, *op.cit.*, pp. 54 – 67.



pursued a new grand strategy.<sup>46</sup> The acclaimed Davutoğlu, who is sometimes called as "Turkish Kissinger"<sup>47</sup> has outlined five foreign policy principles all of which negatively affect the consensus of the establishment. To delineate this "new epoch" some analysts choose to call it the "Davutoğlu Era".<sup>48</sup> These principles were: establishing a balance between democracy and security; zero problem policy toward Turkey's neighbors; establishing regional and, gradually, global areas to extend Turkey's sphere of influence –to be supported, as in the case of Middle East with societal relations going beyond state level; a multi-dimensional foreign policy – emphasizing not only the western orientation but also other – i.e. Middle Eastern, Islamic character of the Turkish culture and a pro-active foreign policy based on rhythmic diplomacy –i.e. emphasizing heavily the importance of face to face communication, being there, leading in talking initiative in diplomatic efforts and active participation in international organizations.<sup>49</sup> As he expressed later, rephrasing a well known quotation by M.K. Atatürk the founder of modern Turkey, Davutoğlu believes that there is no such thing as a, single dimensional, front-line diplomacy, but spherical diplomacy and that sphere is the entire globe".<sup>50</sup> He is urging for an inclusive, participatory, egalitarian international order that brings in all of humanity's values and knowledge together in a respectful manner".<sup>51</sup>

There are, in essence three basic schools of thought in Turkey when it came to assessing the virtues and vices of AKP's foreign policy, its sources and its intellectual innovativeness. First, there are supporters of Davutoğlu and AKP foreign policy who argue that what is happening is just a natural necessary correction in Turkish foreign policy and what AKP does is to pursue a brilliant and intellectually refined policy that carries the expectations of the general public to the decision making core. According to them the source and legitimacy of this new foreign policy rests on the increasing democratic expectations and standards in the country that carried the AKP to power and keeps it there.

<sup>46</sup> Davutoglu, Ahmet (2001): *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: The International Position of Turkey], Istanbul, Küre Yay. The book has reached an astonishing 43 editions in Turkey that is by any standard exceptional for any book of the genre.

<sup>47</sup> "The World's Kissingers", *Foreign Policy* (March/ April 2010), p.27. The title was awarded by Mark Parris, the ex. US Ambassador to Ankara. "Davutoğlu, Türkiye'nin Henry Kissinger'i", [Davutoglu, Turkey's Henry Kissinger], *Gazete Star*, Oct. 29, 2008. This however is an implication he refuted publicly. "Davutoğlu'ndan Kissinger itirazı" [Kissinger disclaimer from Davutoğlu], *Yeni Şafak*, May 13, 2009. It should be noted that despite his own rejection of the metaphor the pro-AKP press and outside of Turkey especially Arab media, prefers to use the terminology in appraisal of his influence, intellectual depth and talents. For some examples of this phenomenon reflected in the Turkish press, quoting Arab press' reactions to Davutoğlu's appointment as Foreign minister "Türkiye'nin Kissinger'ı Davutoğlu" [Turkey's Kissinger Davutoğlu], *Star*, May 3, 2009. According to political scientist Hüseyin Bağcı he reportedly prefers to be compared to Grand Vizier Nizam al-Mulk of the Seljuk Empire, who brought order (*nizam*) to the Empire in the second half of 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. Hüseyin Bağcı (2008): *Zeitgeist: Global Politics and Turkey*, Ankara, Orion, p. 547.

<sup>48</sup> The positive assessments of Davutoğlu's vision, knowledge and energy has been reaching new heights recently almost to the degree of a personality cult. For examples of enthusiastic appraisals see Aras, Bülent (2009): *Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy*, SETA, *Policy Brief* no. 32.; Bilici, Abdülhamit, "Filozof Dışişleri Bakanı [Philosopher Foreign Minister]", *Zaman*, 6 May 2009; Bilici, in three consecutive articles reveres Davutoglu as a "philosopher of international relations" while Kerim Balcı announces admiringly that "he has that ideal combination of transcendental synthesis of pure reason and pure empiricism. (Emphasis mine.) Balcı, Kerim, "Theory Meets Practice", *Today's Zaman*, 17 November 2009. See also Bilici, Abdülhamit, "Filozof Dışişleri Bakanı II [Philosopher Foreign Minister II]", *Zaman*, 9 May 2009 and Bilici, Abdülhamit, "Filozof Dışişleri Bakanı III [Philosopher Foreign Minister III]", *Zaman*, 10 May 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet: "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, no. 1, (2008), pp. 77 – 96.

<sup>50</sup> "Diplomasinin 6 yeni kuralı [The 6 new rules of diplomacy]", *Hürriyet*, 05 January 2010.

<sup>51</sup> "Monşerlerin Pişti Açılımı [The Card Game Initiative of the Messieurs]", *Vatan*, 09 January 2010.



Second, there are those who contend that, despite all the rhetoric of innovativeness roared around Davutoğlu and AKP's foreign policy, the actual policies themselves were not new. The argument is that, even though the foreign policy discourse employed and concepts used to structure it might be new, the main framework, as dictated by systemic and regional dynamics, is no more than an extension of the efforts spent for repositioning Turkey within the international system during the immediate post-Cold War era. Following that line of thought, some supporters, as well as critics, contend that contrary to the argument that, "[when AKP came to power] the situation in the foreign policy arena was so uncertain,"<sup>52</sup> Turkish foreign policy was already shaping into its new mould, especially, during the second half of 1990s and the foreign policy leadership of Ismail Cem formed a significant period in that regard.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that Davutoğlu himself agreed with the idea in his pre-politics "*opus magnum*" *Strategic Depth*.<sup>54</sup>

Third, there is a line of thought that finds the difference between what would be dubbed as "traditional" foreign policy and AKP's essentially in the diverging "worldviews" of AKP and its predecessors.<sup>55</sup>

In any case Turkey's ambitions on the international arena and its ability to be a viable partner to the US and the EU, a role that AKP is much willing to fill in, is constrained by the fact that it is a middle size power<sup>56</sup> with "modest economic and industrial resources," and there is still much to be determined by the success it shows in dealing with its persisting "ethnic issues"<sup>57</sup>, as well as potential risks concerning the deepening fragmentation between seculars and Islamists, sectarian divisions that continue to haunt the soul of the country.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Bilici, "Philosopher Foreign Minister...", *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> This line of thought is easily visible in the analysis of commentators that were writing just before and after 2002 elections. For an example see Uzgel, İlhan, "Dış Politikada AKP: Stratejik Konumdan Stratejik Modele [AKP in Foreign Policy: From Strategic Position to Strategic Model] in Uzgel, İlhan and Duru Bülent (eds), (2009):*AKP Kitabı: Bir Dönüşümün Bilançosu [The Book of AKP: The Balance Sheet of Transformation]*, Ankara, Phonix Yay., pp. 357 – 380. Bostanoğlu bases the Turkish foreign policy's search for multi-dimensionalism, -using the concept multi-centralism- during to mid 1950s. Bostanoğlu, Burcu (1999): "Türk Dış politikasında Çok Odaklılık Arayışı [The Search For Multi-Centralism in Turkish Foreign Policy] in *Türkiye- ABD İlişkilerinin Politikası [The Politics of Turkish-USA Relations]*, Ankara, İmge, pp. 342 – 353. Even Kirişçi who otherwise seems to have adopted a quite content and supportive view of the AKP approach to foreign policy thinks that Turkey has already started to emerge as a multiregional state in the second half of the 1990s in a piece written just before AKP came to power. Kirişçi, Kemal, "US – Turkish relations: New Uncertainties in a renewed partnership" in Rubin, Barry and Kirişçi, Kemal (ed.s) (2002): *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, İstanbul, Boğaziçi University Press, pp. 169 – 196.

<sup>54</sup> He writes; "[C]em's efforts to build an initiative through face to face contact involved well directed elements for the rationality of foreign policy". Davutoğlu, "Strategic Depth...", *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>55</sup> For a forceful argument of this approach that also looks into the impact of "worldviews" and their corresponding theoretical approaches see Altunışık, Meliha Benli: "Worldviews and Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, (Special Issue on Turkish Foreign Policy), no. 40 (Spring 2009), pp. 169 – 192.

<sup>56</sup> The conception of mid-size state or middle size power in explaining Turkey's international position is gradually becoming an important and popular concept and unit of analysis among Turkish academics. See Oran, *op.cit.*, p.29.

<sup>57</sup> Aydın, "The Determinants...", *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>58</sup> For a similar critique, however one that asks of Davutoglu to pressure Erdogan more on these issues see Legendijk, Joost, "Ülke içinde stratejik derinlik [Strategic depth within the country], *Radikal*, 5 May 2010.





## 4. The Long and Winding Road: Structural Changes in International System and Turkish American Relations

The weakest link in Turkish-US relations has always been emphasized as the economic relations<sup>59</sup> between the two countries, however, ironically, the relations between Turks, then Ottoman Empire, and Americans started actually with a trade agreement in 1830.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless the security concerns based cooperation between the countries starting after the end of the Second World War. The nature of the Cold War relations were defined on the premises of Turkey seeking security against the Soviet expansionism, both territorially and ideologically, and the US's need of strengthening the containment of Soviet Union. At the end of the Cold War Turkey was the third largest recipient of US aid.<sup>61</sup>

### 4.1. The Path to "Strategic Partnership"

It has been a desire and mainly a tendency of Turkish policy makers to label Turkish-US relations. The preferred concept to resort to is "strategic".<sup>62</sup> It seems that over the years the concept of "strategic" is at times somehow shredded to being a qualifying adjective used interchangeably with crucial, important etc. Such kind of a usage undermined the necessity of such "strategic" relations to be appropriately contextualized with clear priorities and expectations of parties from each other. What is more it should be clear that such relations should be based on complementing capabilities and should be as multi-dimensional as possible both vertically and horizontally.<sup>63</sup> The strength of such relations would lie not only on the perception of decision makers on the vitality of common, or complementing, interests served by maintaining the relations<sup>64</sup> but inescapably also be susceptible to the changes in the context of both the relations themselves and the international system.

<sup>59</sup> See for example Bostanoğlu: "Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinin Zayıf Ayağı Ekonomi [The Weak Pillar of Turkish American Relations; Economy], in Bostanoğlu, *op. cit.*, pp. 367 – 368. Turkish – American relations have been extensively studied. For an excellent early history of Turkish-US relations see Erhan, Çağrı (2001): *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinin Tarihsel Kökenleri [The Historical roots of Turkish-American Relations]*, Ankara, İmge; For a more theoretical comprehensive study see Bostanoğlu, *op. cit.* and Aydın, Mustafa and Erhan, Çağrı (ed.s) (2004): *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future*, London, Routledge, Kirişçi, "US Turkish...", *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> Edgar, Alistair D., "The Shape of Things to Come: Defining US Foreign Policy on Turkey after 2001, in Aydın and Erhan, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>61</sup> Kirişçi, "US Turkish...", *op. cit.*, pp. 170 – 174; Aydın, Mustafa, "Reconstructing Turkish-American Relations: Divergences Versus Convergences", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, vol. 40 (Spring 2009), pp. 126 – 127; Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 35; Kirişçi, "US Turkish...", *op. cit.*, pp. 170 – 174.

<sup>62</sup> Aydın, rightly, claims that "the American side reluctantly began to use it largely as a goodwill gesture to the Turkish side". Aydın, *Ibid.*, foot note. 10, p. 128.

<sup>63</sup> I mean by verticality the societal consensus at every level attributed to the importance of the relations –on different sides of political spectrum, within different institutions at every societal level, affected by the perceptions and positive involvement of different groups on the commonality and hierarchy of interests, the way these interests are formed, perceived and articulated among the decision makers, both as individuals and institutions and by the wider public at large –reflected in the attitudes against "partner". In revoking the concept of horizontality I refer to individual issues –which may be further qualified on the basis of actors involved, subjects and the social, economic, military and political aspects of every issue. The wider and deeper the relations between the parties in terms of stakeholders and counterparts, the more diverse the number of issues that parties cooperate and the deeper the complexity of relations on the horizontal scale and the stronger the positive perceptions of the "partner" and the strength of convergence of interests, the more resilient the strategic relations hence the easier to maintain for sustained periods of time.

<sup>64</sup> As it inevitably displays a temporary character in that they do depend on the *zeitgeist*, the question of duration and strength of the decision makers to stay in power.





The weakness of Turkish-American relations from the start lied in the fact that it was largely one-dimensional in the sense that it was perceived and structured around security concerns and interests. The bipolar international system imposed dictated constraints to Turkey and it endured three main crisis, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, 1964 Johnson Letter on Cyprus and 1974 arms embargo. However the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the regime change in Iran invoked the necessity to strengthen and deepen the relations. The result was the Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) of 1980 partially addressing the inherent weakness and bringing in an economic dimension. The fact that this Agreement survived the 1980 military coup unscratched is significant,<sup>65</sup> because it also indicates the existence and strength of converging interests.

As the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War ended in 1989 Turkey found itself in an urgent need to redefine its geo-political positioning. The problems with Turkey's relations with Europe had a bearing in its relations with the European members of NATO within the organization. Efforts of Europe to delineate a separate security identity under the revival Western European Union was critical in that regard. The process of formation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy -increasingly excluding Turkey- and the vocal criticisms on Turkey's human rights record during the 1990s, coming in a time when Turkey was struggling with PKK terrorism, pushed Turkey to enunciate stronger ties bilaterally with the US. This seems to have coincided with the post-Cold War US strategy of building alliances. It also made sense within the context of existing US interests within Turkey's environs at the time as it should also be said that the United States too could not afford the luxury of alienating Turkey in a time of post-Soviet restructuring in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. The Gulf War that followed the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait witnessed the height of relations. It was again during the 1990s that the US became an important guarantor of Turkey's economic stability through its important weight in the IMF and "as an important source of [Foreign Direct Investment] FDI, as a market for Turkish products".<sup>66</sup>

It is a fact that Turkey had hardships in terms of benefitting from the "peace dividend" years both financially and in terms of "desecuritizing" its foreign relations. It would not be wrong to say that the inability stemmed partly from the strategic culture, intertwined with *Sevres Phobia* on the side of the decision makers, the level of competence they have shown for assessing and understanding the new parameters and dynamics of the transforming international system and to reposition the country by structuring a new foreign and defense policy pillared on these new parameters and dynamics or, as one writer has put it, on a larger scale a "prominent role of conspiracies and paranoia in Turkish social and political life".<sup>67</sup> However it should also be recognized that starting from mid 1980s Turkey has had very different concerns in terms of its security and foreign policy dictated by the low intensity conflict it was suffering and surrounded with regions suffering the throes of post-Soviet restructuring. In a way, Turkey did get out of the Cold War just to find itself encircled by hot conflicts and drowned into a fight against Kurdish separatism. An overwhelming majority of the traditional decision makers felt they were clearly fighting "2 ½ Wars".<sup>68</sup> The wide spread belief at the time, that can somehow be said to contain what most traditional decision making

<sup>65</sup> Kirişçi, "US-Turkish...", *op. cit.*, p.173.

<sup>66</sup> Aydın, "Reconstructing..." *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>67</sup> Berlinski, Claire: "A Nation of Conspiracies", *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 March 2010.

<sup>68</sup> The concept of 2 ½ Wars was first used by Ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ in a piece he has written to Foreign Ministry's Center for Strategic Research's Perceptions journal and gained wide currency especially among the decision makers. Elekdağ, Şükrü: "2 ½ War Strategy", *Perceptions*, vol. 1, (March/ May 1996) at <http://www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/Volumel/March-May1996/%20212WARSTRATEGY.pdf>.



elites regarded as a transcendent truth at the time, was reflected in Elekdag's words: "[N]o matter how capable a foreign policy might be, it cannot be stronger than the military might it relies on."<sup>69</sup>

From mid 1990s onwards however Turkey has started to realize the change. The alliance with Israel, the positive role it played in regional conflicts, the participation of Turkish Armed Forces in international peacekeeping operations, the renewed relations with Greece and with Syria after the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan was forced out of the country following the signing of the Adana Accord in October 1998, the "Neighborhood Forum" initiative started by then foreign minister -1997 to 2002- İsmail Cem İpekçi in January 1998, were all regarded by most observers of Turkish foreign policy as a great transformation. One such observer declared unhesitatingly, that "Turkey has transformed its foreign policy and self-image more thoroughly than any noncommunist country in the post-Cold War era".<sup>70</sup> At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, before the elections of 2002 that carried AKP to power, it was already remarked that only Turkey was, unlike any other state in that, apart from the US, in a position to "[play] a part in so many different geographical reasons".<sup>71</sup> Especially following Öcalan's capture in Kenya Turkish foreign policy was largely relaxed. It can even be argued that the success of Turkey's enhancement of its post-Cold War security situation through its foreign policy is displayed very graphically in the success of its use of coercion against Syria that ended up in 1998 Adana Accord and with the banishment of Öcalan from that country. All in all, as Lesser observed the "strategic neglect that many Turks feared after the demise of the Soviet Union"<sup>72</sup> did not become a reality.

Even though there were also areas of divergence in foreign policy within these years, like the issue of Northern Iraq, the policy of dual containment and its consequences for Turkey, the appropriate way of dealing with Iran, the Cyprus issue<sup>73</sup> "US – Turkish relations showed considerable resilience and strength in the aftermath of the Cold War."<sup>74</sup> The general anticipation on US-Turkish relations was that "a strong basis for continuous strategic cooperation"<sup>75</sup> between the two countries exists.

#### **4.2. Clinton: The Relief after the Earthquake**

In mid November 1999 President Bill Clinton's visited Turkey. Though it was hard to arrange it for the US administration under Congressional pressure,<sup>76</sup> the visit itself was a huge success. The trip was organized just after the Marmara earthquake of 17 of August that hit one of the most industrially developed areas of Turkey, officially claiming 17.480 lives that year. The speech Bill Clinton delivered was the first by a US President.<sup>77</sup> On 15 November 1999

<sup>69</sup> Elekdag, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Rubin, Barry: "Turkey: A transformed international role", in Rubin and Kirişçi, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Lesser, Ian O.: "Beyond Bridge or Barrier: Turkey's Evolving Security Relations with the West" in Makovsky, Alan and Sayari, Sabri (eds.) (2000): *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C., Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. 203.

<sup>73</sup> For assessment of these issues see Kirişçi, "US Turkish...", *op. cit.*, pp. 174 – 192.

<sup>74</sup> Sayari, Sabri: "Turkey and the United States: Changing Dynamics of an Enduring Alliance" in Ismael, Tareq Y. And Aydın, Mustafa (eds.) (2003): *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A changing role in world politics*, Aldershot, Ashgate p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Kirişçi, "US Turkish...", *op. cit.*, p. 192. For similar comments see Sayari, *op.cit* and Aydın, "Reconstructing...".

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187 – 189.

<sup>77</sup> Clinton himself was the third President of the United States to ever visit Turkey after Eisenhower and Bush Sr. The five day trip was the longest ever and remains as such.



Clinton stated that within the so-called peace dividend years that followed the end of the Cold War, Turkey and the US have “[L]earned that” their, “[F]riendship does not depend upon a common concern with the Soviet Union”.<sup>78</sup> In fact for the decade and a half following the Cold War the Turkish-American relations, called a strategic cooperation or a partnership, were the closest thing to a constant in the Turkish foreign policy formulation. Despite the restraints that Operation Provide Comfort and Operation Northern Watch had brought,<sup>79</sup> due to suspicions in Turkey about alleged support that these operations directly or indirectly provided to the PKK, the relations between the two countries were for the large part ‘alive and well’ in that “moment of great optimism”<sup>80</sup> as Clinton has called it in his address for Presidential reception dinner organized by President Süleyman Demirel in his honor. During his visit Clinton made his famous declaration on US and Turkey being “strategic partners”. This was, it seems, largely in reciprocity when the subsequent Turkish leaders revoked the concept “strategic” for qualifying the bilateral relations.<sup>81</sup>

A Turkish academician underlines that it has traditionally been important for Turkish leaders to hear words of admiration as it somehow comes to mean “confirmation or renewal of confidence” that in return may bring more political credence and economic credibility that in return assures the business community and political circles as well as the wider<sup>82</sup> public that “everything is right on track” and the leaders in charge are “respected”. Considering the prerogatives US has in Turkey’s external relations, the importance that Turkish press attributes to such contacts like the high coverage of US leaders visits traditionally receive as well as some aspects of Turkish culture such as exaltations coming from the US have traditionally been important. Being able to have a quick appointment arranged at the White House and a cordial welcome from the US administrations is regarded as clear signs of prestige and is deemed significant.<sup>83</sup>

However it is hard to comment that the strategic nature of relations reflect themselves in the economic indicators. As Clinton arrived in Turkey the US was having a 8,2 percent share in Turkish foreign trade. Almost ten years later in 2008 this figure was 4,85 percent in an investment climate where Turkey increased its foreign trade 3,6 fold and faced a weak US currency. Within the same period imports from the US increased 2,8 times, from USD 3 billion to 8,5 billion, while exports increased only 1,3 times, from USD 2,4 to 3,2 billion. The US’s share in the foreign direct investment (FDI) received by Turkey between 2000 and 2008 was 10,09 percent. That figure was 31 percent in 2000, and 5,79 percent in 2008. Within the

<sup>78</sup> T.B.M.M. Tutanak Dergisi, Dönem: 21, Cilt: 16, Yasama Yılı: 2, 19 uncu Birleşim, 15 Kasım 1999.

<sup>79</sup> For an account and debates surrounding the effect of the Operations targeted to provide a Kurdish safe haven above the 36th parallel in Northern Iraq see Kirişçi, Kemal, “Provide Comfort or Trouble: Operation Provide comfort and Its Impact on Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Turkish Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 8 (1994/1995), pp. 43 -67.

<sup>80</sup> Cumhurbaşkanı Demirel’in onuruna Çankaya Köşkü’nde verdiği akşam yemeğinde ABD Başkanı Bill Clinton’ın yaptığı konuşmanın İngilizce metni [The English Text of the Speech by President of the USA, Bill Clinton at the Gala Dinner Given for His Honor in Çankaya Palace by President Demirel” 15 Kasım 1999, [http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/cldemirel\\_06.htm](http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/cldemirel_06.htm).

<sup>81</sup> Aydın, “Reconstructing...”, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>82</sup> Uzgel, “Dış Politikada...”, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

<sup>83</sup> The latest example of this situation is the way Turkish media covered Erdogan’s meeting with Obama in April 2010 during the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington D.C. Almost all newspapers made a common choice putting this one aspect of the meeting to the forefront: the meeting lasted for forty five instead of the fifteen minutes as it was originally planned. See *Radikal, Vakit, Zaman, Taraf* amongst others on 14 April 2010.



same period the amount of FDI Turkey received increased by 18 folds, from USD 817 million in 2000, to USD 14,8 billion in 2008.<sup>84</sup>

Looking at the past from where we are today it indeed can be characterized as the ‘great optimism’ period. Following the 9/11 attacks and Bush “War on Terror” that is marked with the invasion of Iraq, Turkish – American relations suffered what some call a “train wreck”. The train started to derail with the rejection by the Turkish Parliament on 1 March 2003 of the use of Turkish territory for mounting the invasion from the north. Later, in Sulaymania US troops apprehended Turkish Special Operations Troops on 4 July 2003 which caused the then Turkish Armed Forces Chief of General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, to say that it was the “deepest confidence crisis”<sup>85</sup> that the relations suffered. Even though the resilience of Turkish-American relations were tested over time and proved strong, the effects of both events that occurred within the span of four months has to an extent transformed the nature of the relations. At the least the US’s image amongst Turkish public was deteriorated in a way that seems to be quite persistent, if not permanent.<sup>86</sup> Even the election of Obama as the President did not change that deep feeling of mistrust against the US.<sup>87</sup> In July 2006 making an effort, the two countries announced a document titled, “Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership” without any ratification at any level. The document seemed to be prepared and announced mainly by the Turkish side and “its announcement without signature highlighted the difficulties to structure a dialogue around a shared strategic vision.” Even though the document stated the intention for a structured dialogue and underlined the existence of “strong bonds of friendship, alliance, mutual trust and unity of vision.” and talks about shared set of values, ideals in regional and “global objectives” like “the promotion of peace, democracy, freedom and prosperity,” and pledges for concentrated efforts,” it was not signed by the parties.<sup>88</sup> The document seemed to be prepared and announced mainly by Turkish side’s demand and the fact that it was announced “without signature highlighted the difficulties to structure a dialogue around a shared strategic vision.”<sup>89</sup> Amongst the mechanisms that were mentioned the only one which had enough breath to come to the attention of the public was the Coordination Group for Countering the PKK. Established on 28 August the same year, ended in blunder when the Turkish envoy, retired General Halit Edip Başer was relieved of this duty following his public criticisms of the US attitude on 21 May 2007,<sup>90</sup> his American counterpart Joseph Ralston

<sup>84</sup> The data for foreign trade figures are collected from Turkish Statistical Institute web site “Ülke Gruplarına Göre Dış Ticaret [Foreign Trade According to Nation Clusters]” at [http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?tb\\_id=12&ust\\_id=4](http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?tb_id=12&ust_id=4). FDI figures are collected from Prime Ministry Undersecretariat of Treasury *2001 Yılı Raporu [2001 Annual Report]*, T.C. Başbakanlık Hazine Müsteşarlığı Yabancı Sermaye Genel Müdürlüğü, Başbakanlık, Ankara, 2001, pp 40 – 41; *Hazine İstatistik Yıllığı 2008* at <http://www.hazine.gov.tr:80/irj/go/km/docs/documents/Treasury%20Web/Statistics/Annual/V%20Yabanci%20Sermaye/YSGM.xls>.

<sup>85</sup> Sevenler, Erhan, ‘En büyük güven krizi’ dedik ABD'nin üzüntüsüyle yetindik [We called it 2the deepest confidence crisis settled down with just USA’s sorrow]”, *Radikal*, 16 July 2003.

<sup>86</sup> There was a strong expectation for a serious apology within the public at large that turned into a serious disillusionment after the joint declaration of the two countries on the issue. *Ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> Stephens, Bret, “What Is Happening to Turkey? As the country has become wealthier, it paradoxically has also shed some of its Western trappings”, *Wall Street Journal*, 11 May 2010.

<sup>88</sup> For the full text of the document, see, [http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statement\\_070508.html](http://turkey.usembassy.gov/statement_070508.html).

<sup>89</sup> Aydın, “Reconstructing...”, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>90</sup> “Edip Başer Görevden Alındı [Edip Başer is Dismissed]”, *NTVMSNBC.com*, 22 May 2007 at <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/408638.asp>.





followed suit almost five months later.<sup>91</sup> He then accused the US of not keeping their word to Turkey.<sup>92</sup>

### 4.3. AKP and Consolidation of Political Power

Apart from the sympathies that he has been widely blessed by the Turkish people as well as by the global public opinion, Obama represented some specific risks for Turkish foreign policy. As he was campaigning for the Presidency he had explicitly committed himself to the Armenian claims to recognise the events of 1915 as genocide.<sup>93</sup> This led Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to say: “As America is a very strong country in the world, at present the weight [responsibilities] on it is very distinctive. Especially in a period that a crisis is experienced USA would [fulfill] the responsibility to contribute to the world peace which lies much more with them [than any other nation]. At this point we think that some of their discourses [delineated] during the election campaign will be restricted exclusively to the campaign [period]. Because Turkish –USA relations do not [take shape and last according to] change of administrations but within [the context of] the strategic relations between the countries. I think it will be like that,”<sup>94</sup> while he was commenting on Obama’s election. In Erdoğan’s words there is a clear emphasis and recognition of the US’s power. Then again apart from the fact that he is in realization of the risks Obama presents for Turkey, the tone of his words represent a much more confident Erdoğan as he was trying to find his way through the situation concerning US’s invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>95</sup>

There were both domestic and international sources of confidence exhibited by Erdoğan. To understand these sources the interplay of domestic politics and foreign policy in Turkey should be substantiated. On the one hand “the changes in foreign policy reflect the rolling revolution in Turkey's domestic political arrangements”<sup>96</sup> and on the other hand Turkish politics is transformed through the legitimacy gained from the way foreign policy was pursued. In that regard AKP’s approach to foreign policy can be defined as shaping on two basic currents.

First, the sustained and almost continuously escalating tensions with the bureaucracy forces the AKP to maintain an external balance that would serve them as the legitimacy against what seems to be an unremitting threat perception they feel to strengthen their political base and power. Second, AKP tries to keep the support it receives from the aforementioned external balance uninterruptedly mobilized. This is particularly the case in the relations of AKP with the West but, especially, the US.

<sup>91</sup> Cindemir, Kasım: “Roslton istifa etti [Rolston Resigned], *Hürriyet*, 1 October 2007.

<sup>92</sup> “The US government should have made good on the commitments they have made to the Turks”, Senanayake, Sumeda: “Iraq: Threat of Turkish Invasion Diminished, For Now”, *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, 8 November 2007, at <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079101.html>.

<sup>93</sup> In a speech delivered on 19 January 2008 he said; “I shared with Secretary Rice my firmly held conviction that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy.... and as President I will recognize the Armenian genocide.” Obama, Barack: “Barack Obama on the Importance of US-Armenia Relations, *Organizing for America*, January 19, 2008, at [http://www.barackobama.com/2008/01/19/barack\\_obama\\_on\\_the\\_importance.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/01/19/barack_obama_on_the_importance.php).

<sup>94</sup> “Erdoğan Barack Obama’yı Tebrik Etti” [Erdogan Congratulates Barack Obama], at <http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/haber-124131.html>, 5 November 2008, “Başbakan Erdoğan’dan Obama’ya İlk Yorum” [Early Comments from Prime Minister Erdogan], *Star*, 5 November 2008.

<sup>95</sup> See for example Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip: “My Country is Your Faithful Ally and Friend”, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2003.

<sup>96</sup> Stephens, *op. cit.*





As such the general understanding of AKP on the relations with the US can be said to bear a strong mark of the tumultuous event of March 2003, namely the Turkish Parliament decision on granting permission to the US troops to use the Turkish territory to march on Iraq. As AKP came to power its general stance *vis a vis* Turkey's –read the Party's– relations with the US was one of compulsory cooperation. The events following the Iraq decision seems to have reinforced this stance.<sup>97</sup> According to one line of thought AKP was quick to grasp the repercussions that the traditional decision making elite has suffered as a result of the strategic game that they have played. The failure to deliver on their side as expected was not forgiven, as displayed in Sulaymania. It seems that AKP was quick to build on the vacuum that was left by the traditional decision making elites who found themselves between strong suspicions concerning the AKP and their increasing dislike for the US policies. The AKP thesis to their US counterparts was that, traditional decision making elites no longer constituted a viable partner for the US. Particularly because of their nationalist, Kemalist –read undemocratic– stance. However, as AKP's roots rested in a political movement –*Nationalist Outlook Movement* (NOM) led for years by Necmettin Erbakan– that has been a victim of the unfair practices stemming from the differences of the NOM and establishment's perspectives, mainly on Turkey's orientation and identity, and is by definition<sup>98</sup> more open to dialogue and cooperation, AKP had the power to support US and western interests. As such AKP was able to make a difference.<sup>99</sup> What is more, what makes AKP unique, and all the more important, is the political tradition that it grew out of. That tradition, political Islamism now moderated to an understanding of conservative democracy, makes it very convenient for the AKP to understand the most troubled regions, in particular, Muslim Middle East as it grants the Party's decision makers an “inside” look to those regions as well as a wider perspective. The same tradition has its roots in history, in the time of the Ottoman Empire. That is particularly important as only AKP as the “modern” standard bearer of the political Islam in Turkey has an exclusive expertise when it comes to developing relations, giving and structuring messages and building upon their credibility a convincing approach that would bring parties of hot issues in the ex- Ottoman land and its hinterland –especially in the Middle East, North Africa, Balkans and Caucasus. The credibility is also an exclusive domain of the Party because of its political roots that permitted the preservation of the political tradition and cultural heritage of Islam and the Ottoman Empire while the Kemalist state has done everything in its power to distance the country and eradicate that heritage and pertaining Islamic identity. The tradition enables AKP to structure an ideological response from “inside” –non western– to limit and extinguish the risks and threats the West in general, and the US in particular face in the post-9/11 international environment. The unique character of the tradition and heritage AKP possesses not only qualifies Turkey under AKP the only viable model of a Muslim state in terms with the West, but also makes it possible for AKP to become a very instrumental and effective chaperon, courier, broker, facilitator, whenever the conditions and terrain is suitable a mediator, even a referee. As for these reasons, this line of thought argues, it would only be rational to support the socio-political consolidation that AKP has started, and succeeded to considerable extent, in the country. It should be kept in mind that the logical extreme of this line of thought is a sustained AKP dominance in Turkish politics. AKP has learned well from the fate of the traditional decision makers when they failed to deliver in March 2003 for

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<sup>97</sup> See, then Erdogan's influential advisor and AKP founder, Cüneyt Zapsu's reactions that were apparently shaped, at the least, also by this experience; footnote 100 below.

<sup>98</sup> Here the emphasis is on the multicultural tolerance that had its foundations in the Ottoman Turkish statecraft that AKP was the rightful heir to. Though the problem with this line of thought is that it was founded on a firm belief of supremacy against the other cultures and religions, is frequently overlooked.

<sup>99</sup> Whereas the Kemalist state was not, goes this line of argument, as it lacked any credibility with the Muslim/ Arab world.



domestic political considerations against itself.<sup>100</sup> The message that the West should make use of or facilitate Turkey under AKP is a repetitive theme in AKP foreign policy.<sup>101</sup>

The tendency for using foreign policy as a means of strengthening the domestic political base has always been a dominant tendency in Turkey.<sup>102</sup> It is argued that this is true in general for Middle East and North African states.<sup>103</sup> When analyzed in the light of such an understanding the tendencies of AKP summarized above is not at all exceptional. What is more, none of this changes the fact that good or bad, sound or not in the post 9/11 security environment in its region AKP's Turkey was the only country with a game plan which can claim the virtue of being constructive as a basis of its legitimacy at the same time.

Domestically also Turkey's economic transformation has been impressive in terms of the sustained growth performance the economy showed under the AKP. Even though the relative volume and diversity of the economy is still far from playing a global role, Turkey is in the region the “most important economic power” –the 16<sup>th</sup> largest with a GDP of USD 880,1 billion by purchasing power parity in 2009 according to the IMF – and “[N]ot only a major modern economy, but the largest, perhaps the only modern economy in the entire Muslim world”.<sup>104</sup> “Goldman Sachs anticipates 7% growth this year, which would make the country Europe's strongest performer”.<sup>105</sup> Also, particularly after the 2007 elections and the ascendance of the former foreign minister Abdullah Gül to Presidency after a period of bitter struggle between AKP and its opposition the AKP seems to feel that the process of political consolidation has been completed carrying the party to become an absolute center of gravity in Turkish politics. Even though this process is still going on the authority of AKP has become nothing short of impressive traceable through the great shift in the ownership of media, ascendance of a new Islamist bourgeoisie<sup>106</sup> with close links to the government. This authority is strengthened by the ongoing trials and investigations concerning alleged coup attempts between the first and second term of AKP. The dragging process of *Ergenekon* case on the alleged coup plans involving academicians, generals, journalists, police chiefs amongst others and the pressures on the press, in which the Dogan Group tax case became emblematic

<sup>100</sup> Uzgel, *op. cit.*, p. 373. For an interesting and overlapping analysis of the events surrounding March 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 Moment see Bilici, “Filozof Dışişleri Bakanı”, *op. cit.*

<sup>101</sup> Davutoglu went on record to say, “Europe could have an inestimable partner to bring peace and stability to today's fragile and dangerous Middle East –Turkey. If only the EU took advantage of what Ankara can offer...”. *Turkey as a Partner for European Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 136 th Bergedorf Roundtable, Istanbul, (February 23rd-25th, 2007), p. 25. Also the much controversial words of Cüneyt Zapsu, the advisor to Erdogan then, voiced, reportedly, in a meeting in American Enterprise Institute on 7 April 2006, the US calling for the American decision makers not to “sweep [Erdogan] down the drain but use him”. Yanardağ, Merdan (2007): *Bir ABD Projesi Olarak AKP [AKP as a US Project]*, Istanbul, Siyah Beyaz Yayınları, p. 79. Zapsu then repudiated that he did not use the words as such. “Zapsu'dan ‘down the drain’ açıklaması [‘Down the drain’ explanation from Zapsu]”, *NTVMSNBC.com* at <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/413011.asp>.

<sup>102</sup> Erhan, Çağrı: “Türkiye Ortadoğu'da ABD Ne İstediyseniz Yapmıştır [Turkey Has Done Everything the US Asked in the Middle East] in Özdal *et. al. op. cit.*, pp. 51 -52

<sup>103</sup> Nonneman, Gerd, “Analyzing the Foreign Policies of the Middle East and North Africa: A Conceptual Framework” in Nonneman, *op.cit.*, p.9.

<sup>104</sup> Friedman George (2009): “The New Fault Lines”, in *The next Hundred Years*, New York, Anchor Books. p. 80.

<sup>105</sup> Stephens, *op. cit.*

<sup>106</sup> On the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie and its meaning and possible effects see *Ibid.* For a more comprehensive but somehow controversial analysis see Werz, Michael (2010): *The New Levant: Understanding Turkey's Shifting Roles in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Washington, D.C., Center for American Progress, at [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/pdf/turkey\\_levant.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/pdf/turkey_levant.pdf).



of that consolidation that raised at least some eyebrows both in the country and abroad.<sup>107</sup> However as these developments reinforced the domestic authority of the government it also seems to fragment the society somewhat deeply. Nevertheless the success AKP showed in projecting the image of power consolidation, that I referred earlier, at home, in return, reinforces the AKP's active stance in foreign policy.<sup>108</sup> As this brings them "kudos" internationally AKP officers and members of parliament continuously underline the message of consolidation in their deliberations with their western, especially American, counterparts to receive more international support or at least approval to further consolidate their political power at home.<sup>109</sup>

#### 4.4. Enter Obama

The hope that Obama represented was needed in Turkey and that was of no surprise to anyone involved in the trade of Turkish – American relations. As Obama was taking over the White House, "the US image abroad was suffering everywhere" according to the PEW Global Public Attitudes Project<sup>110</sup> and nowhere else, even not in Palestinian territories and Pakistan,<sup>111</sup> the popularity of the US was in shambles as bad as in Turkey where the popularity of the US hit a record low of 9 percent in 2007 and 12 percent in 2008,<sup>112</sup> while Turks also led the charts in disliking both American ways of doing business and American ideas of democracy with 83 and 81 percent respectively.<sup>113</sup> During the Bush years Turkish – American relations might be said to have suffered deeply from a post-9/11 syndrome.

The syndrome had two dimensions: first, there was the legacy of issues concerning the context, structure and priorities of the alliance between the two countries. This was due, mainly, to the problems surrounding Turkish decision makers on deciding how to position the country in the post-Cold War international system. According to Kirişçi; "During the Cold War Turkey has benefited from a rent due to her geostrategic position and Turkish foreign policy has showed outstanding success in keeping this rent as high as is possible."<sup>114</sup> Following the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkish decision makers had a rough time in positioning<sup>115</sup> the country against new challenges that the seemingly unipolar world brought. Second, the US's invasion of Iraq and the events that followed has planted deep feelings of distrust among the Turkish population. These included, but were not limited to the US sponsoring the establishment of a Kurdish regional autonomy that has brought the question of whether or not the US was working for the declaration of an independent Kurdish state that

<sup>107</sup> The former Ambassador of the US in Turkey between (2003 – 2005) Eric Edelman who closely observes Turkey also underlines the inconclusively Alçı, Nagehan: "ABD'den habersiz de darbe yapılabilir [A Coup may be realized without the USA knowing]", *Akşam*, 29 Mart 2010.

<sup>108</sup> The definition of camps in the article that I referred to earlier by Abramowitz and Barkey is indicative of the success of AKP in convincing the outside world to the image consolidation. See foot note. 36 above.

<sup>109</sup> For just one recent example see, Werz, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Werz quotes Suat Kınıkloğlu, AKP's Deputy Chairman for Foreign Relations and Foreign relations Coordinator; "There is no dependable opposition," ... the opposition is disparate "to the degree that it makes us uncomfortable."

<sup>110</sup> "Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001-2008)", *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, Washington D.C., (December 18, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> A previous PEW survey pitched US popularity in Palestinian territories at 13 %, while Pakistan was scoring 15 % for the year 2007. See "Global Unease with Major World Powers", *PEW Global Attitudes Survey*, Washington D.C., (June 27, 2007), p.3 and 13.

<sup>112</sup> "Global Public Opinion...", *op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>113</sup> "Global Unease...", *op. cit.* p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Kirişçi Kemal: "Türkiye Daima Kendisini AB'ye Yakınlaştıracak Politikalar İzlemelidir" [Turkey Should Always Pursue Policies That Would Bring Itself Close to EU] in Özdal *et. al.*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Kirişçi calls the situation, "some kind of a confusion". Kirişçi, *Ibid.*, p. 4.



might fuel PKK's Kurdish separatism in Turkey<sup>116</sup>; the events that occurred in Sulaymania<sup>117</sup> and the general atmospherics resulting from the overall approach to the whole issue of "war on terror", from human rights abuses in Abu Ghraib to the unfortunate invocation of the concept of crusade by Bush Jr. in what seemingly was an inappropriate effort to underline the righteousness of US's cause, and so on.<sup>118</sup>

Even though AKP has done its best to repair the relations somehow after the turbulent months of 2003,<sup>119</sup> it seems to be a relief for the AKP to have a new president elected in the US. That would conceivably have been the case with any president but Obama was, mainly because of the perception that he represents a comparable identity, like those of the marginalized pitted against the mighty power holders, a better alternative for the AKP. Obama's legitimate and rightful aspiration to come to power, therefore, would be perceived much positively and "sell" better to the AKP constituency.<sup>120</sup>

## 5. "Change" meets "Transformation"

In his remarks made to the press together with President Abdullah Gül, following their meeting of 6 April 2009, during his two day visit to Turkey, US President Barack Obama has labeled the Turkish - American relations as one that "can be" built as a "Model Partnership".<sup>121</sup> Later, Obama has delivered what was the second ever speech by a US President before the members of Turkish Grand National Assembly. His tone was different then Clinton nearly a decade ago. He said:

"The United States and Turkey have not always agreed on every issue, and that's to be expected -- no two nations do. But we have stood together through many challenges over the last 60 years. And because of the strength of our alliance and the endurance of our friendship, both America and Turkey are stronger and the world is more secure."<sup>122</sup>

Phillip Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State, European and Eurasian Affairs, later expressed more directly these ideas. In a speech delivered at the Brookings Institution Gordon first underlined the importance of Turkish-US relations but then he did not hesitate to openly call

<sup>116</sup> Despite numerous announcements by US officials to the contrary.

<sup>117</sup> That profoundly, if not irredeemably, blew up the bridges between Turkish secular nationalists and the US. Though the feeling can be said to cut across and shared by different layers of society. See for example liberal *Radikal* daily. Sevenler, *op. cit.*

<sup>118</sup> Bush, George W.: "Today We Mourned, Tomorrow We Work", Remarks by the President Upon Arrival, *White House*, Washington D.C. (16 September 2001) at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>. Bush actually used the concept while answering the questions after his speech.

<sup>119</sup> That led finally to Bush calling PKK the "common enemy" and an agreement on "hot" intelligence sharing between Turkey and US See Aydın, "Reconstructing...", *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>120</sup> At least one commentator points out that this is the case on the issue of representing dynamism for embracing and initiating transformation. Fisher Onar, Nora: "Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy", *EDAM Discussion Paper Series*, (2009/03), p. 15.

<sup>121</sup> "Joint Press Availability with President Obama and President Gul of Turkey", Cankaya Palace, Ankara, Turkey, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-availability-with-president-obama-and-president-gul-turkey>.

<sup>122</sup> Obama, Barack H.: "Remarks by President Obama To The Turkish Parliament", April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-turkish-parliament>.





the beast with its name saying that, “Turkey has always had multiple identities. But what binds the United States and Turkey together are shared interests, shared values, and a commitment to partnership.” He went on with identifying the formula that worked during the Cold War, “The relationship, which was much easier to justify when we faced a shared Soviet threat”. So he added in the new international environment, “those of us who believe in the relationship have to make a special effort to explain the enduring value of the partnership between the United States and Turkey.”<sup>123</sup> What makes Gordon’s words more noteworthy is the high probability that he is the inventor of the “Model Partnership” conceptualization that Obama used for naming the Turkish-American relations.

### 5.1. What is the Meaning of the Word “Model”?

Talking to *Council on Foreign Relations* Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton said that in the face of the new threats that the US is facing; “Rigid ideologies and old formulas don't apply.”<sup>124</sup> The concept of “Model Partnership” seems to be formulated with this principle in mind. It was a flexible concept of a fluid nature, re-shapeable according to the circumstances and needs of the parties. As Clinton cited Turkey within the second tier of a total of seven countries as “emerging global powers” on which the US will “put special emphasis [for encouraging] ... to be full partners in tackling the global agenda”<sup>125</sup> the concept of “Model Partnership” seems to rest mainly on the existing elements of cooperation with added flexibility as and when the circumstances demanded. The existing institutional framework of relations –under NATO, G-20 etc.- will be preserved while the parties extend their cooperation to economy, encouraging entrepreneurship in the Middle East using, what is thought to be, the AKP experience.<sup>126</sup> It seems like the US, naturally, also assumes the continuation of existing relations on Afghanistan and Iraq while it goes on supporting the Turkish bid to be a member of the European Union (EU). At a first glance this framework leaves the energy, Iran and Turkish-Israeli relations –even Turkish-Russian relations- either out or presupposes that they wouldn’t represent important areas of divergence as they will either be outweighed by the benefits of cooperation, somehow be insignificant or, yet better, sort themselves out.<sup>127</sup>

AKP’s leadership is as keen as their US counterparts when it comes to Turkish-US relations and the importance of US’ friendship to Turkey. Abdullah Gül, then Foreign

<sup>123</sup> Gordon, Philip H.: “The United States and Turkey: A View From the Obama Administration”, Sakıp Sabancı Lecture, *Brookings Institute*, Washington, D.C. (March 17, 2010), at [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2010/0317\\_turkey/20100317\\_turkey\\_sabanci.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2010/0317_turkey/20100317_turkey_sabanci.pdf).

<sup>124</sup> Clinton, Hilary Rodham, “Council on Foreign Relations Address by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton”, Transcript, *Council on Foreign Relations*, Washington, D.C. (July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009), at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/19840/>.

<sup>125</sup> The first tier being China, India, Russia and Brazil and second tier consisting of Indonesia, South Africa as well as Turkey. *Ibid*.

<sup>126</sup> To explain the AKP’s rising to power by relying heavily on the increasing weight of the new Islamic bourgeoisie -the so called Anatolian tigers- and putting significant emphasis on the transformational role these new Islamic elite plays on both Turkish society and politics and democratization of political Islam –the latter being more important with the potential it represents for the Muslim world in general- is a popular theme in the research agenda on AKP. See Yavuz, M. Hakan (2009): *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press and Werz, Michael (2010): *The New Levant: Understanding Turkey’s Shifting Roles in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Washington, D.C., Center for American Progress, p. 4 at [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/pdf/turkey\\_levant.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/pdf/turkey_levant.pdf). See also Kirişçi, Kemal: “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State”, in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 40, (Spring 2009), pp. 29 – 56.

<sup>127</sup> If so that seems to be an overly optimistic approach.





Minister, reportedly said that these relations were, “above and beyond everything else”.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand Foreign Minister Davutoğlu calls these relations “unique” in character.<sup>129</sup> Referring to the concept of “Model Partnership” Davutoğlu underlines his belief that President Obama did use the conceptualization on purpose to signify “a prototype relationship between the two countries [that is]... a prototype for others”.<sup>130</sup> However, as he underlines this future “prototype” he also underlines very strongly the unique character of the Turkish-US relations. As he paints a picture of a self-confident Turkey that has a foreign policy agenda that exactly matches that of the US on global issues because Turkey “has to be everywhere” not only because it is ““unique power in its surrounding regions and an important player in world politics,” but also because “these are [Turkey’s] concerns as a significant player of world politics.”<sup>131</sup> That approach inevitably leaves the answers of two critical questions out: Firstly, how can a relationship which is so unique constitute a “prototype” for others in their relations with each other or with the US? Second, how can Turkey with all its internal divisions, especially divisions that are concerning the AKP and a still “precarious economic situation” can lead and shape the region,<sup>132</sup> or be the speaker on behalf of, say, “Africa”<sup>133</sup> as Davutoğlu suggests?

Actually, when it comes to Turkish-American relations Davutoğlu’s approach is firstly one of a balancing act. He thinks that “Turkey should never be in a situation where he is left alone” with any of the global heavyweights such as the EU or United States as this will “ring about a strategic submissiveness”.<sup>134</sup> The final aim of Turkey is to “establish an area of influence in its environs”.<sup>135</sup> He clearly sees the US as a party that is crucial for Turkey to engage. According to him, “Turkey, as a middle size central country, needs the strategic weight of a continental superpower within the parameters of the internal balances of power of Afro-Eurasia”.<sup>136</sup> The relations of two countries “has a solid geopolitical foundation, a strong historical background and an institutional framework.”<sup>137</sup> Hence, the two countries, “need to have a comprehensive strategy, a comprehensive character for our model partnership,” as Davutoğlu is “sure that in 10 years, the role of the United States as the global power will be strengthened” and Turkey will be playing that unique role in regional and global politics as he envisages.<sup>138</sup> His analysis on Obama’s utterance to “Model Partnership” is remarkable in this regard:

“This long historical experience together during the Cold War. Of course, we appreciate and we should remind each other of the good memories of the Korean War, good memories of other joint efforts. But, it should not be nostalgia and it should not be just referring to these. Memory is good, but we have to be future-oriented. After the Cold War, the situation

<sup>128</sup> Yavuz, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>129</sup> Davutoğlu, Ahmet., “Turkey-US relations: A Model Partnership, Global and Regional Dimensions”, Speech Delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu at the 28th Annual Conference on US-Turkish Relations, ATC-DEIK, Washington DC (2 June 2009) at [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/minister\\_s-speechat-the-28th-annual-conference-on-us-turkish-relations.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/minister_s-speechat-the-28th-annual-conference-on-us-turkish-relations.en.mfa).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Yavuz calls Davutoğlu’s assumptions to this end “premature”. See Yavuz, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>133</sup> He quotes this anecdote; “President of Tanzania, in our meeting, told our President, “You are in the G-20. There is no real representation from Africa, from the South in the G-20. Please be our voice. We have full confidence in Turkey and that Turkey will bring all our issues to the agenda of G-20”. Davutoğlu, “Speech...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>134</sup> Davutoğlu, “Stratejik...”, *op. cit.*, p. 521.

<sup>135</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s...”, *op. cit.*, p.79.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Davutoğlu, “Speech...”, *op. cit.*



has changed and now there must be a new substance, there must be a new paradigm in our relations. Therefore, when President Obama used this term “model partnership” I said yes, this is a change of paradigm. Not just a strategic partnership, but a more comprehensive model partnership. That is what we need.”<sup>139</sup>

Just like Davutoğlu, albeit in differing tones at home and abroad, Erdoğan also doesn't shy away from underlining the importance AKP attributes to the US. In a 2005 meeting in Washington, D.C. he went on record to say, “Turkey is a friend and ally of the United States of America. Our relationship dates back many, many years. And it is born on sound foundations. And it is true that at times we go through the test of time. Nevertheless, we see that there is a strong solidarity between our countries that is a result of commonsense and realism.”<sup>140</sup> Two years later at the same venue he said; Turkey “highly value[s] ...strategic partnership with the United States, which is one of the fundamental bedrocks of [its] foreign policy.” He went on, “and I want to underscore this in the strongest and clearest terms. The deep-rooted history, shared values and common interests in our relations with the United States, which are advancing on a multidimensional basis, constitute the solid foundation of our alliance.”<sup>141</sup> Even the sheer weight of numbers speaks for themselves in that regard. A clear indication of the importance to give to bi-lateral relations by his government is that Erdogan visited the US 18 times 15 as Prime Minister –almost half of the total number of visits by Turkish presidents and prime ministers.<sup>142</sup> During his 2007 speech, Erdoğan's host, Richard Holbrooke, the veteran US diplomat who would become special adviser on Pakistan and Afghanistan to the president in the Obama administration, remarked, he“...can think of none ... who is more important to the United States, to the stability of Europe and the Middle East, ... There is no country in the world of more strategic importance to the United States at this moment in time than Turkey [which is ] what Germany was during the Cold War, the frontline state...”.<sup>143</sup>

However, despite these announcements from both sides that are full of compliments, none of these declarations change the fact that “Model Partnership” remains a vague term. The lack of a clear definition, as it was the case with the “shared vision” or “strategic partnership” in the past, is again the characterizing future of this new model of relations. This vagueness was not altogether negatively received in Turkey. Many commentators, especially within the circles sympathetic to the government hailed the new term as symbolizing “the beginning of a new era for every one of us and everything”. This, Çandar argued, was because

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Erdoğan, Recep T.: “A Conversation with Recep Tayyip Erdogan [Rush transcript; Federal News Service, Inc.]”, *CFR*, Washington D.C. (September 13, 2005), at [http://www.cfr.org/publication/8880/conversation\\_with\\_recep\\_tayyip\\_erdogan\\_rush\\_transcript\\_federal\\_news\\_service\\_inc.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8880/conversation_with_recep_tayyip_erdogan_rush_transcript_federal_news_service_inc.html).

<sup>141</sup> Erdoğan, Recep T.: “A Conversation with Recep Tayyip Erdogan [Rush transcript; Federal News Service, Inc.]”, Washington D.C., *CFR*, September 27, 2007 at [http://www.cfr.org/publication/14395/conversation\\_%20with\\_recep\\_tayyip\\_erdogan\\_rush\\_transcript\\_federal\\_news\\_service.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/14395/conversation_%20with_recep_tayyip_erdogan_rush_transcript_federal_news_service.html).

<sup>142</sup> “Erdoğan 17 kez ABD'ye gitti”, *Haber*, 5 April 2010, at <http://www.24haber.com/?newstype%20=normal&newsid=43532>. Reflective of Davutoğlu's influence in shaping the foreign policy doctrine of AKP, as of mid March 2010, according to information reportedly released by AKP, Erdogan has completed 234 diplomatic visits. “7 Yılda 234 Kez Yurtdışına Gitti [234 Abroad in 7 Years], *Stratejik Boyut*, 15 March 2010, at <http://www.stratejikboyut.com/haber/7-yilda-234-kez-yurtdisina-gitti-33209.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Erdoğan, A Conversation with Recep Tayyip Erdogan [Rush transcript; Federal News Service, Inc.]”, September 27, 2007.



“Turkey was going to be understood as one of the most important countries in the eyes of the US and treated as one”. It was like the US and Turkey were creating “jointly” a new “company” for handling and cooperating on various global issues together”.<sup>144</sup> Another observer inferred that “Obama is talking about an exemplary relationship, especially for the relations with Muslim countries,” however the same observer has also called for “contextualizing the term”.<sup>145</sup> The pro-government daily *Star* has heralded a new “relationship of equals”.<sup>146</sup> There was a clear expectation on the Turkish side that the new era will be one that Turkish-American relations would develop on the economic front.<sup>147</sup> However in the lack of a clear definition of what a “model” entails or what does “strategic” encompass on the articulation of interests by and within both parties the expectation in this direction does seem to be lame. Tellingly it quickly became apparent by the Turkey’s behavior ( not by the US).

Almost six months after the initial decoration of the new mode of partnership the process seemed to have frozen. Just before President Obama’s speech on the Armenian genocide claims in April 2010, and after a positive vote in the House Committee on Foreign Relations pushing for a bill recognizing the claims, Turkish Minister of Industry and Commerce, answering to questions from the press, said that “[the Committee’s] decision unavoidably made us, somehow, push the brakes. We will see the developments. We will decide what to do after April 24<sup>th</sup> [Obama’s speech].”<sup>148</sup> AKP’s Foreign Relations Coordinator Suat Kınıkloğlu has commented that if the “[house] bill is passed into a law the US will no longer be able to be a superpower”.<sup>149</sup> To be sure in part these reactions were for soothing the domestic public opinion.<sup>150</sup> However there is nothing in this suggestion that contradicts the earlier comment on the proximity of processes of interest articulation.

<sup>144</sup> Çandar, Cengiz: “Barack Hussein Obama: Dürüst, Dost, Duyarlı [Barack Hussein Obama: Honest, Friendly, Sensitive”, *Hürriyet*, 7 Nisan 2009 at

<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?%20id=11381721&yazarid=215>.

<sup>145</sup> Kılıç, Gülay: “Sedat: Laçiner: ABD ile Model Ortaklığın İçi Dolmalı [Model Partnership with the USA should be Contextualized”, *USAK.com*, 15 December 2009 at <http://www.usak.org.tr/makale.asp?id=1193>.

<sup>146</sup> “Erdoğan ve Obama Model Ortaklık ile ‘eşitler arası’ yeni bir ilişki kurdu”, *Star*, 9 December 2009.

<sup>147</sup> Davutoğlu also has remarked that the current state of Turkish-US trade and economic relations were unacceptable. Davutoğlu, “Speech...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>148</sup> “ABD ile model ortaklık Obama’nın 24 Nisan konuşmasını bekliyor [The model partnership with the USA on hold until Obama’s April 24<sup>th</sup> Speech]”, *Star*, 14 Mart 2010.

<sup>149</sup> “Suat Kınıkloğlu: Tasarı Yasalarsa ABD Artık Süper Güç Olamaz [If the Bill Passes into a Law the USA Will No Longer Be Able to Be A Super Power ”, *TurkishNY*, 2 March 2010, at <http://www.turkishny.com/interviews/40-interview/25232-suat-knklolu-tasar-yasalarsa-abd-artk-super-guc-olmaz>.

<sup>150</sup> As evidenced by the way Erdogan reacted to Obama’s use of the term “Meds Yeghern“ (Great Calamity) in his April 24, 2010 Armenian Remembrance Day speech. “Erdoğan’dan Obama’nın 24 Nisan Açıklamasına Olumlu Tepki,[Positive Reaction From Erdogan to Obama’s Announcement of 24<sup>th</sup> April], VOANews.ComTürkçe, 25 April 2010, at

<http://www1voanews.com/turkish/news/Erdoandan-Obamann-24-Nisan-Acklamasna-Olumlu-Tepki-92050334.html>.

Erdoğan said “our sensitivities were taken into consideration” and accused the opposition for being disillusioned with the result and calling that it was to the oppositions detriment that Obama has made such an announcement” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took an entirely different line by declaring Obama’s words “wrong and one-sided”. It is interesting to compare the reaction from Davutoglu’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the same subject which can either be taken as a sign of the division between the Erdogan led “pragmatist and opportunist group” and Gül led “moralists and idealists” within the AKP leadership. See Yavuz, *op. cit.*, p. 233.or as yet another example of what AKP’s opposition calls the dual track public diplomacy –read disinformation- campaign from AKP to cover its foreign policy blunders. See, “ABD Başkanı Obama Tarafından Yapılan Açıklama Hk. [Regarding the Speech by President Obama]”, T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, no: 90, 24 April 2010, at [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-90\\_-24-nisan-2010\\_-abd-baskani-obama-tarafindan-yapilan-aciklama-k\\_.tr.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-90_-24-nisan-2010_-abd-baskani-obama-tarafindan-yapilan-aciklama-k_.tr.mfa). As a matter of fact, Obama’s utilization of the concept and the whole outlook of the speech



There are also a wide array of issues that will not be addressed here in detail ranging from AKP's denial of the human tragedy in Sudanese Darfur, on the grounds that, in Erdoğan's words "it is impossible that anyone belonging to the religion of Islam that we belong may commit genocide,"<sup>151</sup> to the somehow ambiguous issue<sup>152</sup> of Iran's nuclear program that, again according to Erdoğan, the entire intelligence on it, can be called "rumors,"<sup>153</sup> All this represent critical differences in the interests and hence foreign policies of Turkey and US.

## **6. Turkish – American Relations: Strategic Framework and Limitations**

As the effects and consequences of 9/11 hit to the international system the "rent" that Turkey enjoyed with her geostrategic importance has been transformed. This has fit well with the AKP's self image as well as its political strategy. The civilizational outlook of the new conflict suddenly put great emphasis on Turkey's multi-faceted identity. A European state with most of its landmass in Asia, traditionally looking to West but with deep cultural roots in the East, a predominantly Muslim state with a secular regime and a multitude of sects. Turkey was now important not only for its geopolitical position, as was the case during Cold War, but it is also the predominantly Muslim democracy with secular institutions and governed by a, self defining, conservative democrat government which came to power through elections. The last one of these aspects seems to be especially important given the aforementioned civilizational outlook of the post-9/11 conflicts and tensions.<sup>154</sup> This civilizational outlook

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*might be said to include almost all Armenian demands except using the g-word. For the full text of Obama's speech see Obama, Barak H.: "Statement of President Barack Obama on Armenian Remembrance Day", The White House, 24 April 2010 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-barack-obama-armenian-remembrance-day>. This also was not a surprise given the fact that while visiting Turkey Obama, despite repeated questions from the Turkish press, has said that he didn't change his position on the issue. See "Joint Press Availability...", op. cit.*

<sup>151</sup> "Erdoğan'a göre Darfur'da Soykırım Yok! [According to Erdogan There is No Genocide in Darfur!]", *CNNTurk.com*, 9 November 2009, at [http://www.cnnurk.com/2009/turkiye/11/08/erdogana.gore.darfurda\\_soykirim.yok/550901.0/index.html](http://www.cnnurk.com/2009/turkiye/11/08/erdogana.gore.darfurda_soykirim.yok/550901.0/index.html).

<sup>152</sup> I call the situation ambiguous as in private many high ranking Turkish diplomats and even members of AKP –though ones who seem to be less identity oriented- voice their concerns on Iran's nuclear program and its potential effects on Turkey's foreign policy. Especially when one thinks about AKP's claim that Turkey is on its way to becoming a regional power with global influence a nuclear Iran should rationally be considered a hindrance. It might be said to be the case that AKP is merely following through the steps of Turkish governments before it. On the issues relating to Iran AKP's predecessors have always took a very cautious attitude and frequently choose to neglect the potential threats and risks Iran has posed to Turkey. This was largely due to the energy trade and commercial ties between the two countries which Turkish decision makers have traditionally put a high premium on. It should also be remembered that Iran's hydrocarbon resources, especially natural gas is strategically very important for Turkey's aspirations of becoming a transit and terminal country, a hub in world energy equation. This was the case during the 1990s onwards. Nevertheless Erdogan's attitude is hailed in Iran, see "Turkey: Iran's Nuclear Programme 'Solely Cvilian'", *Iran Affairs*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at [http://www.iranaffairs.com/iran\\_affairs/2010/03/index.html](http://www.iranaffairs.com/iran_affairs/2010/03/index.html).

<sup>153</sup> Özel, Soli: "Başarının Riskleri [The Risks of Success], *Haber Turk*, 19 April 2010 Erdogan attributed these words while giving an interview to CNN's Christian Amanpour while attending the Nuclear Security Summit in the US.

<sup>154</sup> Obviously when the civilizational aspect, or the probability of post-9/11 conflict being defined in terms of civilizations, is revoked the work that is referred to whether implicitly or explicitly is the *Clash of Civilizations* of the late Harvard Professor Samuel Huntington. Huntington, Samuel P. (1997): *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York, Touchstone. The comment that Huntington's forcefully argued and equally controversial thesis was criticized mainly "out of fear that it may fuel the conflict" and the efforts to





was, and still is something that all the actors persistently denied. Though looking at the tone of the debate and the arguments developed in open denial and refutation of this aspect of post-9/11, one can wonder whether there is a genuine consensual belief on the nature of the situation not related to civilizational fault lines. In short, these kinds of generalizations may fuel the conflict.

These fears, somehow logically, not only put a premium on Turkey's importance for the West and the US but also increased the value-added of AKP's proposition that it and only it represented an exclusive, genuine wisdom that promised a chance for reconciliation by playing the role of a counselor, mediator or facilitator between the West and the Islamic rest, derived from the Ottoman past that it is the rightful heir of. Following on this argument AKP did not hesitate much before assuming, or at least tacitly accepting,<sup>155</sup> the role of leader of the now infamous Greater Middle East Project and then transforming this somehow dubious role by becoming, with Spain, the co-sponsor of *The Alliance of Civilizations* initiative on 13 June 2005, that was announced by the then Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan in July 2005.<sup>156</sup> Following the appointment of State Minister Mehmet Aydın by Secretary General Annan to the position of Co-chair<sup>157</sup> it was commented in the Turkish press that this marked "a new perspective for Turkish foreign policy" as "Ankara which, since the establishment of the Republic pursued a foreign policy that was oriented towards the West and kept itself distant from the Islamic countries has by including itself in this initiative, in a way assumed the role of the voice of the Muslim World."<sup>158</sup> Indicative of an expectation in AKP that this initiative would also add up to the influence of Turkey, hence increasing the credibility of AKP's foreign policy and respectability at home and abroad, Erdoğan has not shied away from frequently using the issue as a sign of the renewed prestige that AKP made possible.<sup>159</sup>

Actually the way that President Obama's visit was reacted by the AKP circles can also be understood within the context of solidifying this image of prestige inside and outside the country. A report prepared for the pro-government think-tank SETA announces that, "[Obama's] visit contributed to Turkey's soft power image on the international stage." However, reflective of the need to define and contextualize the new mode of relations the

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strengthen a civilizational dialogue may in themselves be interpreted as an indication more of denial than forceful refutation. Amidst the early havoc of 9/11 Huntington seems to be careful not to "fuel" the risk by drawing attention to the fine tunes in his argument but he seemed to have no reason whatsoever to reject and contradict his earlier "prophecies". Steinberger, Michael, "So, are civilizations at war?", *The Observer*. For an equally forceful critique of Huntington's thesis see Said, Edward W.: "The Clash of Ignorance", *The Nation*, vol.273, no. 12, (21 October 2001).

<sup>155</sup> See Uzgel, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

<sup>156</sup> José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, President of the Government of Spain, called for the creation of the Alliance of Civilizations at the General Assembly meeting on 21 September 2004. See <http://www.unaoc.org>.

<sup>157</sup> "Secretary-General Announces Composition of High-Level Group for Alliance of Civilizations", *United Nations, Secretary-General SG/SM/10073/Rev.1\**, (02/09/2005), at [http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sgsm\\_10073\\_doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sgsm_10073_doc.htm).

<sup>158</sup> Balcı, Ali: "Medeniyetler İttifakı ve AKP [Alliance of Civilizations and AKP]", *Radikal*, 12 November 2006.

<sup>159</sup> Indicative of his position concerning the issue Erdoğan vowed that if the European Union (EU) doesn't accept Turkey as a member that would be EU's loss "Because Turkey represent the Islamic world of 1,5 billion, we are carrying out the position of the co-chair of Alliance of civilizations". "Biz Medeniyetler İttifakı'nın Eş Başkanıyız", *Haberiniz*, 4 September 2009, at

[http://www.haberiniz.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3122:qchp-gelmezse-biz-onlara-giderizq&catid=137:politika&Itemid=214](http://www.haberiniz.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3122:qchp-gelmezse-biz-onlara-giderizq&catid=137:politika&Itemid=214). The issue is an interesting one to observe as while participating in such an initiative as kind of an inter-nuncio Erdoğan clearly places himself as the leader of one side – a position that is not categorically unifying. Also it should not be overlooked that the value of the position as a factor of influence ironically is dependent on holding the rift between the "civilizations."



analyst goes on to say that “there is a need to constitute a solid base for Obama’s notion of model partnership in order to secure long-term support and cooperation on the ground from the US administration.” The need is critical because “the challenge is to utilize converging regional and international interests between Turkey and the US in the current era in order to create a win-win situation for all sides.”<sup>160</sup>

Actually one can’t help to wonder how a relationship that is, in Gül’s words I quoted earlier, “above and beyond everything else” may suffer from such a seemingly structural deficiency. For some the answer lies in the fact that the American side has for a long period of time realized the importance of having an American confirmation carried for Turkey’s governments and have been generously scattered the qualitative adjectives for labeling the relations -the last example being the “Model Partnership”. However the reality may be lying in the fact that Gordon underlined. The black and white world of the Cold War provided the parties with a solid rationale for developing and maintaining relations. Especially, for Turkey with its foreign policy being formulated on the traditional pillars of status-quo preservation, westernization and security, the justification was almost too easy to infer. Under those circumstances the US, with its unchallenged position of leadership of the western world and military might, was the natural signpost to watch. The 1990s were not so certain. They were somehow lost for Turkey as most of the decade was spent in pursuit of the formulation of the right strategy for fighting its two and a half wars –with the pressure of shouldering all the social, political and economic costs attached to such an endeavor. The US on the other hand was still able to toy around the idea of the unilateral moment that it enjoyed. Again at the time, for Turkey there was hardly ever any alternative other than getting along with what some called the hegemon of the international system given the necessities and priorities shaping around the “two and a half wars.

Today, these days are over. AKP’s vision of Turkey becoming a central country, not only in its region but in a way that enables it to utilize its potential to play a central role within the transatlantic community, has already become the actively pursued policy line.<sup>161</sup> Although the roots of this policy have been clearly traceable in the late 1990s, it would not be wrong to say that AKP has provided it with the mantel of a grandiose discourse. However, the million dollar question concerning Turkish-American relations remain. Does the AKP see its relations with the West, and particularly with the US, in instrumental/ opportunistic terms? If it is so, to what extent? What is the US vision concerning Turkey’s role in US’s policies in Turkey’s environs? The natural follow up of which is, where does AKP stand *vis a vis* these policies?

## 7. Games of Strategy rather than Partnership?

A strategic partnership can be understood as a tool used by a powerful state, or states, to maximize its “political, economic, and military dominance in the international system...[as] a means of shaping the international environment to suit [its/their] vital interests”.<sup>162</sup> It would

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<sup>160</sup> Aras, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>161</sup> For Turkey being a “central country” rather than a “bridge” see Davutoğlu, Ahmet: “Türkiye merkez ülke olmalı [Turkey should become a central country], *Radikal*, 26 February 2004. For the Turkish word “*merkez*”, I am suggesting using the concept of “central” instead of “pivotal” as it is sometimes preferred. This is because of my understanding that what Davutoğlu refers to is an absolute center of gravity rather than a pivot position within a regional framework.

<sup>162</sup> Kay, Sean: “What is a strategic partnership?”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 47, no. 3 (May/June 2000), p. 16.



not be wrong to say that the strategic partnership or cooperation between Turkey and US has long been understood by American decision-makers in line with this framework. However, Turkey's changing regional environment, the challenges and opportunities this change brings, coupled by Turkey's political transformation, in terms of the changing of ruling elites has seriously hindered the US's ability to sustain this situation. The events following 9/11 also has seriously damaged the US's options in effectively pursuing a traditional "carrots and sticks" policy that would encourage compliance with US interest while discouraging defiance. The invasion of Iraq has dented US claims to legitimacy to an extent that even a President such as Obama, who embodies so much of the long envied American Dream, is finding not easy to repair. Under the current circumstances the Obama administration's primary pursuit is damage control: To get the US troops in Iraq back; to evacuate Afghanistan in a foreseeable future with some kind of a success story; to repair the US economy, as well as attending to major foreign policy agendas of the US like WMD, Iran, Russia, China. It seems like the US will not be able to flex its muscles to the extent that it has done within the past decade before this administration or some other future one can win the battle for "hearts and minds" at home. This leaves Obama administration, as it would have any other administration, with no other choice but play a game of strategy where multilateral institutions are utilized whenever possible and *ad hoc* alliances, alliances of choice comprised of the willing, are vital. America at this point is in need of partners that could provide additional legitimacy and lever. Europe, it seems safe to assume, is neither willing nor able to act, at least would not choose to act beyond the framework of multilateral institutions. So it is a viable alternative for the US to begin to understand the concept of Strategic Partnership in terms of "a close relationship between two states that seek mutual gains but whose interest may be competitive rather than shared."<sup>163</sup> Still one has to realize that the "Model Partnership" resonates much more in tune with an emphasis on bilateral relations which in essence is still a convenient recipe for leveraging the influence of the stronger side in the equation –in this case the US.

On the other hand for the AKP, as assertive as its vision might be, the constraints of Turkey being a middle-size/ intermediate, state/ power applies. However the AKP, even though it resorts to typical middle-size state strategies in pursuing its foreign policy agenda<sup>164</sup> in terms of, especially, its multilateralist behavior,<sup>165</sup> has a professed grand agenda. In an undisclosed report entitled "The Turkey Project" AKP is reported to argue that the Party "believes that Turkey should fill in the power vacuum in the Middle East created by the fall of the Ottoman Empire... [by becoming] a major intervening actor" as this is the only solution to Turkey's bilateral and domestic problems and, since "there is no other way to bring peace and stability to the region".<sup>166</sup> It will be interesting to see how AKP integrates the Ottoman heritage of statecraft which is by definition imperialistic, with the cooperative, multilateral, benign order building policy it says Turkey is pursuing. This seems to be an inherent incoherence that AKP's decision-makers will have to cope with.

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<sup>163</sup> Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>164</sup> On mid-size states' multilateralist behavior in foreign policy see Hurrell, Andrew; Cooper, Andrew F.; González González, Guadalupe; Ubiraci; Sennes, Ricardo and Sitaraman, Srin: "Paths to Power: Foreign Policy Strategies of Intermediate States", *Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Latin American Program*, no. 244, Washington D.C. (2000); Daniel, Femes (2007): *Emerging Middle Powers' Soft Balancing Strategy: State and Perspectives of the IBSA Dialogue Forum*, Hamburg, German Institute of Global and Area Studies Working Paper.

<sup>165</sup> Raising it to the level of a principle, Davutoglu, "Speech ...", *op. cit.*

<sup>166</sup> Yavuz, *op. cit.*, p. 229.



It is hard to make a crystal clear comment on the true nature of AKP's foreign policy and the strategy it pursues.<sup>167</sup> This is largely because of the seeming inconsistencies between the discourse and practice as well as incoherence between the professed strategies and their declared targets. If one does not hold a categorical belief in AKP being a US project<sup>168</sup> or AKP being a mere buttress of US's policies in the Middle East<sup>169</sup> one thing seems to be sure, the AKP does not see itself in a position to "say yes to US originated policy choices".<sup>170</sup> However, there again appears to be another contradiction. A very sympathetic observer of AKP policies contends that, "the Party's leadership has shown utmost importance to continue and whenever the opportunity arises further develop friendly relations with the USA"<sup>171</sup> However it will be over stretching to claim that it is bandwagoning with the western –mainly US- interests even though on repeated occasions, as has been widely referred in this study, Davutoğlu has clearly urged the US and the West to work with Turkey, or Erdoğan's top advisers urging the US "to use the men".<sup>172</sup> Also, Davutoğlu, whenever possible, outlines how the West should act with Turkey. A careful reading of his words indicates that this is more an invitation to his counterparts to bandwagon with Turkey, not the other way around. While doing that, it is obvious that AKP is, at least for now, however somehow stubborn on a range of issues, most important of which happens to be the nuclear program of Iran - is not in defiance. Neither it's balancing in the classical Waltian sense –i.e. openly allying itself with powers that are in open confrontation, hot or cold, with the interests of the West and the US.<sup>173</sup>

One should not forget that Turkey is said to have "one of the most complex foreign policy situations in the world."<sup>174</sup> It might be said that a degree of inconsistency has been created as a result of pressing agendas stemming out of this situation. Davutoğlu compared Turkey's situation to that of a "chess player".<sup>175</sup> Yet it is possible to suggest a simpler answer: AKP is omnibalancing in an idiosyncratic way. That is, in Steven R. Davids's terminology, as the primary motivation of the government is to stay in power, it not only tries to deter the external threats but also uses the foreign policy to keep the domestic contenders in check. While doing that it also tries to mobilize the foreign economic resources to create and ensure

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<sup>167</sup> The theoretical framework used here is adopted from; David, Steven R.: "Explaining Third World Alignments" *World Politics*, vol. 43, no. 2 (January 1991), pp. 233-256; Barnett, Michael and Levy, Jack S.: "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: Case of Egypt, 1962-73", *International Organization*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 369-395; Walt, Stephen M. (1987): *Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press; Rothstein, Robert L. (1968): *Alliances and Small Powers*, New York and London, Columbia University Press; Hinnebusch, Raymond: "Introduction: The Analytical Framework" in Hinnebusch, Raymond and Ehteshami, Anoushiravan (eds.) (2002): *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 1 – 27.

<sup>168</sup> Edelman, *op. cit.*, Yanardağ, *op. cit.*

<sup>169</sup> Uzgel, *op. cit.*

<sup>170</sup> Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>171</sup> Kardaş, Şaban: "Türkiye ve Irak Krizi: Kimlikle Çıkar Arasında AKP, [Turkey and The Iraq Crisis: AKP Between Identity and Interest] in Yavuz Hakan (ed.) (2010): *AK Parti: Toplumsal Değişimin Yeni Aktörleri [AK Party: The New Agents of Societal Change]*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul, p. 362. The volume is first published by the University of Utah Press in 2006 under the title *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and AK Party*.

<sup>172</sup> See foot note 100 above.

<sup>173</sup> It can be said today that in the sense of forming a security block the West and the US can't be assumed and treated as a single entity. To be sure on the economic interests seem to diverge more. However even there, a multiplicity of issues, starting from the Euro's potential challenge to US Dollars international reserve currency status makes relations somehow uneasy. Burns, Robert: "US and Europe rethink role of Cold War alliance", *The Associated Press* (April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010), at [http://www.gopusa.com/news/2010/april/0421\\_natop.shtml](http://www.gopusa.com/news/2010/april/0421_natop.shtml).

<sup>174</sup> Rubin, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> "[T]urkey's foreign policy vision was structured on planning the whole experience like a game of chess and to move the right piece with the correct timing." Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez...", *op. cit.*





political popularity. The question asked is not “how does this policy affect states power”<sup>176</sup> but, “how does this policy affect *probability* of *my* remaining in power?” In theory the leaders tend to ask, “which outside power is most likely to protect *me* from the internal and external threats (as well as combinations of both) that I face” rather than seeking a viable ally to help protect the state against external threats.<sup>177</sup>

If one finds the idea that AKP uses foreign policy both to transform the country and delegitimize its opposition and hence amplifying its supporters’ influence by increasing their economic power<sup>178</sup> compelling, then omnibalancing becomes a reasonable explanation of AKP’s foreign policy agenda. Intrinsically, AKP seems to be soft-balancing externally, while hard-balancing domestically. Furthermore the zero-problems with neighbors policy that is often criticized as being idealistic and moralistic also becomes a quite rational policy choice. As it means desecuritization of Turkey’s foreign policy, the direct domestic effect of zero-problems policy is to decrease the Turkish Armed Forces’ clout on politics. As that position is legitimized with the discourse of Turkey being surrounded by hostile neighbors, as much as the self-image of the Army that is shared by a majority, of being the driving force and the guardian of Kemalist revolutions, any move that leads to the questioning of the need of Turkey to sustain the presence of a sizable Army directly decreases the Army’s weight in domestic political balances. In a hostile neighborhood it would be substantially harder to mobilize and convince the public that the Army has become an obstacle on the way to democratization of the country more than it is an asset - as that has been the experience in the past.<sup>179</sup> As such, despite the potential risks that such a policy entails –as the probability of having to side with one of the parties in a crisis situation that goes out of control– it is somehow worth the risk as it guarantees a domestic, as well as an international, *strategic depth*.

As Yavuz says, as Turkey becomes more democratic the foreign policy will also be more and more determined “by the identity of the elected representatives.”<sup>180</sup> This is a phenomenon that we can observe more and more after the landscape victory of the AKP in 2007. Feeling more secure against the domestic threat and overcoming its February 28<sup>th</sup> Syndrome on the grounds of well earned self-confidence through omnibalancing, the Party has become more identity oriented in its foreign policy.<sup>181</sup> In a way, it might be said that AKP has been embarked on a different kind of westernization, trying to get the better part of “Afro-Eurasia”, as Davutoğlu calls it, under Turkish influence.

Looming at the background are three risks: Firstly, there is the intellectual risk stemming from the coherence, or lack of it, of Davutoğlu’s vision. Davutoğlu in essence is building a “grand strategy” on a geopolitical interpretation of history that is inspired by *realpolitik* and of the international system. However on these foundations he tries to elaborately relocate a “principled” functionalist / neo-liberal institutionalist rhetoric. Then he seems to try to run the policy on that structure. Given this situation, his theoretical stance, a frequent subject of debate amongst Turkish academicians, can conveniently be labeled as *pragmatic eclecticism* more than anything else. Under the circumstances there is enough

<sup>176</sup> David, *op.cit.*, p. 238 from Morgenthau, Hans and Thompson, Kenneth (1985): *Politics Among Nations*, VI<sup>th</sup> Ed., New York, Alfred Knopf, p. 14 foot note 3.

<sup>177</sup> Emphasis in the original. *Ibid.*, pp. 235 - 236 and, Hinnebusch, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>178</sup> For compelling arguments on this contention see Yavuz, “Secularism...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 - 204 and, Uzgel, *op.cit.*, pp 366 - 368.

<sup>179</sup> This easily applies to the Kurdish and Armenian issues as well as the approach to Iran.

<sup>180</sup> Yavuz, “Secularism...”, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

<sup>181</sup> See in this volume Tür, Özlem: “Turkish-Syrian Relations –Where are we going?”.



reason to point out to the probability of a moment of truth where he has to really choose between a “conscientious constraint” and interests,<sup>182</sup> risking to lose a good amount of credibility in the process when one consider how much capital AKP has spent on building this beautiful looking but not that solid structure of foreign policy. The second risk stems from the objective conditions surrounding the level of power that Turkey can yield for this ambitious task. Starting from the vulnerabilities of its economy to the sheer lack of enough Foreign Ministry experts and personnel there are a series of inadequacies. AKP also lacks the support of the know-how of large parts of bureaucratic state, some pacified by the AKP itself, as this asks for a level of coherence with the traditional decision making elites of developing such an independent influence. In the end this is important.<sup>183</sup> Since 2007 AKP seems to overcome that obstacle to an extent but nevertheless it still seems to be far off hitting the base. Thirdly, as it is the case in any *game of strategy*, there is the factor of moves of the other parties involved. Not only on the domestic level, about which much has been said in the preceding pages but, also, on international level. There is small probability that the AKP could become a one way street. Answering to a question in a panel on Turkish foreign policy, Ali Bulaç, an influential intellectual of the Islamist circles, said; “Turkey is blocking the system... It has to change itself. Whoever pledges to realize that change will be in government. Today AKP is trying to do that. If they fail they will be replaced by somebody else who delivers.”<sup>184</sup> Moreover; “attempting to become [even] a major regional power while the world’s greatest power is focused on your every move, to say the least, difficult.”<sup>185</sup> The natural consequence is that any move targeted to become a major influence should somehow involve co-opting the US which inevitably involves bandwagoning.

However cracking under multi-level pressures, -growing skepticism about the AKP both in the EU and US, the influence that the deterioration of relations with Israel had on the influential Jewish Lobby in Washington D.C., the increasing voices of concern over the countries inner divisions- there seems to be a belief in the US that the “US needs Turkey for its Middle East agenda.”<sup>186</sup> However as the words speak for themselves the US understanding of Turkey is far from stretching all over “Afro-Eurasia” but rather limited to the identity that AKP is vigorously pushing. To give another more telling example, in a Senate Committee on Armed Services Hearing on *Current and Future Worldwide Threats To The National Security Of The United States*, held in March 2009, Turkey has been mentioned ten times, seven of

<sup>182</sup> In reality such a moment came when the atrocities of Sudan leader al-Bashir were known. However, by that time the “identity cloak” worked for Davutoglu and AKP. A near miss nevertheless.

<sup>183</sup> As “ states foreign-policy (or ideology) can be thought of as a durable formula or tradition that incorporates experience by state elites in balancing and reconciling such elements as economic needs, geopolitical imperatives, domestic opinion, and state capabilities.” Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, p.15. As such it can be said to display continuity that makes it more resilient in the face of events.

<sup>184</sup> Bulaç, Ali: “Ortadoğu Türkiye için Neden Önemlidir? [Why is the Middle East Important for Turkey?]”, *Yirmi Birinci Yüzyıl Tür Dış Politikasının Değişen Parametreleri* [Changing Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Twenty First Century], *Diplomasi Forum- 2010*, İstanbul, ITO (6 May 2010).

<sup>185</sup> Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Ironically Friedman’s argument was aimed at explaining Iran’s position *vis a vis* US.

<sup>186</sup> Katulis, Brian: ““US Needs Turkey for its Middle East Agenda.”, *Atlantic-Community.org* (November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009) at

[http://www.atlanticcommunity.org/index/articles/view/The\\_US\\_needs\\_Turkey\\_for\\_its\\_Middle\\_East\\_Agenda](http://www.atlanticcommunity.org/index/articles/view/The_US_needs_Turkey_for_its_Middle_East_Agenda).

Though, compared with an earlier report, significant of the events that followed its release, co-authored by the same analyst the scope of the relations seem to be limited more on Iraq then Iran and Arab-Israelis conflict. See Boyer, Spencer P. and Katulis, Brian: “The Neglected Alliance: Restoring US-Turkish Relations to Meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges”, *Center for American Progress*, Washington, D.C., (December 2008). For other examples see Werz, Michael: “Turkey’s Democratic Steps Have A Lot in Common with US Interests”, *Today’s Zaman*, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009.



which was within the context of either Iraq or Kurdish terror.<sup>187</sup> Second, Turkey with its limited resources might find it very difficult to deliver on such an over-stretching call. Third, in the face of internal divisions of Turkey getting bitter and bitter, it will be hard to achieve “peace on earth” before it achieves “peace at home”.<sup>188</sup> In the end the statement quoted above may just be reduced to a myth as was the case with the belief that “US can’t go it alone without Turkey on board in Iraq.”

How long will Turkey go on omnibalancing, especially the soft-balancing attitude towards the US and, in part, under somewhat different dynamics the EU? Werz in a way follows on that question when saying, “[I]t remains an open question if and when the AKP government will decide to make Turkey into a real stakeholder in the region rather than simply maintain its new role as a facilitator.” Then he goes on for another remark, “the latter may not be enough for the United States.”<sup>189</sup>

## **8. Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier Davutoğlu’s approach seems in essence to be one of *pragmatic eclecticism*. Under this approach the AKP seems to bandwagon with the US on many issues of significance and promises on its ability to be able to do more. However if AKP is omnibalancing under the threat it perceives from the traditional decision making elites within the framework elaborated by David then it may well be the case that the omnibalancing by soft balancing in this case might as well look like bandwagoning with the dominant power in what is for all practical reasons still a unipolar world. The distinction, Yavuz noted,<sup>190</sup> amongst AKP decision makers as the moralists and pragmatics might lose its relevance under such an explanation as they all become actors, in final analysis, motivated by a shared pious as well as an imperial identity –namely Ottoman Islamic. This approach could be a position that the US finds for the time being accommodating and acceptable. This is because it, first, promises much needed backing by a major Muslim country, accompanied with solid messages of support for most US policies. Second, because, as mentioned earlier it comes in a time that the US administration is under heavy pressure from all fronts concerning the economy and foreign policy, the latter of which being largely in connection with the Muslim world. Third, a brief analysis of the US foreign policy in the Middle East or elsewhere clearly indicates that the US is as pragmatic in its foreign policy as any other power despite the rhetoric of values that often accompany the practice.<sup>191</sup> However, the reverse westernization that was mentioned earlier, with its focus on becoming as powerful as the West once successful might definitely provide ample incentive for transforming soft balancing to outright defiance. For the US, whose national interests in Turkey’s region, which by no means constitute the geographical limit for AKP’s quest for influence, might be summarized as, “having unfettered access to oil, do away with anti-American groups, promote the interests of Israel and prevent any Middle Eastern country from evolving into a regional hegemon to

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<sup>187</sup> “Current and Future Worldwide Threats To The National Security Of The United States”, Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, *United States Senate, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, First Session*, Washington, D.C., Government printing Office (March 10, 2009).

<sup>188</sup> It still remains, even perhaps more so then the time this comment was made that “The trouble with Turkey is still “conflicting visions of the county’s future character and external role”. Lesser, “Beyond ‘Bridge...”, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

<sup>189</sup> Werz, “The New...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>190</sup> See foot note 148 above.

<sup>191</sup> Such a pragmatic continuity was traced and analyzed above.



challenge US and/ or Israeli domination in the region,”<sup>192</sup> such defiance will be, to say the least, problematic.

Seemingly outside of the debate on “Model Partnership” as term used to define the Turkish-US relations, there is also the larger issue of Turkey playing the role “Model” for the countries that it has religious, cultural or ethnic ties with. This issue however somehow becomes relevant when the definition of “Model” as used in the term “Model Partnership” is interpreted as meaning a prototype. Under the prevailing conditions of the day it may well look plausible to have Turkey play as a *civilizational arbitrator*. This has definitely been an idea that the US toyed with for some time now. A model for the rest of the Muslim world as pre-dominantly Muslim country, run by moderated Islamists as *Muslim Democrats*.<sup>193</sup> As such the country led by AKP might serve as an agent of transformation in Islam. However while embracing that approach one has to also remember the immediate years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the time many in Turkey and around the world couldn’t help but see a great potential in Turkey being a model for the ex-Soviet Central Asian Turkic Republics. The argument was that Turkey being the secular Islamic society, run by a democracy with a functioning free market system –that it very recently transformed its economy to- was the ideal model for the so called “Istans”. However, the constraints that are in large part still looming today were casting a long shadow on Turkey’s prospects of becoming “Turkic” model” at that time too. That experience resulted in disillusionment not only because Turkey lacked the necessary resources to run the distance but, also because Turkey’s other identities were not able to be very much effectively mobilized eager to support “that” cause. Today, the other half of Turkey’s *Janus* like identities is not very much eager, if not outright against, to be mobilized for the cause of the “model Islamic country”. That is a considerable problem given the fact that in the 1990s there was at least no fragmentation comparable to the current one hanging over the society like the sword of Damocles. While Turkey’s competing but unified identities do fight for its soul they do drag each other away from going into a single consensual direction. The trouble for Turkey is much in unifying these identities in one soul rather than deciding a winner over its consciousness.

There is no doubt that Turkey and US can’t risk letting each other go their own ways in the foreseeable future. Neither there is reason to expect a sudden breakup of the relations. Though the road ahead seems to be one that is downhill rather than the other way around in the absence of a real, contextualized “partnership” that is based on either shared interests, or common values and principles –preferably all-, the relations still carry at least a pragmatic and instrumental value for both sides. There is no question that what Turkey under AKP demands, in addition to the enriched multidimensional content or “comprehensive character”<sup>194</sup> for the relations, that almost all past Turkish governments wanted, is a much more egalitarian relationship with the US.<sup>195</sup> Under the circumstances it may well be the case today that Turkey-U.S “partnership” qualified under any label is just an amiable salutation of a bygone

<sup>192</sup> Yavuz, “Secularism...”, *op. cit.*, p. 238. I should, Express that I am not as sure of the validity of the parts of the analysis concerning Israel under the Obama administration. However they were definitely there at the time of Yavuz’s writing.

<sup>193</sup> For an argument coming from within arguing that “Muslim Democrat” constitutes a more appropriate definition of the AKP then the preferred “Conservative Democrat, see Akdoğan, Yalçın: “Muhafazakar-Demokrat Siyasal Kimliğin Önemi ve Siyasal İslamcılıktan Farkı [The Importance of Conservative Democrat Identity and the Difference with Political Islamism], in Yavuz (ed.), “AK Parti...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 -73.

<sup>194</sup> Davutoğlu voiced this when saying “Nobody should make just one reference to our relations.” See Davutoğlu, “Speech...”, *op. cit.*

<sup>195</sup> It should be said that *égalité* in this case should be understood as one that transcends the theoretical equality of the states enshrined in the UN charter and international law in that it is rested on an equal treatment and respect to the Turkish present demands and interests globally.





past that may be very hard to resurrect in the absence of another Korea or the common threat of an “evil empire.”