

Master Thesis

Problem formulation: Why did Turkish foreign policy strategy in the Middle East
Shift and how has this affected Turkish-Israeli relations?

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Introduction

There is no doubt that Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East and its neighboring regions has changed since the **kemalist**-military elite gradually were replaced by a more Islamic conservative political elite. The gradual shift in Turkish grand strategy and interest not only in the Middle East but in all its neighboring regions including Europe and central Asia, have taken pace since the election of the conservative Islamic party **AKP** led by Recep Tayip Erdogan, in 2002. After 2002, the AKP government pursued a policy of establishing new relations and reviving old ones, particularly with Arab and Islamic countries. The new geopolitical reality of the 21st century gave Turkey the option of reconsidering its strategic priorities and interest, the AKP approach to international politics and its own foreign policy resulted in a more assertive approach, especially in the Middle East (Alsaftawi, 2017,p.2) .

The post-2002 was largely formulated by **Ahmet Davutoglu**, according to Davutoglu Turkey enjoyed what he termed historic and geographical depth. The strategic depth doctrine called for an activist engagement in all regional systems in Turkey's neighborhood. The philosophy of the doctrine came to replace the **kemalist** ideology of the state apparatus, and as a result of Turkish history, its geopolitical location, domestic polarization, and regional and international developments (Murinson, 2006,p.948).

Davutoglu's doctrine worked in various fields of trade, diplomacy, security, and international institutions. The core of his doctrine was to increase Turkey's **soft power** and economic interdependence in its neighboring regions and implement a policy of zero-problems with neighboring states. The doctrine and its soft power approach became popular for the AKP's constituency (Davutoğlu, 2010)

The AKP transformed Turkey's image abroad particularly in the Middle East from being perceived as "regional coercive power" to more benevolent power (Kirişçi, 2009,p.52). The accession talks with the EU further promoted Turkey's soft power capabilities as Turkey was seen as a political and economic role model in which Islamic countries could aspire to. Within this context the EU-reforms Turkey undertook, the success of Turkey to reduce the military's power in domestic politics, achieve economic growth, and build strong state institutions and organization for governance

coupled with its improving relations with its neighbors all together supported the narrative of a changed Turkey (Alsaftawi, 2017, p.3) .

Whether Turkish foreign policy strategy took a soft-power oriented, trade oriented, or a *real* political approach is open for discussion; nevertheless, it is notable that Turkey's relation with Israel has been affected by its new grand strategy¹.

A public political clash between Turkey and Israel erupted, which only intensified from with the 2008 Gaza war, the 2009 Davos crisis, the 2010 low chair incident, and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incidents (Sönmez, 2016, p.3). The fact that economic relation remained stable during the political clash, indicates that Turkey and Israel took a pragmatic approach regarding economic relations (Akgün & Gündoğar, 2013, p. 4-7). At the same time, Turkey also increased its relations with the Palestinians both on a humanitarian and a political level, particularly with Hamas after its election victory in Gaza in 2006. Turkey supported Hamas as a legitimate actor, despite its international isolation, and pushed for Hamas to be engaged regionally and internationally (Benjamin, 2016, p.196), (BBC2).

I argue that Turkey's support of the Palestinians and its growing tension with Israel was part of a broader strategy in its Middle East policy, and that Turkey utilized its support for the Palestinians for domestic and regional purposes. The AKP's own constituency share much more solidarity with the Palestinians, than the Israeli's. They see them as Muslim brothers suffering under an occupying Israeli force. In the Middle East, the Arab public opinion was turning favorable forwards Turkey, as its stance towards Israel helped foster a new perception of Turkey on the Arab streets(Akgün & Gündoğar,2013,p.9), (Altunisik & Çuhadar, 2010, p.375).

The main focus of this thesis is Turkey foreign policy strategy in the Middle East and its relation with Israeli relation from 1990-2017, I argue that Turkey under the AKP initially approached Israel within its line of expanding cooperation, trade, and notably as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however this mediator role was not isolated to only encompass the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also other conflicts in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon(Erdurmaz, 2012,p.54)

¹ According to neoclassical realism, grand strategy refers to "*the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's relations with the outside world... it is future oriented enterprise involving considerations of external threats and opportunities, as well as the specific material, political, and ideological objectives of the state*"(Ripsman et al., 2016)

The AKP intensified and consolidated its power over the economy, civil services, the judiciary, and the media after the third consecutive electoral victory in June 2011, and the start of the Arab Spring in 2011 presented the AKP leadership with new opportunities. They sought to promote their own model of political Islam coupled with liberal capitalism in the Middle East and with Turkey at the focal point of such order.

Davutoglu's perceived the Arab spring as a "normalization of history" meaning that he believed that the events should have happened long time ago, and that the Arab public demands of democracy were legitimate (Cerami, 2013, p.143).

The AKP saw the potential to fulfill its leadership role in the Middle East by supporting the Arab people in their revolutions against dictators (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.69-70). Even though the Arabs were given a higher political priority, and then Israel, economic relations between the two countries remained intact. It is arguable notable that Turkey used the Palestinian cause, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and its own political clash with Israel to strengthen its position externally in the Arab-Muslim states and internally for its own constituency (Alsaftawi, 2017).

However, Turkey's strategy in the Middle East during the Arab spring was miscalculated and led to many faulty policies which created both internal and external chaos for the AKP government. On the domestic scene the fighting with **PKK** resumed, the war in Syria placed Turkey under a heavy refugee burden, and the Islamic State destabilized its border, consequently by increasing its terror attacks in Turkey but also by enabling an environment for future Kurdish separatism in Northern Syria. Moreover, there was growing public dissatisfaction in Turkey over its gradual decline of international prestige, the decline of freedom of expression, the AKP dominance of power, and of the economic situation (Yesilyurt, 2017, p. 74-76)

Turkey's Arab Spring policies had implications for its relations with the EU, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel which worsened from the onset of the Arab Spring.

The growing international isolation of Turkey led to a reassessment of its grand strategy in 2016, Binali Yildirim who replaced Davutoglu as prime minister in 2016 made it clear that Turkey needed to "*increase its friends and decrease its enemies*" (Solaker,).

Literature review

The changes which have taken place in Turkish domestic and international policies have been examined by different scholars, and there is a great debate on how to account for Turkey's domestic and foreign policy turn, with the onset of the AKP government in 2002. Some scholars, such as Cohen, (2016) , Eligür, (2012) ,Uzer, (2013) , and Murinson,(2006) account for Turkish foreign policy, and its changing relations with Israel by emphasizing the role of the AKP's Islamic ideological preferences and Davutoglu's neo-Ottoman philosophy.

These scholars argue that the changes of Turkish foreign policy must be understood by examining the ideology background of the AKP. Eligür,2012 argues "*the new Turkish foreign policy towards the region has been dominated by the AKP government's Islamist vision of a brotherhood of Islamic countries*" and that "*Islamism in Turkish foreign policy clearly manifested itself in the current strained Turkish-Israeli relations*". (p.431). Uzer 2013, emphasizes Turkish cultural and historical affinity towards the Arabs and Islamic countries based on Davutoglu's strategic depth doctrine to account for Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East. Whereas Murinson,2006 examines the prominence of Davutoglu's worldview and philosophical departure in formulating a new Turkish foreign policy strategy in the Middle East.

Cerami, (2013) and Kalin, (2011) use Joseph Nye's concept of soft-power to analyze and explain Turkey's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East. Cerami's, (2013) main argument is that Turkey's soft-power in the Middle East stems from its unique mix of combining Islamism and secularism as a societal model, the secular-Islamic synthesis made it persuasive for the Arab public to aspire to. Nevertheless, the slow domestic reform progress and regional development exposed the limitation of Turkish soft-power and Davutoglu's doctrine.

Whereas Oğuzlu, 2010 accounts for Turkish foreign policy by mainly looking at the international and regional developments, his analyses of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and towards Israel are explained by looking at structural changes. He particularly emphasizes the negative turn in Palestinian-Israeli relations after the second intifada, the post 9/11 international security environment, the rise of Iran, and the Kurdish security dilemma as key systemic variables for Turkey's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East.

However, Tür,(2012) finds that both international and domestic variables are important in accounting for Turkish foreign policy, and subsequently its relations with Israel. Tür combines the AKP's ideological background with international and regional developments to account for the deterioration of relations between Turkey and Israel.

Others have highlighted the role and importance of trade, when explaining the AKP's foreign policy strategy. Kirişçi, (2009) , argues that *“Turkish foreign policy in the last couple of years increasingly has been shaped by economic considerations.”* (p.39).

Ceviköz, (2016) and Murinson, (2008) stress the importance of energy and Turkish desire to become an energy hub, by connecting the European energy market with central Asian and Middle Eastern ones.

The debate over the causal logic of Turkish foreign policy and its relations with Israel are of great interest for many scholars and journalists and within diplomatic circles. Turkish domestic and foreign policy has received a lot of attention due to the development of Turkish-Israeli; Turkish-Palestinian relations; Turkey's EU accession talks; the Kurdish question; the Arab Spring and its involvement in Syria; and the Kemalist versus Islamist domestic power competition.

The political literature on Turkey is immense, and there are different scholars who employ different theoretical approaches to account for Turkey's foreign policy shifts.

The problem formulation of this thesis, *“why did Turkish strategy in the Middle East shift and how has this affected Turkish-Israeli relations”* will be analyzed through the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, more specifically does this thesis use Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell's book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, as theoretical departure in answering the problem statement.

The complexity of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and its relations with Israel necessitates an analysis, which considers domestic, regional and international variables because Turkish foreign policy is deeply intertwined with its domestic realm of politics. Furthermore, does

this thesis have to consider the Palestinian cause as a major factor in shaping Turkish-Israeli relations, as it historically always has played a major role in their relations.

The main advantage neoclassical realism offers in answering the problem statement is that neoclassical realism integrates unit and sub-unit variables such as perception, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions to structural perspectives of neorealism, this allows researcher to more wholly understand states foreign policy strategy (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.65)

I aim at showing how neoclassical realism could explain Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East before, during, and after the Arab Spring. The relation between Israel and Turkey will be examined to fully understand the changes in Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, as an aspiring regional power.

Historical background

Turkey was initially against the **UN partitioning plan for Palestine in 1947** and voted against it. However, two years later, Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize the state of Israel. Turkey's relations with Israel in the initial years were formed out of a fear that Pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism would help facilitate the Soviet Union's stronghold in the Middle East (Arbell, 2014, p.4).

Israel on the other hand envisioned Turkey to become part of its non-Arab "peripheral belt" which would break Israel's isolation and enhance its security in the region, and effectively form a coalition of friendly states including Iran and Ethiopia to counter opposition faced by the Arab block in the region (Arbell, 2014, p.5).

However, the Suez War of 1956 pressured Turkey to downgrade its relations with Israel, as Turkey was pursuing a policy of forming the Baghdad Pact, which would include a coalition of countries such as Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Great Britain essentially to counter Soviet influence. Yet Iraq's vote against Turkey in the UN over Cyprus in December 1957, the establishment of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria in February 1958 and the fall of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in July 1958 made Turkey reconsider Israel's Peripheral alliance. (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.23).

The foundation for relations between Turkey and Israel were laid after a secret meeting between Adnan Menderes the Turkish Prime Minister and Ben Gurion the Israeli Prime Minister in Ankara

in 1958. The deal included campaigns aimed at changing public opinion in both countries, and cooperation of the economic, diplomatic and military sectors. Turkey had thus entered the Peripheral alliance with Israel effectively until the mid 1960s. Furthermore, Turkey came to the conclusion that Israel was effective in providing support for Turkish agendas in Washington, as the Jewish lobby was effective in US politics. Ben Gurion was quoted saying *“Turkey treat us as its mistress. But we have already married and Turkey fails to accept this”* (Arbell, 2014,p.5).

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Turkey began to reconsider its relations with Israel and started to distance itself from Israel and the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal had voiced concern over the growing number of Palestinian refugees in 1965, stating that, *“refugees eliminate the old disagreements between Turkey and the Arab world and lead to close and friendly relations with them”* (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.26).

During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war Turkey made it clear that the United States could not use its military bases to resupply Israel, and in the UN general assembly Turkish Foreign Minister called for *“the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the territories they occupied”* (Bolukbasi, 1999,p.26) Turkish distance from Israel was also expressed when Turkey joined the OIC² as an observer in 1969 in Rabat, Morocco. Two issues were raised at the conference; one was the arson at the al Aqsa mosque and the status of Jerusalem after the Israeli occupation during the 1967 War.

Once again, Turkey refused to allow the Americans use of its airspace and bases to provide support for the Israelis in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. There were even some indications that Turkey allowed the Soviet Union to use Turkish airspace in its support for Egypt and Syria. The Turkish gesture towards the Arabs did not go unnoticed, and when the oil embargo was imposed towards the West Turkey was spared, yet the Turks had to pay a high price for the oil it received(Bolukbasi, 1999, p.26).

The Turkish economic crisis in the 1970s coupled with the oil crisis played a major role in the downgrade of relations between Turkey and Israel. Even though no concrete steps were taken against Israel, Turkey joined the Arabs in rhetoric and declaratory practices against Israel. Turkey’s

² OIC: The organization for Islamic Cooperation is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1969 as response towards growing Israeli presence and influence in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem. It had 24 members states when it was founded, now it consist of 57 Islamic countries including representatives of Muslims living in India and the PLO (Kayaoglu, 2015)

refusal to allow the U.S. to use its airspace and bases as a platform, indicates that Turkey tilted towards the Arab block regarding Israel-Palestine issues.

A number of steps were taken to support the Palestinians during the 1970s. In June, 1975, Turkey recognized the Palestine Liberation **Organization (PLO)** as the sole representation of the Palestinian people, in November, 1975 it supported the UN General Assembly's Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism, and in 1979 it allowed Yasir Arafat to open an PLO office in Ankara (Arbell, 2014, p.5). The relations between Israel and Turkey further deteriorated after the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) passed a law declaring that "Jerusalem united in its entirety is the capital of Israel". (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.27) .

After the bill was passed the Turkish parliament forced the Foreign Minister out of office because of his lack of care about the status of Jerusalem. Relations deteriorated further after the military coup of September 12, 1980, when Turkey recalled its ambassador from Israel and advised Israel to do the same. Relations between the two countries was not lifted to ambassadorial level until December 1991(Yavuz, 1997,p.24) .

The deterioration of Turkey's economy at that time reasoned why Turkey chose to take such harsh actions towards Israel. Between 1979 and 1981 Turkish economy experienced shortages of hard currency, so that it could not even pay for its oil imports bills, which had increased drastically after the Shah in Iran was toppled by the Islamic revolution in 1979. Turkey exported for a total value of \$2.2 billion in 1980 while it imported oil for \$3.5 billion. In search of hard cash Turkey received a \$250 million loan from the Saudis and concluded agreements to increase bilateral trade. In return, Turkey cut off relations with Israel after the Jerusalem Bill was passed in the Knesset(Bolukbasi, 1999.p28).

In light of the economic crisis, Turkey realized that reforms were needed to tackle the issues in the economic sector. Thus, the old import substitution model of the 1960s and 1970s was gradually replaced by liberalization policies, particularly with the onset of Prime Minister Turgut Özal in 1983. The liberalization policies lead to the formation of new an economic class known as the "Anatolian tigers.". These new Anatolian entrepreneurs were largely Islamic oriented however urban- and market-oriented, and close to Özal's motherland's party (Yavuz, 1997, p.25)

These new reforms resulted in growth in Turkish exports which grew from \$2.8 billion in 1978 to almost \$5.7 billion in 1982. The Middle East market had a share of 44% of total export value, whereas the Israeli market for Turkey was less than 1 % (Bolukbasi, 1999,p.31).

- *Reconsidering the Arabs*

Several political developments made Turkey reconsider its pro-Arab stance from the early 1980s, but most notably from the mid 1980s. The lack of support from Arab countries for Turkey's policy towards Cyprus in international institutions such as the UN and OIC angered Turkey. The Arab nations refused to consider the Turkish Cypriot's right to self-determination, and only recognized the Greek Cypriot government as the legitimate government of the whole island.

Another issue which aggravated Turkish Arab relations was the unwillingness of Algeria, Syria and the PLO to support a draft calling on the international isolation of Bulgaria, as a result of the Bulgarian regimes forced assimilations policies, which forced 300,000 Bulgarian Turks to leave the country (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.28).

However, the biggest rift between Turkey and the Arab countries manifested in its relations with Syria and Iraq. The rift came when Turkey announced its Southeast Anatolia project also known as GAP in 1983, the GAP project would irrigate 1.6 million hectares of land by using the water from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

The project created tension between Turkey on the one hand and Syria and Iraq on the other.

Syria and Iraq had demanded a trilateral treaty on the water issues related to the Euphrates and Tigris rivers starting in 1983, however, Turkey refused the trilateral. Syria and Iraq's lobbying effort along with other Arab countries to pressure Turkey to compromise its GAP project, made Turkey anxious of an Arab block aimed at countering Turkish national interest. Unhappy with Turkey's stance on water issues Iraq and Syria reach an agreement in 1990, in which they agreed on sharing the water coming from the two rivers, the agreement stated that Syria would receive 42 % of the water supply from the rivers, while Iraq would receive the rest. The water issue aggravated Turkey's relations with Iraq and Syria, and Iraq refused to renew the Turkish-Iraqi security protocol in 1984, which allowed Turkey to pursue military operation in Northern Iraq against Kurdish forces (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.29).

Turkey had experienced a rise in Kurdish nationalism since the mid-1980s, which had developed to an insurgency in its Southeastern provinces where Kurds formed the majority. The militarization of the conflict with the Kurds, as a result of Turkey's refusal to allow Kurdish identity in the political space transformed the Kurdish issue into a national security issue, aimed at partitioning Turkish territorial integrity (Yavuz, 1997,p.26).

Syria had always supported anti-Turkish groups while it feared Turkish aggression. During the 1970 it granted sanctuary to Turkish Marxist groups and **the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA)**. In the mid 1980s, Syria identified an opportunity to gain some leverage over Turkey by actively supporting the PKK. Syria hosted PKK guerillas and trained them in Syrian bases in Syria and Lebanon. Moreover, Syria granted refuge to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan who lived in Damascus from 1984, and until 1998 the Syrian involvement in PKK affairs frustrated Turks (Bolukbasi, 1999, p.29-30).

- *Reconsidering Israel*

The deterioration of Syrian-Turkish relations and Iraqi-Turkish relations as a result of the GAP project and the Kurdish issue, coupled with the perceived Islamic threat emerging from Iran by the ruling Kemalist elite in the 1980s, made Turkey reconsider Israel as a partner in the region. Turkey had already tried to improve its relations with Israel in 1986 but the move was interrupted by the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising (**intifada**) in 1987 after an Israeli truck driver ran over a group of Palestinian workers. This incident lead to widespread protest against Israeli repression and occupation of Palestine (Alsaftawi, 2017,p.81),(Yavuz, 1997,p.30).

Throughout the intifada, Turkey denounced Israel's behavior towards the Palestinians, as an infliction on international law and the Palestinians' human rights. However, several political developments of domestic, regional, and international character made the political environment more positive for Turkish policy towards Israel. The Turkish military elite had calculated that good relations with Israel would: (1) counter regional support for the PKK and Islamist groups, which were supported primarily by Syria and Iran; (2) to confirm Turkey's Western orientation and secular nature, after the EU initially rejected Turkey's EU membership bid; (3) to gain access to the influential Jewish lobby in Washington;(4) to insure a reliable source of military technology(Yavuz, 1997,p.27) .

Methodology

- *Research question*

The research presented in thesis takes departure in Turkish external and internal policies. The internal aspects of Turkish politics will be examined, particularly by examining the AKP's influence in pushing a paradigm shift on Turkey's domestic political realm, and how this in turn effect also changed Turkish foreign policy towards Israel.

However, neoclassical realism gives primacy to the international structure in which states operate, therefore is it required to examine the international and regional structure of Turkey's political environment (independent variable), and thereafter connect the domestic political process of perception, decision-making, and finally policy implementation, with intervening sub(unit) variables such as: leader's perception, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions.

These sub(unit) intervening variables can alter and modify certain parts of the domestic political process, which is the process of defining and implementing policy responses, or broader foreign policy strategies (dependent variable), according to immediate, or long-time trends of international and regional threats, or opportunities (Ripsman, Taliaferro, & Lobell, 2016, p.45) .

The problem formulation "*why did Turkish political strategy in the Middle East shift and how has this affected Turkish-Israeli relations*" will therefore be analyzed by starting to examine the international and regional political environment of Turkey before, during, and after the Arab Spring, particularly from the electoral victory of the AKP in 2002.

The relations between Turkey and Israel are examined to identify why Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East shifted, and consequently also impacted their relations. It is important to have in mind that the Palestinian cause historically has played a role in shaping their relations. This thesis therefore presents a short historical background of Turkish- Israeli-Palestinian relations. Moreover, this thesis identify the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Palestinian cause, as some of the important systemic variables in shaping Turkey's relations with Israel and the region. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict coupled with other systemic variables such as: the end of the Cold War; the Gulf War; Israeli-Arab peace process,9/11; the 2003 Iraq war; and the Arab uprising have all

influenced Turkish foreign policy. These systemic changes are important to analyze as they affect the international and regional structure for Turkey as a rising regional power, and therefore also its foreign policy strategy in the region.

Neoclassical realism and the broader school of realism, thus identifies the third image of analyses as the independent variable in accounting for foreign policy behavior and international outcomes.

This thesis hence shares ontological perspectives with the school of realism because neoclassical realism likewise conditions that the third image analysis always should precede the second and first image of analysis. A good foreign policy analysis should always ask what effect the international system has on national behavior, because the most powerful generalizable characteristic of a state in international relations is its relative position in the international systems; since the international (sub)system offers opportunity and limits in relation to a state's relative power (Rose, 1998, p.151) .

However, this thesis additionally identifies intervening domestic variables that can influence Turkey's foreign policy responses, according to Turkey's regional and international systemic constraints and opportunities. This is one of the main advantages neoclassical realism theory offers researcher interested in foreign policy and international outcomes because it can link these domestic variables to system structures and therefore more holistically account for foreign policy responses and their international outcomes. The intervening variables mentioned above are informed by the critique of other theoretical approaches such as constructivism and liberalism. The constructivist and liberal critique of realism is the indifference realism gives to variables such as perception, ideas, norms, and domestic and international institutions at influencing foreign policy behavior and international outcomes.

I address these shortcomings by incorporating and identifying Turkish domestic variables such as the AKP leaderships perception and ideology, strategic culture in Turkey that includes norms and ideas, state-society relations, and domestic institutions in the analyses of why Turkish foreign policy strategy and its relations with Israel changed. This is done because neoclassical realism treats the intervening unit-level variables as a transmission belt between systemic constraints/threats and opportunity (independent variable) and foreign policy responses (dependent variable), as a potential source of dysfunctional and non-optimal state responses to systemic incentives presented by the international system and structure (Rose, 1998, p.158)

This thesis aims to explain the applicability of neoclassical realism in explaining Turkish foreign policy strategy in the Middle East, as an aspiring regional power in a time with rapid international and regional structural change, Turkish-Israeli relation will be examined to demonstrate how and why Turkish foreign policy strategy shifted.

- ***Epistemology***

Neoclassical realism uses key aspects from positivism. In other words, there is an observable world from which objective knowledge can be gathered. However, by using neoclassical realism I likewise acknowledge, that the social sciences can make absolute objectivity problematic as it studies human behavior. I use a “soft positivist” epistemology to research my problem formulation. John Stuart Mill’s (1807-73) understandings of causality underpins the scientific method of the social sciences, and particularly in international relations. I can demonstrate the casual relation between an independent variable X (the international system) and the dependent variable Y (policy outcomes) By using one of Mill’s canons of causality. In essence, by using Mill’s *method of agreement* I acknowledge that the independent variable X (the international system and the distribution of power) always is present, whenever the Dependent Y (policy outcomes) are present (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.333).

I use a cause-effect relationship that consider the intervening variables Z (perception, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institution) that can modify or alter the effect X (international system and its power distribution) otherwise would have had on Y (policy response and outcomes).

- ***Data collection***

This thesis has used a wide range of sources in answering the problem statement. Empirical data have been collected from: academic journals; academic articles; think-tanks; books; government sources; news articles; and online debating programs. Empirical data is primarily gathered from secondary sources, but also from primary sources.

- ***Research outline***

The first section in this thesis will provide a brief historical background of Turkish-Israeli relations, and the Palestinian cause as a shaping factor in their relations. The second section will analyze the international and regional structural environment of Turkey, and how a strategic and positive

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relationship between Turkey and Israel developed during the 1990s militarist-kemalist rule. The third section will be divided into three subsections, this section examines and analyzes Turkey's international political environment and the influence of the AKP leadership at changing and adjusting its policies towards the Middle East, and Israel.

The first subsection will start with an analysis of Turkey's regional and international environment from 2002-2008, and how this affected Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, nevertheless are domestic variables such as Davutoglu's doctrine strategic depth, political reforms, state-society relations, and strategic culture explicatory, to fully understand Turkish Middle East policies and its relations with Israel during this period.

The second subsection will examine the period from 2008-2016, this section account for how the 2008 Gaza war and regional developments slowly challenged Davutoglu's soft power doctrine and replaced it with more hard power strategy. Turkey's tension with Israel during this period is analyzed to demonstrate how Turkish-Israeli relations can account for Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, and how this affected their relations.

The final subsection which looks at the period from 2016-2017 and analyze how its foreign policies in the Middle East and regional developments during the second period 2008-2016 had led to growing international isolation and called for reassessments of its foreign policy strategy in the Middle East, and with its relations with Israel.

Finally, a conclusion is drawn to the main question "*why did Turkish political strategy in the Middle East shift and how has this affected Turkish-Israeli relations*"

Yet neoclassical realist does not view these measurements as objective truths in accounting for various states power capabilities, in essence do neoclassical realist apply a soft positivist epistemology, nevertheless they do give some qualitative and quantitative indicators of material capabilities. (Metode Section ?)The underlying soft-positivist epistemology underlying neoclassical will be discussed in further length at the methodology section of this dissertation.

Theory

Liberalism

The liberal image of international relations has four underlying assumptions: 1) that the state's as well as non-state actors have important roles in world politics. Liberalists emphasize non-state transnational actors, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, and even individuals to be entities who could influence the course of international politics; 2) the state does not always act unitarily, and that self-help environment of the anarchic system can be pacified by institutions. 3) that interdependence of economic or other forms, and its interconnectedness between state and non-state entities can appease, or at least moderate state behavior; and 4) that state-society relation is critical to the study of international relations, and that the nature of international politics is not only dominated by military-security concerns (Viotti, Kauppi, & Brooks, 2010, p.119-20)

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, (2002) in his article *Domestic politics and international relations*, stresses the need for international relations theory to consider the effect of domestic decision-makers to examine international affairs. Mesquita (2002) rejects the focus on structure, claiming that, "*the focus on system structure, which has beneficially occupied so much research clearly also leads to the mistaken implication that the Soviet Union, presumptively like all states, was immortal.*" and that he finds it odd to view "*states as immortal seekers of national security.*" (p.4). The emphasis on citizens, leaders, and leadership by Mesquita and his essentially bottom-up approach to international affairs stands in stark contrast to realist approaches. Gideon Rose, (1998), a neoclassical realist, wrote that, "*that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative materiel power capabilities.*" (P.152). Whereas Mesquita, (2000) states that "*leader, not state, choose action*" and that "*without bringing leaders and their domestic incentives back to the forefront of research*" (p.4). Mesquita, (2000) therefore stresses the need to bring the first and second levels of analysis back into research otherwise we would not understand the very factors we wish to explain.

Mesquita, (2000) argues that international affairs first and foremost must be examined by looking at the decision-making and how its local considerations form a larger strategic fabric of international politics. He states that "*systems become bipolar, or multipolar, balanced or unbalanced, nuclear, or nuclear-free ... because of the interdependence among individual decisions*" and that "*international*

politics are formed by the aggregated consequences of our individual and collective decisions." (p.7). However, realists views the anarchic condition of the international systems and its distribution of capabilities, as the main cause for states behavior and policies. Rose, (1998) wrote that "*if there is any single dominant factor shaping the broad pattern of nations' foreign policies over time, it is their relative material power vis-à-vis the rest of the international system*"(p.150). Whereas liberals approach international politics from a domestic angle, examining how state-society variables and individual's affect international relations.

Douglas C. Foyle,(1997) argues that decision-makers perception and reaction to public opinion correlates, to the way decision-makers views the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy decisions and implementation. Foyle,(1997) suggests that, "*individual belief about the proper role of public opinion in policy making may be one such variable affecting how policy makers react to public opinion when making foreign policy.*" p.(142). He likewise perceives decision-makers belief systems to affect their interpretations and responses to both national and international political environments. The beliefs system essentially helps guide decision-makers actions in the domestic realm, which in return alter and affect foreign policy behavior of states(Foyle, 1997, p.144) .

Foyle,(1997) identifies four belief systems which can affect the way decision-makers considers public opinion in their foreign policy implementation. I argue that two of these beliefs systems; the guardian and the pragmatic-are relevant to my problem formulation. Foyle,1997 argues that the Guardians-belief system "*finds public input into foreign policy choices undesirable and believe its support is not necessary for a successful foreign policy.*" (p.147). Moreover, Guardian decision-makers perceive themselves as most capable of making decisions on behalf of state's national interest. Guardians view public opinion as an unreliable basis for policy option as it "*can be easily led astray into areas of emotionalism and subjectivity which make it a poor and inadequate guide for national action.*" (p.147). The Guardian-belief system could help shed light on why Turkish decision makers in the 1990s chose to ignore public opinion regarding its foreign policy strategy in the Middle East and its relation to Israel. Likewise, it could help shed light on why AKP decision makers chose a more pragmatic-belief system regarding their foreign policy. The pragmatic-belief system does not perceive public input desirable for foreign policy choices, pragmatics rather believe that public support is necessary for the final policy chosen. A pragmatic-belief system would therefore try to lead public opinion towards their own preferred option and use their own judgment to determinate

the best suitable foreign policy. Nevertheless, the lack of public support would for pragmatists sincerely delimit their range of feasible options (Foyle, 1997, p.146),

Variables such as, economic or other forms of interdependence, perception, belief-systems, public opinion, and individuals can influence, or shape international affairs as liberal theories assumes, however neoclassical realist rejects the casual-logic of liberal theories. The bottom-up approach requires liberals to construct theory based on variables at the state-society and individual level, neglecting the impact of the international system and its distribution of relative capabilities among state. Neoclassical realist uses measurements such as: a state's gross domestic product(GDP): level of annual defense spending; the size and composition of the armed forces; military R&D; available natural resources; and the size of state territory to indicate a state's relative material capabilities vis-à-vis other states in the system (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.44).

The international system and relative capabilities are the premise for the casual-logic of neoclassical realism, yet as Rose (1998) states, *"to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, one must analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables such as decision-makers perception and domestic state structure."* (p.152). I argue that liberalism casual-logic of domestic determinism and the domestic prism in which they analyze international politics is insufficient at analyzing and explaining why Turkish strategy in the Middle East shifted because it downgrades the impact balance-of-power and relative capabilities has had on Turkey foreign policy behavior.

Constructivism

Constructivism, at its core, is interpretative meaning that it understands observed phenomena through a subjective filter. Constructivist are interest in concepts such as norms, rules, and identities and how they affect the conception of ourselves and the way we understand the world, moreover constructivist rejects the realist and liberal reductionist approach to reality and objective knowledge(Viotti et al., 2010, p.276-77) .

Constructivist and realists differs on the way they perceive the international structure, whereas a realist assumes that the international structure is made out of distribution of material capabilities only, constructivists claims that it also has an equally important social dimensions (Wendt, 1995, p.73)

Wendt argues that structure have three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. Social structures consist of shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge among states in the international system determines whether the shared knowledge is cooperative, or conflictual, (Wendt, 1995, p.73). Objective material resources such as gold and tanks are also subject to subjective interpretation of according to Wendt (1995) “*material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded ... Material capabilities as such explain nothing; their effect presuppose structures of shared knowledge, which vary, and which are not reducible to capabilities.*” (p. 74). Wendt argues that when material capabilities produces social changes in the structure of the system only then, do they have an effect. This is partly because Wendt and other constructivist perceive ideas and material interaction as the formulation for practices. These practices thus define the social structure of system. Wendt (1995) states that, “*the Cold War was a structure of shared knowledge that governed great power relations for forty years, but once they stopped acting on this basis, it was over.*” (p 7).

Numerous scholars have been interested in how identity and ideology can produce or transform the way states define their interest within Turkish context, Eligür has examined how the Turkish decision-maker’s ideas and ideology also changed their approach to the Middle East. Eligür (2012) argues “*the new Turkish foreign policy towards the region has been dominated by the AKP governments Islamist vision of a brotherhood of Islamic countries*” and that “*Islamism in Turkish foreign policy clearly manifested itself in the current strained Turkish-Israeli relations*”. (p. 431). Wendt argues that identity is the basis of interest, and that interest is the basis for action, therefore state identity is a significant concept which can affect the way foreign policy is formulated and implemented (Wendt, 1994,p. 385).

Wendt’s denial of the existence of any objective systemic constraints on state behavior and that “anarchy is what states make of it”, stand in contrast to neoclassical realism which indeed accepts the objective reality of relative power and its effect on state interactions(Rose, 1998, p.152-3). Yet, neoclassical realism incorporates key insight from constructivism, Rose (1998) states that “*neoclassical realist occupy a middle ground between pure structural theories and constructivist.*” (p.152). Moreover, neoclassical realism considers the critique of both the liberalist and

constructivist, by treating concepts such as, ideas, norms, belief-system, state-society relation, and leadership as features of the intervening variable in theory (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.5-6)

Offensive Realism

In his book, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, John J. Mearsheimer 2001 present the theory, Offensive Realism, which argues that not only do states seek power, they do so on the expense of each other. Mearsheimer 2001 clarifies that the international system shapes the behavior of states, as he explains that a multipolar world with several potential hegemon is what motivates the highest number of conflicts between states. According to Mearsheimer 2001, Offensive Realism is becoming increasingly relevant because of the international system that is developing away from the unipolar world we have known since the end of the Cold War. “For all realist, calculations about power lie at the heart of how states think about the world around them. Power is the currency of great-power politics, and states compete for it among themselves” (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.98).

Mearsheimer thus suggests that when there is not one state more powerful than the rest, national governments will be more motivated to compete to maximize power at the expense of others.

Mearsheimer presents four points about Realism that is necessary for understanding his notion of Offensive Realism;

1. Since states are the most important actors in international politics, great powers are more relevant to analyze as they “...dominate and shape international politics and they also cause the deadliest wars” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.?)
2. The behavior of states is shaped by the external rather than internal environment. Regardless of culture, political system, or national government, all states operate according to the same logic within the structures of the international system.
3. The desire for power dominates the actions of states, which see war as “...an acceptable instrument of statecraft...[and] a continuation of politics”
4. States may cooperate for common purposes, but in reality, their respective struggle for increasing power represents a conflict of interest between all states.
(Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.98-99).

“[M]y theory sees great powers as concerned mainly with figuring out how to survive in a world where there is no agency to protect them from each other; they quickly realize that power is the key

to their survival.” (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.99). The lack of agency to protect states from each other is, according to Realism, the factor that makes the world an anarchic system, where the ultimate goal of all states is to become the hegemon (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.12).

Offensive Realism is built upon the notion of “security dilemma”, which is a well-known concept among scholars of international relations. According to Mersheimer, the security dilemma of states is relevant for the theory of Offensive Realism, because when a given state increases its own security, other states become less secure. “Thus, it is difficult for a state to increase its own chances of survival without threatening the survival of other states” (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.102).

Offensive Realism hence suggests that states are offensive because they seek to enhance their own security, which in turn creates the need for other states to do the same; and since no state can feel secure in the multipolar world of anarchy, “...the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on.” (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010, p.103).

Although neoclassical realism has a structural realist baseline, Rose, (1998) argues that “*a theory of foreign policy limited to systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time, the neoclassical realists argue, which is why offensive realism is also misguided.*” (p.152). A neoclassical realist would look at how states interpret and respond to their external environment, one must therefore analyze how systemic incentives are filter through intervening variables such as decision-makers perception and domestic state structure. In neoclassical theory are international Anarchy, neither friendly nor Hobbesian, it is rather murky and difficult to read (Rose, 1998, p.152). In the next section I will introduce the theoretical framework of this thesis.

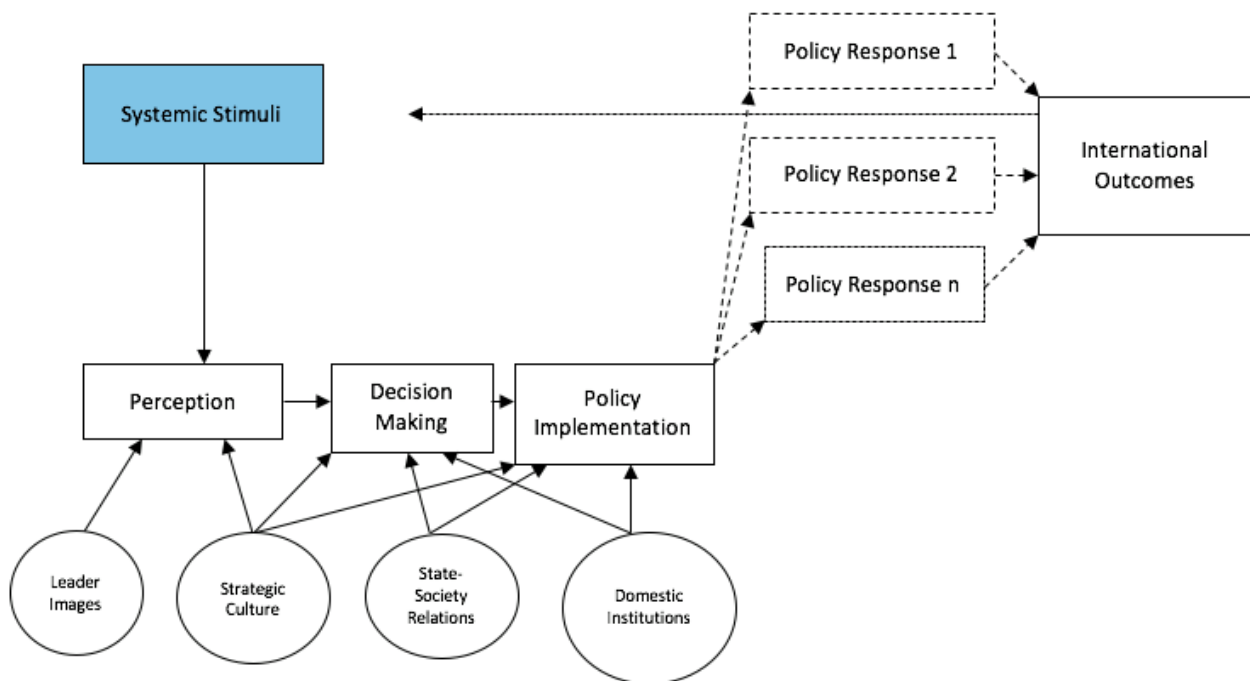
Theoretical Framework

Neoclassical realism

The neoclassical realist theory of international politics starts its analyses of international political outcomes by analyzing the international system, Gideon Rose wrote in his article in *World Politics* that a neoclassical realist believes “that the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative materiel power capabilities” Neoclassical realism also holds the assumption that territorial states are

the primary units in the international system, therefore are the neoclassical realist assumptions about the international system state centric (Ripsman et al., 2016)

The international system in this dissertation refers to the interstate system that emerged in Western Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Westphalia state system). By the early twentieth century this system, as a result of colonialism and technological diffusion, developed into a single global international system replacing old autonomous systems in East Asia, Africa, Indian subcontinent, and the Americas (Ripsman et al., 2016).



(Ripsman et al., 2016)

System structure and system modifiers

According to Ripsman et al., 2016 structural modifiers would include “geography, the rates of technological diffusion, and the offence-defense balance in military technologies. These factors can in return modify how the international structure operates, explicitly the anarchic ordering of the units and its relative distribution of capabilities, in return structural modifiers affects states strategic interaction and their external behavior.” (p.40).

Some of the structural modifiers have uniform effect on the international system, for example the invention of aviation changed the geographical distance between states, in effect molding the international system by increasing the security dilemma. As another example The English Channel i.e. created a geographical security buffer for Great Britain until the advent of long-range aviation in the mid-twentieth (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.42). However, some structural modifiers do not affect the whole international system. Sometimes it only has impacts on a pair of units within the system, or particular regions and sectors in the system (i.e. the advent of nuclear weapons had greater impact on great power interaction in the system in contrast to weaker states) (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 41).

Geography is another structural modifier because it creates constraint and opportunity for some states in the system. Furthermore, geographic modifiers establish patterns of interaction and strategic relations between units in certain parts of the international or regional structure.

In essence, do classical realism, structural realism, and neoclassical realism agree with the fact that geographic distance or the lack of it, strategic depth, and topographical barriers can have an effect the way units operate in the system by increasing the security dilemma. Nevertheless, the development and diffusion of new technologies as air power, ballistic missiles, nuclear weapon and the internet can reduce geographical barrier between states and thereby modify the structure (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.42).

Power and polarity in the international system

Neoclassical follows the broad thinking of the realist school by viewing international politics as eternal struggle for power and influence among the states in the system, a system where resources are finite and a system in which uncertainties about intension and capabilities of other states always prevail. The structure of the international system and the structural modifiers molds and sets the framework and level of strategies states can pursue in their interaction which other states.

Power is a contested concept in international relation theories because it is situated at the heart of theory explanation, there is little consensus about how power influences, force, and control between the different theoretical school, Neoclassical realism follows the element of national power approach in which power is treated as a resource to achieve states goals and strategies.

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Neoclassical realism shares the same approach to power as the broader realist school, in which different measurements are used to indicate a state's relative material capabilities. Neoclassical realist uses measurements such as: a state's gross domestic product(GDP); level of annual defense spending; the size and composition of the armed forces; military R&D; available natural resources; and the size of state territory, furthermore it incorporates variables such as morale and the quality of leadership and diplomacy (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.44).

Neoclassical realism, like structural realism, uses polarity in the international system to explain how many great powers exist in the system. Polarity gives neoclassical realism an idea of how many great powers there is in the system and their material capabilities but also their ability to extract and mobilize those resources when it is needed.

Neoclassical realism views polarity as the relative distribution of capabilities between the great powers, a unipolar system denotes a system where one states has the strongest capabilities and dominates the entire international system, whereas a bipolar international system denotes a system where two units dominates the system, and a multipolar system where three or more states dominates the system.

In essence, neoclassical realism does not view polarity as patterns of alignment between states and their behavior, rather it views polarity as the relative distribution of capabilities between major states(Ripsman et al., 2016,45).

The international system can only encompass one of the ideal types of system: unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar and the system cannot clearly signal when a transition from one type is replaced by another. For example, it took the great powers of the pre-Second World War (the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan) several years to recognize the bipolarity of the international system with the U.S. and Soviet Union as bipolar powers (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.45)

Clarity

Another important systemic variable neoclassical realism applies is clarity. Neoclassical realism views clarity as the signals and information which the international system provides to states.

Clarity has three mechanisms: (1) the degree to which threats and opportunities are obvious for states; (2), whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities; (3), whether optimal policy options are clear or not (Ripsman et al., 2016,p 47)

The first mechanism of clarity is how threats from other states or sometimes quasi-state actors are composed towards a state by three traits : (1) revisionism or expressed hostility to inflict damage towards the state's territorial integrity or national interest;(2)) economic and military capabilities to hurt a state, however this depends on geography and technology; and (3) a sense of urgency of the threat and capability to inflict harm on the state in the short run (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.47).

Clear opportunities on the other hand requires a state to be capable of achieving improving balance of capabilities vis-à-vis other states. Clear opportunities can happen by as a state's rapid increase in economic and military capabilities, the deterioration or collapse of other states capabilities, or both combined. Clear opportunity has three main components: (1) evidence that the relative capabilities are in favor of the state's in question; (2) evidence that other states lack the capabilities to hinder the move of the state in question move in the sphere of interest; (3) evidence of the balance of capabilities favoring the state in question will not last forever, thereby calling the state to act as soon as possible to harvest the opportunity (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.47).

The second mechanism of clarity is time horizons. Time horizons are often difficult to assess for leaders because it requires solid knowledge of enemies' real intentions and their capabilities to follow those intentions. For example, the British tried to accommodate Germany in the status quo from 1935 from 1936 because of the slow British rearmament program and their unwillingness to confront Germany militarily, thus giving Hitler more time to challenge the order set after the First World War. On the other hand, did the risk represented to the United States of Soviet nuclear ballistic missiles deployment into Cuba in 1962, did present a short time horizon for Kennedy to act (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.48).

The third mechanism of clarity is the clarity of policy options a state should implement. This type of clarity is rare in the international system, as it only in seldom cases provides clear cut clarity of optimal policy responses for states. Clarity is an important systemic variable in neoclassical realist analyses, as societal actors within a state have less influence of policy responses to a given threat or opportunity, if the threats and opportunity a state faces is clear, the time horizons to which they are

expected to act upon is clear, and the optimal policy response is rational. On the other hand, leaders, parties, states have a greater say and room to pursue their preferences based on parochial interest, or the strategic culture they are embedded in, if there is less clarity of the systemic incentives in the international system (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.48).

States are usually confronting uncertainty in the international system, particularly when they have to calculate the balance of power, the intention of other states, and the time horizons of those calculation, inherently because the nature of the international system is anarchic.

Neoclassical realism assumes that the clarity of each state in the system varies over time, in which international and regional dynamics constraints, or presents opportunity for a given state in a given time. However, uncertainty also stems for unit level intervening variables, which will be discussed in another section, particularly image of leaders and strategic culture, as a result uncertainty arises from the interaction of faulty agents coupled with an international system that gives vague incentives (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.50-51) .

Permissive and restrictive strategic environments

Another key systemic variable in neoclassical realist analyses of international politics is the variable permissive and restrictive strategic environments. Whereas the variable of clarity and uncertainty explains the scope of information the international system provides, permissive and restrictive environments concern the content of that information (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 52)..

A restrictive strategic environment is related to the emergence and scale of threat and opportunity a unit in the system faces. If the threat becomes gets more real and dangerous, or the opportunity more tempting for a state, it would conversely translate into a more restrictive strategic environment. Whereas if the threat is more remote and non-threatening for the state, or the opportunity less of importance to the state, then it will result in a more permissive strategic environment where intervening-unit variables can be more powerful to frame and shape responses to systemic incentives. In contrast a restrictive strategic environment gives intervening-unit level variables less room to maneuver and influence state policy as there are few alternative policy paths to follow (Ripsman et al., 2016,52).

Permissive and restrictive strategic environments are not a byproduct of the polarity in the international system; all types of polarity within the system can be both restrictive or permissive for different states in the system. Clarity could be present in both environments as the system can provide clear signals of threat and opportunities, the time frame, and policy options in both strategic environments, similarly could there also be less clarity in both environments.

The notion of clarity and strategic environments as systemic variables in analyzing international politics is unique to the school of neoclassical realism (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 55-56) .

This section of the dissertation has enlightened how neoclassical realism views the international system and the different variables within that system and how units respond to systemic incentives. Furthermore, it has described how neoclassical realism shares some epistemological viewpoints with the broader realist school of thought about the international system and how it is the independent variable in neoclassical realist analyses of international politics. The next section will introduce the intervening variables in neoclassical realist theory.

Intervening variables in neoclassical realist theory

Neoclassical realism identifies four intervening variables which affect the intervening level process of perception of the international system, decision-making process, and policy implementation.

These four intervening-variables neoclassical realist identifies are: (1) leaders image; (2) strategic culture; (3) domestic institutions; and (4) state-society relations.

These variables make use of psychological and bureaucratic/organizational insights to explain how they can affect international politics and outcomes (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.59). They consider how different types of constraint affects central actors and how they react to systemic incentives, particularly the interaction within and between decision makers and society, and the processes and mechanism in which foreign policy responses are formulated.

Leaders image

This intervening variable has to do with beliefs of individual decision makers which includes the president, prime minister, or dictator, moreover can they also include ministers, advisors, and key cabinet members, these clusters of individuals are labelled foreign policy executives (FPE).

FPE's can, according to neoclassical realism, affect the first domestic political process-perception of international incentives. The cognitive explanations of FPE are of particular interest when researchers look at foreign policy behavior because their core values, beliefs, and images guide their interaction and understanding of the world. Moreover, it also gives an insight into how FPE process information, what they pay attention to, what they ignore, and how they understand signals, information and events, all of which creates FPE bias of the international system and its incentives (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 62).

Alexander George, and Ole Holsti argue that FPE are guided partly by their operational codes, Meaning that they have master beliefs that helps them make decisions, these "master beliefs" FPE's have are not easy to change. FPE's master beliefs involve three elements, which shapes them: philosophical beliefs about politics, instrumental beliefs about the best strategies to achieve one's interest, and images of one's enemy and oneself (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.64).

Furthermore, FPE have difficulty of measuring accumulated power. FPE unpack power into four aspects "the elements of power" (what people think power is)," the distribution of power" (how the state compares to other great powers), "the mechanics of power" (the operation of the balance of power), and "prestige" (the state's relative status and influence over international politics). Jeffrey Taliaferro also notes that leaders do not accept loses of their state's relative power easily, and often invest more into failed foreign policies in an attempt to regain loses which can be self-defeating both militarily and diplomatically (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.65).

Strategic culture

Strategic culture underlines the way countries perceives and adapts to international incentives and structural shift in material capabilities. Strategic culture includes entrenched beliefs, worldviews, and shared expectations of society as a whole. Furthermore, it can also encompass organizational culture of state institutions such as the military.

The ideational aspect of strategic culture among elites and the general public includes a set of inter-related beliefs, understandings, and norms, thereby do strategic culture shapes the strategic expectations of political leaders, and the general public. These collective assumptions, beliefs, and norms becomes deeply embedded in countries through institutionalization and socialization an in effect constrain a state's behavior by defining what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable

behavior. Moreover, national strategic culture can be constructed and reconstructed over time by the efforts of governments, major historical events, or by foreign occupiers. Kemal Atatürk's secularization plan implemented in the starts of the twentieth has had a profound impact on Turkey's national strategic culture (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.67).

Dominant national ideologies are likewise an important component of strategic culture, as they shape a state's stance towards the international system and its willingness to use force. Furthermore, nationalism is an important part of strategic culture, as both nationalism is an ideology can determine a state's international alignment patterns (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.69).

Colin Dueck argues that the international environment foremost sets the parameters on states behavior and that changes in the distribution of power will result in adjustment of a more expansive or restrictive grand strategy. Moreover, political leaders have to frame, adjust, and modify their strategic choices according to cultural inclinations because of fear of losing domestic support. The strategic culture can also force political leaders to choose suboptimal strategies, as some strategic ideas resonates better culturally, and ideationally even though it would be a less effective strategy (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 70)

State-society relations

State-society relations refer to key institutions of the state, various economic, and societal groups. This intervening variable relates to the degree of harmony between the state and society, the degree of accepting state leader's foreign policies despite disagreement, competition among societal coalitions to capture the state apparatus, the level of political and social cohesion, and public support for general foreign policy and national security objectives. These state-society relations are important, as they can affect the way state leaders can extract, mobilize, and use national power for its objectives (Ripsman et al., 2016,70).

If the FPE are protected by political institutions to enact its preferred foreign policy and there is good amount of trust between key societal groups and the state, the state should be relatively free to decide and implement its foreign policies. However if this harmony requires extensive consultation between the FPE and societal actors, the state could end up formulating and implementing foreign policies who satisfies the domestic audience instead of the international ones.

Moreover, if the general public feels that the states foreign policy curbs its rights and resources it could obstruct the state's foreign policy objectives. This is because foreign policy and strategies needs vast amount of human, material, and financial resources to be implemented, and if the public obstructs the state from collecting these resources it could be less effective in its policy implementation(Ripsman et al., 2016, p 71).

Another important aspect of state-society relation is the nature of civil-military relations as it relates to how civil society, political elites, and the military as an institution tasked with protecting the state and using force interact. The military as an institution is far superior to than its civilian counterparts in the state apparatus in terms of power. However, because its behavior and scope can be regulated by civilian authorities, it has to calculate if independent actions are worth the risk of a backlash from the general public and the civil state institutions. Therefore, is it important to examine civil-military relations when analyzing foreign policy as it can influence the strategies a state is able and willing to pursue abroad.

A regime's vulnerability in resisting domestic challenges including the military, opposition parties, and societal interest groups, or coalitions are important as it can affect the government's willingness and ability at implementing foreign policies and grand strategies (Ripsman et al., 2016, 72).

Domestic institutions

This intervening variable refers to state structure and domestic political institutions such as: formal institutions, organizational routines and processes, and bureaucratic oversight, which usually are confined within the constitution. This variable is important in the analysis of foreign policy and grand strategies because it gives researchers an indication about who can contribute to policy formation, and who can act as veto player by using their power to block policy initiatives and thereby reshape state policies (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 75).This intervening variable relates to factors such as the division of powers, checks and balances in democratic states.

Institutional rules that are of utmost importance in democracies relates to the autonomy of the president, parliament, or both and their relationship with the legislature and bureaucracy. Key institutional variables which can affect foreign policies of democracies involves: the degree of

power the executive is entitled to; executive-legislative relations; party systems; voting rules; and the governments administrative competences. These variables do affect democratic state's leaders in utilizing the nations power in response to international incentives and shifts in the international distribution of power (Ripsman et al., 2016, p 76).

Domestic institutions in non-democratic states regulates the scope of authority of the leader, in non-democratic states the leader must consult with key societal interest such as the military, political and economic elites before implementing foreign policy strategies. In short, domestic institutions, the number of political parties, and the autonomy of the executive can all impact the effectiveness of foreign policy implementation (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.77)

The dependent variable in Neoclassical realism

The dependent variable in neoclassical realist theory is essentially time bound, meaning that it seeks to explain crisis decision-making, foreign policy responses and grand strategic adjustments in the short- to medium-term to international outcomes in the medium- to longer-term and structural change in the long term (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.79). Neoclassical realism, can over the short-term help explain the policy choices of states and how they respond to particular international incentives. Over the short-medium term, neoclassical realism contributes to explain policy planning and strategic adjustments to forthcoming shifts in the international distribution of power, and the threats and opportunity it presents. Over the medium-long term, neoclassical realist theory explains international outcomes by looking at grand strategies of great powers and how they interact (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.81). The international structure does not alone determine the grand strategies of key players in the international system, the domestic intervening variables also influences the context in which they get formulated. In this regard are neoclassical realism more explanatory than pure systemic or domestic theory of international politics when looking at the problem statement of this thesis.

Short-term is defined as days, weeks, and months. Within this short time frame relative power is very unlikely to change considerably. Policy changes are therefore made within the context of the status quo power distribution, and the short time frame does not allow states to increase their economic or military capabilities to challenge the given power distribution.

This time frame is characterized by crisis decision-making in the sense that policy response towards unexpected events is formulated by comparing one's own capabilities with that of other states capabilities when responding to a given event or crisis (Ripsman et al., 2016,p.83).

Short-medium term is defined as months and years. In this period, policy makers are more inclined to look ahead and tend to be less worried about the actual conditions and constraints of the international system. This term is characterized by strategic planning. A former U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, claimed that strategic planning means *“to look ahead, not into the distant future, but beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crisis of current battle; far enough ahead to see emerging form of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them”* (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.84).

Policy makers therefore have to formulate a national strategy that guides the state when faced with expected and unexpected coming crisis, challenges, opportunities, international power shifts. Grand strategy therefore refers to *“the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's relations with the outside world... it is future oriented enterprise involving considerations of external threats and opportunities, as well as the specific material, political, and ideological objectives of the state”*(Ripsman et al., 2016, p.84).

The extended time frame thus means that states can plan how to achieve its objective by increasing economic and military capabilities, and forging strategic alliances with other states, however the objective and strategies pursued by states in short-medium term are also confined by domestic variables such as ideological preferences, societal pressures, and the state's ability to use its resources to implement its strategy (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.85).

Medium-long term is defined as years and decades. This time frame allows the grand strategies of great powers to interact, and thereby affect international systemic outcomes. The strategies pursued by more than two units in the system can produce international systemic outcomes when these strategies interact to create observable political phenomena (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.85) .

Systemic outcomes cannot be derived only from the international structure because the international structure interacts with the grand strategies of key players in the system, and these players are themselves influenced by unit level intervening variables as mentioned above. When analyzing long term political outcomes which is defined as decades, the policies and grand strategies which states

follows can assist in reshaping the structure itself, these systemic outcomes results in weakening of existing great powers and the creation of new ones (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.86) .

Changes in the international system requires differential growth rates of key units in the system and different growth rates does not happen incidental, the growth rates of different units are consequently the product of grand strategic planning, foreign policy, and economic and political choices made over time. Structural change is therefore the result of key state's strategy in implementing a restraining or expansionist strategy, and their domestic political environment (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.87). As mentioned previously a neoclassical realist analysis starts with the structure and international system, but likewise reflects on the strategic choices and the domestic political environment of the state at interest. The next section will therefore start with a structural analyses of Turkeys international and regional environment but consider how its strategic preferences and its domestic political realm can account for why Turkey made and strategic shift and how it affected its relations with Israel.

The next section will thus examine how structural changes such as the end of the Cold War, the Gulf War, the Israeli-Arab peace process, EU's Turkey policy (or lack thereof), and the U.S. Middle East strategy transformed Israel's strategic importance for the Turkey.

Analysis

Independent variable -*The start of an alignment*

Neoclassical realism holds the belief that the structure of the international system and the structural modifiers molds and sets the framework and level of strategies that states can pursue in their interaction with other states. I, therefore, start by analyzing the international and regional structure of Turkey because it sets the parameters in which external strategies and foreign policy can be formulated.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent end of the Cold War, changed the geostrategic role of Turkey through its traditional alliance with NATO. The Turkish political elite expected that their importance for its Western allies would either diminish or decline, as Turkey was no longer needed as a bulwark against a potential conflict with the Soviet Union(Cohen & Freilich, 2014, p.2)

The unipolar character of the international system contributed to the process of an alliance formation between Israel and Turkey. The restrictive environment, and the clarity of the international system as a result of the US-led order, presented Turkey with a clear opportunity to enhance its relations with Israel and to address its external and internal threats.

On the other hand, certain Arab had states lost power-impact capabilities in the Middle East with the demise of the Soviet Union because the unipolar character of the international system pushed them to engage in the **Madrid Peace Conference** with Israel after the Gulf War in 1991 (Bengio and Özcan, 2001, p. 79).

For Turkey, this conference signaled a positive regional environment to conduct and establish relations with Israel. The foreign ministry of Turkey issued a statement saying, “*that there was no need to be more Arab than the Arabs*” in response to anger in the public opinion about the establishment of official Turkish representation in Israel and vice-versa (Yavuz, 1997, p. 27).

The Gulf War

The Gulf crisis (August, 1990 to February, 1991) provided Turkey with an opportunity to show its relevance to its traditional Western partners in Europe and the U.S. after it had lost strategic value within NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union. General Cevik Bir also believed that the unipolar character of the world was the most pressing issue Turkey had to deal with. The demise of the Soviet Union pressed Turkey to reformulate its foreign policy towards the three neighboring regions; the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Middle East, especially after the Gulf War in 1991 (Bengio, 2005, p. 82).

Turkey did not participate directly by confronting the Iraqi military, but it did, however, allow the US to use their bases and deploy 100,000 troops along the Turkish-Iraqi border. As a result of the war, Turkey closed an Iraqi pipeline to the Mediterranean, which exported 54% of Iraqi oil. This was due to the fear that the start of this conflict could signal a new post-cold war order in the Middle East. Evidently, it was in Turkey’s best interest to remain on the dominant side of such an order (Altunishik, 2000, p. 173).

Some Arab observers described Turkey's new role after the Cold War and later on in the 2003 Iraq War as "*Turkey was like someone who woke up in the morning and found a big treasure besides his bed.*" (Bengio & Özcan, 2002, p.2). Turkey had come to the conclusion that the Arab block was no longer effective at employing pressure upon it as a result of their weakened position after the Gulf War. The oil weapon was no longer sufficient, and the notion of pan-Arabism died out because Arab states became more inward looking and consumed on domestic issues (Bengio 2005, p.78), (Bengio and Özcan,2001,p.79).

The Gulf War also highlighted Turkey's own shortcomings, politically and militarily. On the political level, Turkey felt marginalized by the EU who was busy implementing a Central European approach, which excluded Turkey. The political elite in Turkey felt that the iron curtain was being replaced with a new Western curtain, particularly because of the EU's reluctance to provide Turkey with military hardware both during and after the war. The human right outcries from the EU over Turkey's human rights accord in connection with the Kurdish issue had forced the EU to terminate arm sales to Turkey. The absence of common Soviet threat perception and Turkey's non-democratic way of handling the Kurdish issue, paved the way for the EU to doubt Turkey's European credentials and identity (Oğuzlu, 2010, p.279). Turkey had to wait until 1999 to become an official EU candidate (Balci & Kardas, 2012, p.112) . The EU policies towards Turkey in the years prior to 1999 pressed Turkey to seek an alternative strategy to secure its position as a strategic partner for the Western security interest.

The Kemalist establishment formulated a national strategy in which a close relationship with Israel was believed to enhance Turkey's own national interest, in substance national strategy or grand strategy refers to "*the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's relations with the outside world... it is future oriented enterprise involving considerations of external threats and opportunities, as well as the specific material, political, and ideological objectives of the state*"(Ripsman et al., 2016,p.84). By heightening its relationship with Israel, Turkey not only helped increase its strategic value in American eyes through the U.S. objective of dual containment³ in the Middle East but also its own material, political, and ideological objectives for the state.

³ The American strategy in the Middle East during the 1990s were influenced by two American policy pillars, one was the dual containment which were meant to contain both Iran and Iraq, and the other pillar of Arab-Israeli peace process (Bengio & Özcan, 2001)

The Gulf war had highlighted the Turkish Army inferiority compared to the advanced military capabilities of the US-led coalition, especially in the field electronic warfare, night combat, and mid-air refueling. Moreover, the emergence of nonconventional weapons, such as long-range ballistic missiles, reveals the Turkish military's lack of defense capabilities against a potential attack with these types of weapons and technology. A strong relationship with Israel would help Turkey circumvent the Western weapons embargo, by giving Turkey access to advance military hardware and technology from Israel (Bengio, 2004, p.83).

Israel does not apply human rights pre-conditions on its weapon industry. The US moreover, tacitly supported the rapprochement between its two main allies in the Middle East and turned a blind eye to the military and technology transfer between the two countries. The rates of technological diffusion, and the offence-defense balance in military technologies after the Gulf War pushed Turkey to deepen its relations with Israel(Bengio, 2004,p.83). The objective of achieving more effective power projection capabilities and the new threat perception emerging from Turkey's Southern neighbors, namely Syria, Iraq, and Iran likewise helped facilitate stronger relation between Israel and Turkey.

The Turkish political establishment perceived its relations with Syria and Iraq increasingly through the lens of the Kurdish issue. The Kemalist's fear of Iranian sponsored Islamism inside Turkey, and the electoral victory of the Islamist Refah party in 1996 increased Turkey's tension with Iran, particularly after the Sincan Affair(Haas, 2012, p.186). These threat perceptions were led by the political and military elite tied up the territorial integrity and regime survival in Turkey.

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The Arab-Israeli peace process, which started in October 1991, became one of the most important developments for Turkish-Israeli relations. Although the conference did not achieve substantial results it marked the first-time that representatives from Israel and several Arab states met directly. The conference provided Turkey cover and domestic legitimacy to pursue its own ventures with Israel. The peace process helped remove the psychological barriers the military and Kemalist elite had regarding relations with Israel (Altunisik, 2000, p.174).

Turkey had no issues with the Jordanian-Israeli and PLO-Israeli peace tracks, but it was more skeptical towards the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Turkey was concerned about a potential peace agreement between Syria and Israel during their peace talks (1992-1996). The fear of Syria gaining bargaining power against Turkey over disagreements and issues such as the PKK and water supply, increased the political elite's anxieties of a potential peace agreement. The Israeli peace track with Syria never achieved anything. Nevertheless, Israel and Turkey's dissatisfaction with Assad and his policies was a major factor at aligning the two countries. Their common rivalry and enmity towards Syria thus became a common denominator to build their relations upon (Bengio & özcan, 2001, p.81)

The peace process between Israel and the PLO, on the other hand eased the problematics of direct and public engagement for Turkey with Israel. The traditional need to strike a balance between the Palestinians/Arabs and Israeli's evaporated since Israel and the PLO were now in a peace process. Hence, Turkey's traditional concern and sensitivity towards the Palestinian's prior to the beginning of the Oslo Peace agreement in 1993 started to fade, however the failure of the Oslo Peace agreement at the start of the 21st century, once again forced Turkey to reconsider the Palestinians as a denominator in its relations with Israel (Oğuzlu, 2010, p.278), (Balci & Kardas, 2012, p.112). Though, it would not take long before Turkey acted upon the opportunity to enhance its relations with Israel. One month after the September 1993 Oslo Peace agreement between Israel and the PLO was signed when Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin officially visited Israel (Bengio, 2004,p.79).

The PKK and Syria

Turkey in the mid-1980s witnessed a rise of Kurdish nationalism that led to an armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. The armed conflict between Turkey and the PKK by the mid-1990s had claimed thousands of casualties, and the PKK became a force to be reckoned with. The Turkish security establishment had come the conclusion that the PKK issue had become regionalized, since the PKK was receiving support from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, the PLO

and the former Soviet Union. In 1992, the Turkish army's **National Security Policy Document** changed its main threat perception from being an external (Soviet Union) to an internal (PKK). The Involvement of external player in PKK affairs particularly from Syria and to lesser extent Iraq and Iran legitimize the militaries growing influence over foreign policy issues (Bengio, 2004, 84-85).

The chief-of-staff of the armed forces in Turkey had precedence when it related to decision-making and its process. The military as an institution has long had control over foreign affairs and security issues gained by its legal provisions acquired over the years. However, several factors contributed to the acceleration of its de-jury control vis-à-vis the political-civilian authorities in the 1990s. The first was its traditional depiction as the guardian of the Turkish state and its republican principles, second was the double threat of Kurdish separatism and Islamism, thirdly the ineffectiveness of coalition governments (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p.264).

The linkage of Kurdish nationalism and Islamism to external threat perception from Syria, Iraq and Iran, gave the military room to define security within a broad interpretation, covering almost all societal and political spheres.

The internal and external problem of Turkey was intertwined from the generals' perspective, and therefore required the military's involvement to resolve them. This granted them the final say in domestic and foreign policy-making and an opportunity to enhance their influence in different areas, particularly in foreign affairs (Bengio, 2004, p.82), (Gresh, 1998, p.190).

Turkey's changing perception and new concerns at the end of the Cold War, Europe's hostility towards it, the Gulf War, and the Arab-Israeli peace process made a partnership with Israel appear attractive in the eyes of the Kemalist elite. Furthermore, it fulfilled Turkey's aspiration of spreading its influence in the Mediterranean and responding to its new threat perception emanating from Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Syria

Syria lost an important patron at the downfall of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, which resulted in a tightened relationship with Iran. Syria in this context has been an important supporter of Iranian backed foreign policy ventures, with its support for the Shia-Based Lebanese organization

Hezbollah. It is important to mention now that conflicts and war between Hezbollah and Israel have erupted several times since the 1990s.

Turkey's problems with Syria during the much of the 1990s were linked to the water issue and the PKK. In 1992, Turkey and Syria came close to the brink of war, as Syria's dissatisfaction with the completion of the Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates River led it to intensify its support for the PKK. Syria used its own Kurdish minority in its northern territory, which has a large Kurdish majority to train and execute attacks on Turkey (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.116).

Furthermore, the military agreement between Syria and Greece signed in 1995 that allowed the Greek air force to use Syrian bases in a potential conflict with Turkey, increased Turkey's frustration with Syria. The conflict between Syria and Turkey over the PKK had by 1995 evolved to become the principal rift in their bilateral relations (Oğuzlu, 2010, p.279-80). Syria's refusal to extradite Abdullah Öcalan, the head of the PKK, and its military agreement with Greece steered Turkey to suspend all diplomatic relations in 1996. The growing threat of the PKK in Turkey's Hatay province which it had annexed from Syria in 1939 further increased tension between the two countries (Gresh, 1998, p.193).

Syria support for the PKK and its military agreement with Greece, gave the Kemalist elite yet another legitimized reason to establish one of the most comprehensive military agreements with Israel in 1996 (the nature and content of the military agreement will be discussed in the next section). According to the chief-of-staff of the armed forces, general Cevik Bir, the alliance with Israel had "*the objective of keeping theocratic extremism and martial despotism a check*" (Stern & Rose, 2013, p.177). The strategic alliance between Turkey and Israel thus had the clear aim of restraining Syria's hostile action towards Israel and Turkey.

The Military Cooperation and Training Agreement between the two countries also increased Turkey's assertiveness towards Syria. In 1996, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz stated that, "*some of our neighbors shelter those who seek to destroy the unity of our land... Either this neighbor puts an end to this situation or it will sooner or later surely be punished for its enmity... when our patience runs out our reaction will be violent*" (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.117).

Tension between Syria and Turkey peaked in 1998 because of Syria's continued support for the PKK. The Turkish-Syrian crisis of October, 1998, stressed Turkey's accumulating assertiveness towards Syria. During the first three weeks of October 1998, Turkey mobilized a military build-up

along its border with Syria and threatened to invade with the blessings key political figures and the military. The prospect of war between the two countries alarmed Cairo and Tehran, which played a major role in defusing the crisis. It could be argued that the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership might have had pressured Syria to give in to Turkey's demands (Gresh, 1998).

Syria had previously bluntly denied any official involvement with the PKK. In 1997, Syria foreign minister, Faruq al-Shar said, "*we do not shelter the PKK*" and that, "*the Kurdish problem is above all an internal Turkish one which cannot be dealt with by force. Iraq has already tried this without success*" (Gresh, 1998, p.193). However, following the October, 1998 crisis, Syria agreed to give up its strongest bargaining chip against Turkey by stopping its support for the PKK. Syria agreed to deport Öcalan, close down PKK military camps, and halt any support for the PKK in the future by signing the Adana Accords in November 1998 (Kosebalaban, 2010, p.46).

Power according to neoclassical realism is seen as a resource to achieve a state's objective and goals (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.44). Turkey's partnership with Israel increased its military capabilities vis-à-vis Syria with an objective of pacifying Syria's support for the PKK. Turkey relative capabilities and the risk of war in October 1998 forced Syria to comply to Turkey's demands. Furthermore, Öcalan's was captured in Nairobi with the help of Greek, Israeli and American intelligence in 1999 after being on the run since Syria expelled him in 1998 (Hooper), His capture helped ease Turkey's anxiety about the PKK.

The Adana Accords marked a new beginning for Turkish-Syrian relations, Turkey removed Syria from its threat list and president Ahmet Necdet Sezer attended the Syrian president, Hafez al-Assad's funeral in 2000. Later that year, Bashar al-Assad sent his vice president to Turkey with a letter promising to "*turn over a new leaf*" in Turkish-Syrian relations. Additionally, Bashar al-Assad was viewed upon favorably by Turkey's decision-makers, as he endorsed close relations with Turkey. (Makovsky, 1995), (Kosebalaban, 2010, p.46).

Subsequently, at the 1999 EU Helsinki summit Turkey's candidacy as EU member was confirmed, this was followed by waves of domestic reforms, which significantly limited the military's authority vis-à-vis the civilian authority. The EU, which excluded Turkey from the enlargement process in 1997 had gradually changed its mind about Turkey, as they realized their partial loss of influence regarding Turkey's foreign policy. The EU therefore accepted Turkey's candidacy not because of

its liberal democratization progress but out of geopolitical and strategic concern of losing Turkey to an Israeli-American or Russian axis (Balci & Kardas, 2012, p.112), (Oğuzlu, 2010, p.279).

Furthermore, did Turkey experience a severe economic crisis between 2000-2001 that further limited the military's role in domestic and international issues, since economic consideration became more urgent than security issues.

Turkey's relation with Israel was also questioned and criticized in the start of the 21st century. The Oslo Peace process which had shielded the military from its domestic opponents and critics had gradually faded, the failure of the peace process became evident at the US sponsored Camp David Accords and the following Al-Aqsa intifada afterwards (Makovsky, 1995)

The Al-Aqsa intifada (2000-2005), (BBC 1) thus brought the Palestinian cause back as denominator for Turkish-Israeli relations, which became more evident when in 2000 Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit stated that a "*genocide against the Palestinian people is being carried out before the eyes of the world.*" (Makovsky, 1995)

Turkey's EU candidacy, and the military's weakening position vis-à-vis the civilian authority, and its rapprochement with Syria after having dealt with the PKK issue. Hinted to deteriorating relations between Turkey and Israel, which only would intensify during the first decade of 21th century.

The clarity of the international system which neoclassical realism views a key element of the international system was clear regarding the threat emancipating from Syria, towards Turkey during the 1990s. Clarity has three mechanisms: firstly, the degree to which threats and opportunities obvious for states; secondly, whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities; thirdly, whether optimal policy options are clear or not (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.47-50)

The First mechanism of clarity is how threats from other states or sometimes quasi-state actors are composed towards a state by three traits: *A) revisionism or expressed hostility to inflict damage towards the states territorial integrity or national interest.* Syria's support for the PKK was clearly hostile towards Turkey, since Turkey had engaged in a guerilla war with the PKK since the mid-1980s, and it openly expressed hostility towards the Turkish state and its territorial integrity by incorporating terrorist tactics such as suicide bombing, attacks on Turkish diplomatic representations, and kidnapping in its tactics to establish a Kurdish state (Bruno, 2017).

B) economic and military capabilities to hurt a state, however this depends on geography and technology. Syria's economic and military support for the PKK, increased its capabilities of hurting Turkey, furthermore was the PKK's geographical sanctuary in Syria and its proximity to Turkey enabling it to inflict economic and military damage on Turkey.

C) a sense of urgency of the threat and capability to inflict harm on the state in the short run. The Military perceived the PKK threat as urgent and threatening entity which had to be dealt with, particularly from the 1990s. For instance, three times more, security forces were killed between 1992-95, than between 1984-91 (Balci & Kardas, 2012, p.106). The urgent situation in South East Anatolia made it clear of the urgency of the PKK to inflict harm on Turkey also in the short run

The second mechanism: is whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats or opportunities. This mechanism relates to the Syrian-Israeli peace process which started after the Madrid Peace Conference. Turkey was worried about a potential peace agreement between Syria and Israel because a peace agreement between them would disturb the balance of power between Turkey and Syria. A peace agreement would have given Syria more maneuvering space regarding Hatay, the PKK and the Water issues vis-à-vis Turkey (Bengio & Özcan, 2001, 81).

However, the peace process between Israel and Syria died out in the late 1995, which coincided with the murder of **Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin** in 1995, and the following the electoral victory of Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud party in 1996. The election of Netanyahu presented Turkey with a window of opportunity to enhance its relations with Israel. Deputy Foreign Minister Onur Öymen in January 1996 was quoted saying, "*How come you talk to these bastards? We beg you officially to stop the talks with Syria*" (Bengio, 2004, p.80).

Netanyahu effectively stopped the Syrian-Israeli peace track after his election in May 1996. As Prime Minister he clearly and openly specified the PKK as a terror organization, which his predecessors were more reluctant not to do. The 1996 Israeli election thus gave Turkey a clear time horizon to establish strategic and cooperative ties with Israel (Altunisik, 2000, p. 182).

The third mechanism: which relates to whether optimal policy options are clear or not, was evident for Turkey in the 1990s. The Turkish generals who de-facto controlled Turkish foreign policy saw a strategic partnership with Israel as the most optimal policy option to address its concerns with the PKK, Syria, Iran, and to improve its internal and external Western credentials (Altunisik, 2000,187)

The Impact of Turkish-Israeli bilateral Security Agreement

Israeli and Turkish bilateral relation reassumed when Turkey raised its representation to ambassadorial level in 1992 (Inbar, 2011, p.2). Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin visited Israel on November 14 1993 in which framework agreements regarding tourism, economic cooperation, and education were agreed upon, following the raise of diplomatic relations in 1992 and the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1993. Israel responded with official state visit in January, 1994, and in April, 1994 Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres's visited Ankara and signed an agreement on the environment.

Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller became the first Turkish Prime Minister to visit Israel on November 3-5 1994, just nine days after Jordan and Israel signed a peace agreement. Tansu was endeavoring the idea of a free trade agreement with Israel, which eventually was signed on 14. March 1996 and ratified in April 1997, (Bengio, 2004, p. 79), (Yavuz, 1997, p.28). Even though the economic agreements were important they did not match the military agreements between Israel and Turkey in scope.

The first military agreement between Turkey and Israel "The Military Training and Cooperation Agreement" was signed in February 23 1996, and another "Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement" was signed in August 26, 1996 (Erdurmaz, 2012,p.49). These agreements ensured joint air and naval exercise, mutual intelligence sharing, and joint ventures and production within each other's defense industries. The agreement on military training and cooperation opened the possibility for each country to deploy its land, air, and naval forces in each other's territory. The agreement impacted the balance-of-power to Israel and Turkey's advantage in the Middle East (Gresh, 1998,189). To demonstrate this new strength of military coordination and corporation, Israel and Turkey held several joint military exercises.

A joint naval and air, search and rescue exercise was conducted in the Mediterranean in June 1997, followed by one near Syria in November 1997. The US also participated in their search and rescue exercise code named "reliant mermaid". The exercise became a stark symbol of the Turkish-Israeli-US's triangle in the Middle East. Turkey and Israel claimed that the exercise not was aimed at any third countries. Nevertheless, it drew angry protest from Arab countries and Iran because the exercise was perceived as Turkey increasingly security-oriented foreign policy in the region

(Bolukbasi, 1999,p.187) The joint exercises continued until 2009 when the Turkish military recalled Israel's invitation to a planned NATO-Israel military exercise.

The Turkish military had reached a conclusion that it needed to upgrade and modernize its military capabilities after the Gulf War (Bengio, 2004,83).

In 1996, the Turkish military officially announced its plan to upgrade and modernize its army. The main goal of the plan was to upgrade its old systems and implement new military system with high-tech weaponry. The initial part of the program received a budget share of \$ 25-30 billion of, which \$ 2-3 billion annually would for be allocated for the first 8-10 years of the program (Erdurmaz, 2012, p.51).The "Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement" signed in August 26, 1996, thus increased the importance of Israel for Turkey. Israel became the optimal policy option for the Turkish military to implement its modernization plan, as Israel accepted Turkey's request for joint production and technology transfer. Moreover, the military viewed Israel's technological capabilities to be on Western standards and therefore suitable for its targets with the plan. Three major agreements were agreed upon: modernization and upgrading of weapon system⁴: weapon System purchasing⁵: Joint production⁶ (Erdurmaz, 2012, p.54).

The military agreements did in fact enhance both Turkish and Israeli capabilities in the regional structure of the Middle East. Turkey needed technological capabilities to fight the PKK and potentially Syria- while Israel needed space to gain strategic and geographical depth in a conflict against Iran, Iraq and Syria. The common threat perception and the Turkish-Israeli alliance's compatibility with U.S. foreign policy strategy added value to their alignment (Yavuz ,1997, p.33),(Arbell, 2014, p.7)

It is also noteworthy although the U.S's restricted arms sales to Turkey it viewed favorably upon Turkish and Israeli alignment. A US department spokesman in May 1997 stated that "*It has been a strategic objective of the United states that Turkey and Israel ought to enhance their military cooperation, and their political relations*" He described their relations as useful for both countries and the US (Erdurmaz, 2012, 50).

⁴ " the largest amount of worth of \$ 632,5 million were made in the modernization of 54 F-4E Phantom aircraft... in order to perform this agreement, almost all of the value of this agreement was provided by Israel as credit. Another agreement has taken its place as \$ 75 million worth of 48 F5 modernizations within a consortium of Israel-Singapore."(Erdurmaz, 2012, p.53)

⁵ "A \$ 800 million worth of AWACS early warning aircraft systems, furthermore was radar system , missile defense system potential deals."(Erdurmaz, 2012, p.53)

⁶ "Both countries agreed to invest \$150 million to produce hundreds Popeye missiles and run it in with the Deliah long-range missiles."(Erdurmaz, 2012, p.53)

Iran

Iran was viewed by the Turkish military with growing suspicion, particularly from the mid-1990s coinciding with Turkey's tensions with Syria. The common threat perception between Israel and Turkey regarding Iran, was strengthened after the military and cooperation agreements in 1996. The Iranian regime has expressed hostility against Israel since its Islamic revolution in 1979, however Turkey's concerns regarding Iran gets elevated during the 1990s. The Turkish political elite was suspicious of Iran's role in supporting Islamist movements within Turkey (Yavuz, 1997, p.26).

As with Syria, tension between Turkey and Iran was high during the mid-1990s. The Turkish establishment was becoming more anxious about Iran's support for the PKK. It accused Iran of allowing the PKK to operate within its territory, although Iran rejected the accusations tension remained high. In May 1996 the option of military operation against PKK bases inside Iran was on the table (Altunisik, 2000, p.180). The Sincan Affair and Iran's increasing sympathy towards the PKK all indicated that Iran's policies towards Turkey were hostile. The affair affirmed the military's elite and their supporters suspicion of Iran's role at steering Islamic movements within Turkey and thereby attacking and challenging the ideological foundation of Kemalism and the Turkish state, moreover Iran's close relation to Syria by the mid-1990 was perceived as threat against Turkey. The opposing juxtaposing position between Iran and Turkey in the regional system in the 1990s played an important role in Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran (Haas, 2012, p.182). Turkey had by forming a military alliance with Israel effectively opposed Iranian interest by enhancing Israel's capabilities against Iran, and its own balance of power vis-à-vis the Iran-Syria alliance (Erdurmaz, 2012, p.50).

The degree to which threats and opportunities was obvious for Turkey in the 1990s regarding its relations to Iran can be examined by deploying the three mechanisms of clarity: the degree to which threats and opportunities obvious for states; second, whether the system provides information on the

time horizons of threats and opportunities; third, whether optimal policy options are clear or not (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.47-50)

There was a high degree of clarity regarding the threats and opportunities regarding its relationship with Iran. The first mechanism as mentioned earlier has three defining traits

A) revisionism or expressed hostility to inflict damage towards the states territorial integrity or national interest. Iran's relation with Syria predicated Turkey's threat perception of Iran, furthermore there was a common perception between the military establishment of Iran's role in emboldening Islamism in Turkey, particularly after the Islamic Refah government was elected in 1996.

The Turkish position regarding Iran was clear, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Cevik Bir described Iran as "*a registered terrorist state*" (Haas, 2012, p.186). The military was afraid of Iran's influence inside Turkey, as Islamism was chartered as a threat towards the state and its interest. This became apparent when the Turkish government accused Iran for undermining the ideological principles and expelled Iranian ambassador Mohammed Reza Bagheri implying that Iran should stop trying to export its Islamic revolution to Turkey. Turkey's stance towards Iran also presented Turkey with the opportunity to align its foreign policy strategy with the US-Israeli strategy.

B) economic and military capabilities to hurt a state, (this depends on geography and technology). The Turkish policy makers perceived Iran's foreign policy behavior and strategy in complete contrast to Turkey's own strategy and objectives. Like Syria, the military believed that Iran's support for the PKK was a tool in the hands of the Ayatollahs by which they could inflict damage on Turkey (Haas, 2012, p. 182).

C) a sense of urgency of the threat and capability to inflict harm on the state in the short run. There was a sense of urgency when Islamic Refah won the Turkish election in June 1996. The fear of Iran's influence on Refah and Necmettin Erbakan, and its leaders positive view of Iran fueled the military's sense of urgency about the Islamic threat from both Refah and Iran. This became apparent when Erbakan just 6 weeks after assuming office chose Iran as his first official state visit. Erbakan had always admired the Iranian regime, during the election campaign he openly declared

that he “*had been and continued to be an ardent supporter and admirer of the Islamic regime in Iran*”(Haas, 2012, p.184).

The second mechanism on whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities was clear because Erbakan quickly pursued policies which were against the military’s interests who de-facto controlled a large sphere of domestic and foreign policy.

The linkage between the governing Refah party with Iran limited the time frame for a policy option for the military decision-makers. Since the 1980s Iran had been perceived by the military as wanting to subvert the Kemalist state-aperture either by power with its support for the PKK, or by deliberate policies as supporting Refah (Haas, 2012, p.182). Consequently, the victory of Refah in 1996 and its Iranian linkage limited the time horizon for policy option.

The third mechanism: which relates to whether optimal policy options are clear or not is also applicable here. The military policy-makers saw that improving relations with Israel would be the most optimal policy option, as it would help address its concern regarding domestic Islamism and enhance its capabilities against the threats from Iran.

The military agreements, which enhanced Israel and Turkey military capabilities vis-à-vis Syria-Iran likewise became the optimal policy option to address Iran’s influence on Islamism domestically.

The military used Iran as a pretext to outlaw Refah in Turkish politics, in June, 1997 it showcased its relationship with Israel to demonstrate the powerlessness of Refah over domestic and foreign policy issues. Erbakan had envisioned a national strategy which emphasized closer relations to Islamic countries. The creation of the D-8 group was a clear indication of his foreign policy orientation, he wanted to forge closer ties with Iran and other Islamic countries to counter Turkey’s dependence on the US and Israel. However, the military who viewed Refah’s Islamism as a threat to the Turkish constitution and its principle of secularism forged closer relations to Israel, to demonstrate Refah subordination to the Turkish military, and that Turkey was still the principle decision-maker in the area of foreign policy (Yavuz, 1997, p.29-32).

Turkey’s engagement with Iran during much of the 1990s was characterized by three traits(1) Iran’s relation with Syria, and its potential involvement in PKK affairs (2) a growing anxiety over Iran’s

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influence in Turkey by its support of Islamic movements and parties (3) Turkey and Israel's role in the US's dual containment strategy of Iran and Iraq.

In the next section I look at the decision-makers namely the military, and why the clash with Refah and the Kurds affected the way they perceived systemic incentives and their relation to Israel, and finally their overall grand strategy.

Intervening Variables- *Kemalism, the military, kurds, and Islamism*

Leader Image

The military had a lot of influence in Turkish politics, which it had gained over the years. Nevertheless had the regional and domestic political environment of much of the 1990s had given the military establishment unprecedented influence in Turkish domestic and international decision-making (Kayhan Pusane, 2016)..The military was thus the principle decision-maker during the 1990s. I examine how the military perceived systemic incentives such as the end of the Cold War, the Gulf War etc., by considering how their core values, beliefs and images could have affected Turkey's foreign policy behavior.

Neoclassical realism assumes that decision-makers are guided by partly by their "master beliefs" The master beliefs of decision-makers are shaped by three elements "*philosophical beliefs about politics, instrumental beliefs about the best strategies to achieve one's interest, and images of one's enemy and oneself.*" (Ripsman et al., 2016, p.64)

The Military decision-makers perceived themselves as the guardians of the Turkish state as well as the secular kemalist regime, this role has been ascribed to them since the foundation of the Turkish state in 1923 (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p.263).

The Turkish military's master-beliefs were deeply influenced by Kemalist thinking. Kemalism perceives Islam as an obstacle and threat to 'progress' and 'modernity', and therefore the Turkish state's goal of achieving the highest level of contemporary (Western) civilization (Kushner, 2016, p.219).

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The Kemalist strategy to achieve the “highest level contemporary civilization” was to disengage itself from the Middle East since the Middle East was perceived as a corrupt, authoritarian, and underdeveloped, integration with the West, on the other hand was deemed as the best strategy to achieve this goal(Inbar, 2011, p.6).

Kemalism accordingly, necessitated Islam’s exclusion from the political sphere in Turkey, and furthermore would the social dimension of Islam would need to be contained and controlled by the state. The kemalist decision-maker in the 1990s thus viewed the growing influence of political Islam as fundamental threat against the objectives of the Kemalist Turkish State. The Refah government’s attempt of conceptualizing Islamic foreign policy objectives for Turkey was therefore perceived by the kemalist decision makers as a threat towards the Kemalist ideology and regime. Subsequently, Refah was closed down over its alleged breaches of the secular principles in the Turkish constitution in 1997 (Haas, 2012, p.171).

Key components of the ideology were its emphasis on assimilation and nationalism, which resulted in the rejection of multiculturalism. There was no room for minority culture in the Kemalist perception of Turkish identity. The Military-bureaucratic decision-makers viewed policies which aimed at creating minorities in Turkey, as a mortal threat towards the Turkish state and its unity. This can partly explain why the military perceived Kurdish language and culture, and nationalism as an existential threat towards the Turkish state and its character (Haas, 2012, p.171). The polarity of the international system during the Cold War had given the military decision-makers strategic assurances of regime survival. The loss of such assurance made the Kemalist elite more anxious about the “security threats” posed by political Islam and Kurdish nationalism. They increasingly perceived systemic incentives through the prism of the “Sevres syndrome”⁷, which further increased their influence in domestic and foreign policy. The security oriented foreign policy Turkey implemented with Israel also enhanced the secular elite’s ideological preferences, by commonality of sharing the same belief in progress and Western modernity, whereas they tended to ignore the historic commonality the Turk’s had with the Middle East prior to the republic’s establishment in 1923. The Kemalist establishment’s self-ascribed ‘Western identity’ therefore partly affected how

⁷ The Sevres syndrome:” a conviction that there is an international conspiracy to weaken and divide Turkey”(Balci & Kardas, 2012)

national interest and threats was perceived, pursued, and fought (Balci & Kardes, 2012, p.103); (Yavuz, 1997, p.23).

Strategic Culture

The military-bureaucratic Kemalist regime had through state institutionalization and socialization enforced the ideas of Kemalism in Turkish society and institutions. Kemalist ideology views the state as a historic necessity, and the Kemalist understanding of nation requires all Turkish citizens to accept a homogenized culture, identity and worldview promoted by the military. The Kemalist establishment could through the constitutional court deem which policies and strategies were acceptable or unacceptable according to its own principles. Nationalist ideologies such as Kemalism can have a profound impact on a state's international alignment pattern according to neoclassical realism, In that sense the Kemalist world view and ideology inclined towards a partnership with Europe, US, and Israel, particularly in 1990s. However, most of Turkish society still identified themselves within a more Islamic-conservative understanding of themselves and the Turkish society. The former US ambassador to Turkey stated that, "*Turks did not cease to be Muslims (during the decades of state Kemalism).... The deeper currents of life in Turkey never disappeared.*" (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p.6)

The military's increasing authoritarian conduct under the cover of protecting 'progress' and 'Westernization' from internal and external enemies was perceived by a large segment of Turkey as contracting the actual un-Western dogmatism and authoritarianist principles and conduct (Yavuz, 2000, p.34-35). The EU's recognition of Turkey's candidacy in 1999 increased the pressure on the Kemalist establishment to implement democratic reforms since the Kemalist project of 'progress' and 'modernity' in itself strived to be part of the EU/Western political and economic structure. Although there were elements within the military establishment who started to use anti-Western rhetoric, the military largely refrained from taking action which could hinder Turkey's EU membership. The shared expectation of EU membership from both pro-reformist and Kemalist constituencies, resulted in a parliamentary agreement of implementing two EU reform packages, one in 2001 and another in 2002, which gave more freedom of expression and thought, abolished the death penalty, and finally removed the Turkish-language monopoly on broadcasting and educational production (Kayhan Pusane, 2016, p.278).

State-Society Relations

According to neoclassical realism state-society relations can have profound impact on the way decision-makers can extract, mobilize, and use national power for its objectives. The nature of civil-military relations is an important aspect of state-society relations according to neoclassical realism as it can influence the strategies a state is able and willing to pursue (Ripsman et al., 2016).

The harmony between the military-bureaucratic Turkish state and the Turkish society during the 1990s was tense. First and foremost was the military-civilian balance of power was extremely favorable towards the military in the 1990s.

The military had staged four coups (1960, 1971, 1980, and in 1997) to ensure its dominance vis-à-vis the civilian authorities in politics, while the establishment of the National Security Council institutionalized the military's dominance over Turkish domestic and foreign policy.

The structure of the national security council prevented civil governments in pursuing domestic and foreign policy objectives which contradicted the strategies and objectives of Kemalism and the military. The national security council consisted of the president, prime minister, foreign minister, the minister of internal affairs and five top generals(Yavuz, 2000, p.34) .

When Refah challenged the Military's grand strategy and its relations with Israel after its election in 1996, the NSC reacted by closing it down in 1997 and initiating **the February 28 1998 Process**.

It could be argued that the nature of civil-military relations in Turkey during the 1990s meant that alternative national objectives and strategies easily could be obstructed by the military.

Domestic Institution

According to neoclassical realism, domestic institution informs about who can contribute to policy formation, and who can act as veto player by using their power to block policy initiatives and thereby reshape state policies. As mentioned above, the NSC was instrumental in foreign policy implementation, as it particularly used its power to close down the Refah government, thereby blocking its rapprochement with Iran and other Islamic countries and its pursuit of a different grand strategy for Turkey. Moreover, the NSC pressured Erbakan to sign bilateral agreements with Israel although he strongly opposed (Bengio, 2004, p.110) .

In short, the domestic institutions such as the NSC, the constitutional court, and the military itself acted as veto player regarding policies that contradicted its foreign policy objectives.

Independent variables

The AKP Years.

The strategic reconsiderations in Turkish foreign policy could slowly be observed from 1998 as Turkey implemented EU reforms and started a normalization process with its southern neighbors. These developments affected Turkey's relations with Israel, since the glue which compelled Israel and Turkey's strategic relationship in the 1990s eroded. Turkey and Israel's common threat perception of Syria and Iran was no longer valid for Turkey, especially after the AKP won the general elections in 2002. Moreover, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process which had legitimized Turkey's close relations with Israel collapsed after the failure at Camp David.

As mentioned in the independent variable section above are the relative distribution of power in the international and regional system and the threats and opportunity it represents, the most important variable when analyzing foreign policy behavior of state's.

During the AKP tenures from 2002 to 2017, the 2003 Iraq War and later on the Arab Spring are identified as major events which shaped the balance of power in the Middle East.

The US's and its allies' invasion of Iraq in 2003 again proved the Arab blocks weakness vis-à-vis Western infiltration, Saddam Hussein's fall and the Arab blocks reluctance to take any initiatives regarding the enormous power vacuum left in Iraq gave Turkey and Iran an opportunity to fill in the void. Iran's foreign policy strategy was to gain new proxies among Iraqi Shiites and fortify old ones in Syria and Hezbollah. Turkey on the other hand opted for another approach (Yesilyurt, 2017), Turkey under the Islamic AKP single-party rule since coming to power in 2002, experienced rapid economic development and relative political experience, meanwhile the AKP developed favorable ties with nearly all regional actors through an activist approach to the Middle East. The AKP's activism in the Middle East combined with its domestic achievement in relations to its EU reforms, transformed Turkey's traditional security-oriented foreign policy in the region. The focus was now

on enhancing Turkey's soft power in the region. The new approach were to embrace Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic legacy, in contrast to the Kemalist, and thereby cultivate through economic and cultural measures Turkish dominance, in previous Ottoman lands (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.67-8), (Tür, 2012,p.57). It is within this context that Turkey's new strategy in the Middle East should be seen.

Syria, Israel and Iran

The 2003 Iraq War was the first indication that Turkish strategy under the AKP diverged from that of the US and Israel. While Israel was content to see Saddam's regime defeated, Turkey feared that a power vacuum in Iraq would embolden Kurdish independency and the PKK's insurgency towards Turkey. (Tür, 2012, p.57). However, Turkey has since 2009 realized that its objective of keeping Iraq united was not achievable, therefore it shifted its strategy and established strong relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in order to resolve PKK (Eligür, 2012, p.432). The Iraq War showcased the different strategic objectives between Turkey on one hand and the US-Israeli on the other. Turkey's grand strategy under the AKP called for Turkey's engagement in the region by enhancing relations with Syria and Iran, whereas the US sought to isolate Syria, Iran, and Iraq (Cohen & Freilich, 2014, p.6).

The AKP formulated a "zero-problems with neighbor's policy" to guide its foreign policy strategy in the region. The aim of Turkey's "zero-problem" policy was to replace or at least lessen suspicious and defensive dynamics in the region with the help of economic engagement and dynamic diplomacy such as mediation (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.118). Turkey's rapprochement with Syria and Iran should be perceived within this context.

Turkish and Syrian relations took hold in January 2004 after Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad made a historic visit to Turkey, the first president ever to do so, and later that year Turkey and Syria signed a free-trade agreement (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p. 13). In fact, between 2002 and 2009, 50 cooperation agreements were signed between them, and in 2009 they held their first joint military exercise (Arbell, 2014, p.26). Following the military exercise, they agreed to inaugurate a "Senior Strategic Cooperation Council." to address trade and security issues (Inbar, 2011, p.6). Bilateral trade between Syria and Turkey reached almost \$ 4 billion in 2010, and according to SANA, Syria's state-owned news agency, Turkey is the biggest foreign investor in the country. In 2007 the two countries agreed to create joint energy projects, and visa restrictions were abolished in 2009 (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p.14).

The AKP's new grand strategy for Turkey had changed its threat perception and priorities regarding the Middle East, furthermore had the increasing ties to Syria, reduced Israel's strategic value for Turkey. During the 2000s Turkish-Israeli relations "normalized" in comparison to the "hyperness" of the 1990s, (Tür, 2012, p.49), Turkish and Israeli relations fundamentally deteriorated after Israel's Operation Cast Lead against Gaza in 2008-2009. However, Erdogan had expressed his views regarding the Israelis treatment of the Palestinians in 2004, and 2006 as "state terrorism"(Tür, 2012, p.54).

Nevertheless, he made it clear that good relations with Israel suited Turkish national interest, in fact most trade deals signed with Israel was during the AKP tenure in 2004, bilateral trade was worth \$ 2 billion, in 2012 it was worth \$ 4 billion. The military agreements signed during the 1990s were likewise functioning, the trilateral military exercises "Reliant Mermaid" between Turkey, Israel and the US continued until the end of the 2000s (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.119).

Syrian and Turkish relations had improved drastically since the AKP assumed office in 2002. However, Assad was still suspicious about Turkey's relations with the West and Israel, to ease this suspicion Turkey tried to revive the Israeli-Syria peace track, since it was within Turkey's grand strategic objectives to mediate peace agreements in the region. The AKP used Turkey's connection to both Israel and Syria to start indirect peace negotiations between them prior to Operation Cast Lead in December 2008. According to Turkish diplomats the peace negotiation was at the final phase before Operation Cast Lead Abruptly terminated all talks (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p.14), (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.119). The AKP viewed Israel's insurgence in Gaza as blow to their mediations efforts and called Israel's actions in Gaza a "*crime against humanity*"(Bengio, 2009, p.52). Although Erdogan was harsh in his rhetoric no punitive measures were taken against Israel ironically at the height of Erdogan public clash with Israel an arm deal with Israel worth \$ 167 million was signed. Relation between the formerly "strategic partners" further deteriorated following the 2008-2009 Gaza war, one month after Israel's Gaza attacks, Erdogan verbally attacked Israeli President Shimon Peres before storming out of the 2009, World Economic Forum meeting (FTa). The Turkish National Security Council's annual security threat outlook in 2010, classified Israel's policies as threatening to regional stability (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.119). The Tense atmosphere between Turkey and Israel culminated in June 2010, when Israel killed eight Turkish and one Turkish-American human right activist on board an international humanitarian

flotilla *Mavi Marmara* that sought to break Israel's blockade on Gaza. Following the incident Turkey recalled its ambassador from Israel and suspended military contracts. The UN launched an investigation of the incident, the Palmer Report concluded that the Israelis force was "excessive and unreasonable" and that Israel's blockade of Gaza was legal, moreover it questioned the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) motives behind its *Mavi Marmara* operation. Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador in Ankara, blocked Israeli initiatives in NATO, and supported a court case in absentia against Israeli decision-makers and soldiers and finally cancelled all military exercises with Israel following the findings in the Palmer Report (Stern & Ross, 2013, p.119). Turkey's demands for a renormalization of its relations with Israel conditioned an official apology, compensation for the victims' families, and its removal of the Gaza blockade. The deterioration of relations was unprecedented in Turkish-Israeli relations. The *Mavi Marmara* incident marked the first time a deep bilateral crisis between Turkey and Israel evolved without being influenced by the usual ups and downs in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Huber & Tocci, 2013, p.6) The AKP's policy response towards Israel likewise was guided by larger strategic considerations. The AKP is aware of the Turkish public sensitivity towards the Palestinians, and the Turkish public opinion has been more influential in politics since the implantation of EU's democratization reforms. It could be argued that the AKP utilized the Palestinian issue to mobilize support for its broader grand strategy. The AKP in this regard used the Palestinian question as platform to mobilize internal support, challenging the military which is the principal force driving behind Turkish-Israeli relations, and to mobilize positive attitudes towards Turkey in the Muslim and Arab world (Bengio, 2009, p.52-53). In short was Turkey's rapprochement with Iran and Syria, and the fallout with Israel was part of bigger grand strategy formulated by the AKP, and Davutoglu to enhanced Turkey's soft-power capabilities in the region, according to Davutoglu, Turkey's relation with Israel prevented Turkey from opening up to its Arab neighbors (Bengio, 2010, 17) .

The AKP's rapprochement with Iran was within the same "zero-problems with neighbors" policy. Nevertheless, has Turkey always perceived Iran as regional competitor, regardless of its domestic political structure. The PKK issue which was a major rift in their relations during the 1990s was dealt by signing security agreements concerning the PKK (Kosebalaban, 2011, p.102).

There is a duality in Turkey's relations with Iran in the sense that regional rivalry for more influence and political advantage is balanced with attempts to exist peacefully by strengthening economic relations and hinder a potential independent Kurdistan. There has been an increase in

economic-security cooperation between Iran and Turkey with the signing of a security cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding between 2004 and 2008 (Murinson, 2006, p.957) (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p.14), On the economic level there has been signed multiple agreements have been signed, such as joint production of natural gas, the construction of two power plants, inaugurating of a free industrial zone between their borders, and banks opening in both countries, bilateral trade between the two countries totalled \$10 billion in 2017 (Cakmak 309), (Eligur 444).

The threat perception from Iran in the 1990s by the Kemalist elite was reversed in 2010 by the AKP leadership when Iran was no longer listed as primary external threat. Islamic radicalism which was perceived as an internal threat towards the secular nature of the Turkish state is likewise no longer in to find in the National Security Policy Paper (Eligür, 2012, p. 444). Turkey's political response towards Iran's nuclear program has been benign considering that it is not in Turkey's long-term interest to see Iran acquire nuclear capabilities. A nuclear armed Iran would be detrimental to regional stability, as it could spark a nuclear proliferation race among Arab countries or push Turkey to acquire its own nuclear weapons (Flanagan & Brannen, 2008, p.14), Turkey is well aware that confronting policies towards Iran only will accelerate its nuclear program, therefore the only viable policy option for Turkey is a diplomatic one. Turkey and Brazil were therefore the only countries in the UN Security Council to vote no on the sanctions brought forth in 2010 (the telegraph1)

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its withdrawal from Iraq in 2009 has increased Iran's influence in the geopolitical structure in the Middle East. Iran steadily consolidated its sphere of influence in Iraq and Syria during this period. In order to counter Iran's influence in the region Turkey under the AKP rule adopted a grand strategy to increase Turkey's influence in the region. One of the key components of this strategy was to intensify its Muslim identity as a common denominator between Turkey and the region (Stern & Ross, 2013,p.123). Another aspect of the strategy was to encourage economic interdependence between Turkey and the region at large through economic initiatives. The strategy was quite successful in the first decade of the AKP rule. The Turkish GDP grew from \$233 billion in 2002 to \$800 billion in 2014, which elevated Turkey's capabilities vis-à-vis regional and international actors. Moreover, by the end of 2007, Turkey became the 15th largest economy in the world (Öniş & Kutlay, 2017 p.171) (Flanagan & Brannen,

2008, p.14), The Islamic notes of Ankara foreign policy likewise improved Turkey's image in the Middle East. According to a TESEV survey conducted in various Middle Eastern countries in 2011 revealed that 78% of respondents had a very positive opinion of Turkey in 2011 (TESEV, 2014, p. 6).

The structural changes as result of the 2003 Iraq War had powerful impacts on Turkish foreign policy strategy, as it underwent a paradigm shift from being characterized by security oriented one-sided Western strategy during much of the 1990s, to more benign and multidimensional strategy during the AKP (Kosebalaban, 2010, p. 48). Turkey's improving relations particularly with Iran and Syria, and Hamas, in this context became the source of discontent between Turkey and NATO, not at least Israel (bengio,2009, p. 50).

The AKP which was pleased with its improving regional position consolidated its foreign policy strategy with the objective of becoming the dominant actor in the Middle East.

The next section will examine how the Arab Uprising affected the balance-of-power in the region and consequently Turkey's foreign policy and grand strategy objectives in the region.

The Arab Uprising

The beginning of the Arab Uprising in 2011 was another systemic event which changed the regional balance-of-power, when coupled with the U.S. gradual disengagement from the region in 2009. The disintegration of once stable regimes in the Middle East presented Turkey, who was emboldened by its economic and political achievements, strong incentives to fill the power vacuum and consolidate its leadership role in the region (Yesilyurt, 2017,p. 68).

The Arab Uprising was perceived by the AKP as an opportunity to consolidate and form the Middle East within the lines of its own socio-economic interest. The opportunity to consolidate Turkey as global power, through institutionalization of like-minded regimes, seems to have been the primary driver for the AKP during the Arab Uprising. The AKP calculated that Turkey's increasing capabilities in the previous decade would allow it to achieve its strategic objectives during the Arab Uprising process (H. T. Oğuzlu, 2016, p.60).

Developments in the initial months of the uprising seemed to support Turkey's vision and objectives in the region, the relative quick demise of authoritarian regime in Tunisia and Egypt, and their possible replacement with more like-minded regimes appeared to have encouraged the hopes of the AKP regime. However, the Libyan crisis became the first serious dilemma Turkey encountered with the Arab Uprising. Turkey was against any form of military intervention in Libya initially and encouraged dialogue as a means to end the crisis. However, as Turkey realized it stood alone with this approach, it was forced to join the NATO operations under UNSC resolution No.1973. The AKP realized that its wait-and-see approach to the uprisings risked isolating and sidelining Turkey while other regional and global power stepped in, with this in mind Turkey realized that its strategic approach to the Middle East needed some modifications. The AKP in this context opted for more ambitious and interventionist approach in which they support the "people on the street" which was demonstrating against their authoritarian regimes (Yesilyurt, 2017,p .69-70). Turkey opted to support the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) affiliated parties in post-revolution Egypt and Tunisia, the strategy seemed to be working, as MB political parties won the majority of seats in the Egyptian and Tunisian post-revolution elections. However, the optimism was short lived, as Morsi's MB affiliated government was toppled by General Sisi in July 2013 and the MB was banned and labelled a terrorist organization, and Tunisia's MB affiliated Ennahda government was forced out of office because of its incompetence of assuring stability (Oğuzlu, 2016, p.60),(Yesilyurt, 2017,p.74).

Turkey's foreign policy strategy of supporting Sunni groups such as the MB was viewed upon with suspicion from other regional actors. The MB poses a great danger towards some monarchies in the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. These states have been effective at resisting Turkey's foreign policy objectives by supporting secular oppositions in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. When Sisi assumed power they jointly declared the MB as a terrorist organization. Qatar was the only Arab state which backed Turkey's Arab uprising strategy (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.75).

The Arab Uprising's impact on Syria, however, became the most detrimental development for Turkey's foreign policy strategy. Syria, prior to the uprising was the most promising success story of Turkey's grand strategy in the Middle East, as it had become Turkey's doorway to the Arab world.

When protests erupted in Syria in March 2011, Turkey tried to use its leverage to convince Assad of implementing reforms, legalizing the MB, and holding free elections, however, the advice fell on deaf ears. Turkey thus opted to engage itself assertively by supporting Sunni rebel groups with the aim of replacing Assad with some form of Sunni or MB affiliated structure in accordance with its grand strategy of molding MB dominant governments in a post-uprising Middle East (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.72-73). Turkey's foreign policy strategy of supporting Sunni groups raised allegation of Turkey's growing sectarian preference which contradicted, the AKP's own narrative of supporting "democratic transformation" in the region. Moreover, the AKP's increasing authoritarianism on the domestic political scene, largely dismantled that narrative, as it was dragged into the Syrian civil war. The increasing sectarian character of the Syrian civil war also damaged Turkey's relation with Shiite actors Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah (Yesilyurt, 2017,p.74-75), Iran strongly criticized Turkey's deployment of NATO missile defense system in 2013 saying it would escalate the conflict (Burch, J., 2013) Another setback for Turkey's foreign policy was its rising tension with the West over diverging strategies in Syria.

The ISIS offensive in Syria and Iraq in 2014 rearranged the U.S. and EU's priorities in Syria- the destruction of ISIS became the top priority for the West after ISIS conducted several terror attacks in Europe. The Syrian opposition was too weak and fragmented to be relied on as an effective force against ISIS, whereas the Kurds PYD and their armed affiliate YPG stood out as an effective and organized proxy to support. The US and EU's support to the YPG placed Turkey at odds with its NATO allies, since Turkey regards the YPG as an extension of the PKK, whereas the U.S. and EU's perceives the PKK and the YPG as two different entities (Chulov & Hawramy, 2017).

Russia's military involvement in the Syrian civil war in September 2015 in support of Assad further complicated Turkey's strategic objectives in Syria. Relations between Russia and Turkey likewise deteriorated when a Turkish F-16 jet downed a Russian bomber jet between the Turkish-Syrian border. The tension between the two severely limited Turkey's policy options. Turkey watched passively as the PYD/YPG expanded their territory in Northern Syria with the assistance of US and Russian airstrikes against ISIS. As a result, Turkey's maneuverability in Syria was limited following the downing of the Russian jet, and subsequently Turkish fighter jets stayed away from Syria airspace because of the threat posed by the deployed Russian anti-aircraft missiles.

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Turkey's south has evolved into an escalating power struggle between global powers on one side and regional powers on the other, the sectarian undertone of the Arab spring and the subsequent regional turmoil have made the AKP's grand strategy of establishing a like-minded regional order, increasing unachievable (Oğuzlu, 2016, p.61) .

However, although the above-mentioned developments progressively isolated Turkey, and tilted the regional balance-of-power in Iran's favor, Turkey did not assess a revision of its foreign policy strategy until the crisis with Russia impacted Turkey on a political, economic and military level (Yesilyurt, 2017, p.77). It is within this context that Turkish decision-makers initiated a foreign policy reassessment, and Turkey's growing international isolation resulted in taking steps towards normalizing its relations with Israel and Russia by mid-2016. Furthermore, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim stated that Turkey likewise would be interested in restoring relations with Egypt and even Syria (Reed, 2016). The re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy strategy came after Turkish decision-makers realized that ideological based foreign policy was not serving Turkey's national interest, Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat stated that, “ *the main driving factor behind this readjustment is the realization that Turkey's foreign policy entrepreneurship of the post-Arab Spring era has failed — a belated realization that this ideological and uncertain foreign policy did not serve but rather undermined Turkey's national interests,*” (Borger, 2009)

Intervening variables

Leaders image

Ahmet Davutoglu, “master belief” was instrumental in formulating the AKP governments grand strategy. According to Davutoglu, Turkey’s identity is directly related to its geographical location and historical past, Turkey’s identity cannot be simplified to one category. Instead he argues that Turkey’s geographical location situates it between different regional identities which also gives Turkey multiple regional identities, hence he defines Turkey as a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea countries all at the same time (Eligür, 2012, p.431).

Davutoglu, criticized the Kemalist establishment for the lack of strategic planning based on rational and clearheaded analysis of Turkey’s history and geography when they formulated Turkey’s grand strategy in the 1990s (Sözen, 2010, p.109).

The main argument in his thesis was that ‘strategic depth’ rests on historical and geographical depth. Davutoglu defines historical depth as countries which are at the epicenter of historical events, and he identifies eight former empires which encompasses historical depth, one of which is Turkey. He argues that Turkey’s Ottoman legacy gives Turkey great geographical depth since Turkey has multiple regional identities. He stresses the need to make a rational evaluation from a historical and geographical point-of-view when it comes to evaluating a country potential and ability to adapt to new circumstances (Murinson, 2006,p. 952). Davutoglu argues that Turkey needs to rediscover its historical and geographical identity and reassess its own position vis-à-vis the regional and global issues as it would allow Turkey to pursue its own foreign policy strategy and form its own alliance. He stresses the need for Turkey to re-engage in the Middle East particularly with Syria, Iran and the Gulf states, moreover, that Turkey’s re-engagement with all regions should be based upon establishing economic interdependence. Davutoglu stated, with regards to Turkey’s relations with Israel, that:

“From now on, Turkey has left the image of the passive side in the relations with Israel. She faces with the need of a new assessment on these relations within the framework of inter-regional interaction areas and overall Middle East policy. Conversion of bilateral tactical relations into strategic axis without inclusive strategies for improvement set out in the whole region creates

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inevitable restrictive results in dynamic international conjunctures. Today developments in the Middle East provides to Turkey much more opportunity than ever to become more efficient.”
(Erdurmaz, 2012, p.54).

He thereby tacitly indicates that Turkish-Israeli relations, need to be within the framework of a larger strategy in the Middle East and in harmony with general strategic objectives. Moreover, he emphasizes the urgency for Turkey to change its approach, ”crisis-oriented” to international relations, with a more constructive and visionary approach. On his vision for the Middle East, Davutoglu states that:

“This vision encompasses the entire region: It cannot be reduced to the struggle against the PKK(...) or efforts to counterbalance specific countries. Turkey can use its unique understanding of the Middle East, and its diplomatic assets, to operate effectively on the ground. Turkey’s Lebanon policy, its attempts to mediate between Syria and Israel and achieve Palestinian reconciliation, its efforts to facilitate the participation of Iraqi Sunni groups in the 2005 parliamentary elections, and its constructive involvement in the Iranian nuclear issue are integral parts of Turkey’s foreign policy vision for the Middle East.” (Davutoğlu, 2010).

In his article “Turkey’s Zero-Problems Foreign Policy” in Foreign Policy Magazine, Davutoglu lays out five guiding principles which he deems most optimal for Turkey’s foreign policy strategy and decision-making process.

The first guiding principle is “balance between security and democracy” as he notes that the post-september 11. environment has had the tendencies to undermine liberties for the sake of security. According to Davutoglu *“Turkey has made great strides in protecting civil liberties despite serious domestic political challenges to such freedoms... This required vigorously carrying out the struggle against terrorism without narrowing the sphere of civil liberties-- a challenge Turkey successfully has overcome. In the process, we have found that Turkish soft power has only increased as our democracy has matured”* (Davutoğlu, 2010)

The second, guiding principle of “zero problems towards neighbors” is largely guided by establishing economic interdependence between Turkey and its neighbors and neighboring regions.

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Another aspect is its maximum engagement principles as *“Turkey established high-level strategic council meetings with Iraq, Syria, Greece and Russia. These are joint cabinet meeting where bilateral political, economic, and security issues are discussed in detail.”* (Davutoğlu, 2010).

The AKP governments interdependence policy was apparent regarding its relations with the KRG, it encouraged Turkish businesses to invest in the KRG as means to create interdependence and ease tensions. One of these businesses included OYAK, the military’s pension fund (Sözen, 2010, p.116).

The third, guiding principle *“proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy” aims to take measures before crisis emerge and escalate to a critical level. Turkey’s regional policy is based on security for all, high-level political dialogue, economic integration and interdependence, and multicultural coexistence.”* (Davutoğlu, 2010). He refers to Turkey’s role in mediation efforts between Syria and Israel, and its nation-building projects in Somalia and Darfur. His fourth principle of a ‘multi-dimensional foreign policy’ aim at creating relation with other global actors, stresses that these aims not are in competition against each other, rather they are created to be complementary, which *“means that good relations with Russia are not an alternative to relations with the United States. Nor is the model partnership with the United states a rival partnership against Russia”* (Davutoğlu, 2010).

The last principle is what Davutoglu term *rhythmic diplomacy*, which demands that Turkey engage itself actively in all international organization and on all issues of global and international importance, he mentions are few in which Turkey actively has engage in from the G-20, the GCC and African Union, according to Davutoglu this indicates *“a new perspective of Turkey, one that is based on vision, soft power, and universal language(...) (a)consistent foreign policy in different parts of the world.”* (Davutoğlu, 2010).

The principles Davutoglu formulated to guide Turkish foreign policy have elements of a constructivist approach to international relations. Davutoglu, in his formulation of Turkish foreign policy clearly emphasizes features of constructivism in the sense that identity, social norms, culture, institutions and social practices all defines how peoples interest are defined and how they interact with other. He aims to build a regional security cooperation structures in which security is the responsibility of all, his focus on rhythmic diplomacy also indicates that he believes institutions can

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create better norms of behavior which in turn can stabilize international politics and improve geopolitical order (Cohen, 2016, p.532-33). In short, Davutoglu's 'master beliefs' had profound impact on the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and grand strategy. However, as mentioned earlier Davutoglu's zero-problem policy was severely challenged by the Arab uprising, Turkey's growing international isolation by mid-2016 forced a revision of Turkey's grand strategy.

Strategic culture

The AKP government's worldview differs from that of the traditional Kemalist state that underlined the secular nature and ideological commitment of the state and society to the West. The AKP, on the other hand, re-defined Turkey's state's identity underlining the Muslim and democratic character of Turkey's identity. Moreover, it placed Turkey within the Islamic civilization. This change of state identity had profound impact on Turkey's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East and with its relations to Israel (Altunışık, 2009, p.190).

The tenants of Islamism in the AKP foreign policy became more visible as it consolidated domestic power after its 2007, landslide electoral victory. The Islamist features of Turkey's foreign policy strategy in the Middle East revealed itself by its progressive deteriorating relations with Israel from the onset of Operation Cast led in late December 2008, and the diplomatic crisis following the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. Moreover, the AKP position on Hamas legitimacy as a trustworthy Palestinian actor and its supportive stance on the Iranian nuclear made Turkey a party of conflict in regional issues. Turkey by supporting Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas against Israel and the West aimed at transforming itself into a regional leader, the AKP used Islamic sentiments particularly the Palestinian issue to mobilize domestic support from its conservative Islamic constituency (Eligür, 2012, p.431).

Both the AKP and opposition parties are aware of the Turkish public feelings of affinity and warmth towards the Palestinians, a public opinion survey conducted in 2010 showed that after Azerbaijan, Palestine is the highest-ranking country which the Turkish public feel warmth and affinity towards. Whereas Palestine scored 5.77 out of 10 Israel merely scored 1.15 out of 10. The Palestinian question is of great importance to the AKP core supporters this has in turn affected the AKP government to take more interest in the conflict (Altunisik & Çuhadar, 2010, p.375)

According to neoclassical realism, ideology can influence a state's alignment pattern (Ripsman et al., 2016). The Islamic tenets of the AKP might have influenced it to be more inclined towards Islamic states at the expense of Israel, just as the Kemalist was more inclined towards Western states at the expense of an Islamic one.

State-society relations

The military decision-makers who clearly dominated the decision-making process during much of the 1990s gradually lost their influence regarding domestic and foreign policy issues. Turkey's EU membership process had accelerated the de-securitization of Turkish politics, which tilted the civil-military balance-of-power towards elected civilian officials (Öniş & Kutlay, 2017, p.171). After its landslide victory in 2007, the AKP mobilized its supporters against the secular nature of the state, predominantly the military. The Ergenekon lawsuit in 2008, led to the arrest of high profile secularist accused of being part of terror-network which aimed to initiate a violent coup against the AKP government. The lawsuit further strengthened the AKP control over foreign policy (Eligür, 2012, p.432). Moreover, the AKP successively implemented its suggested constitutional changes after it won the September 2010 referendum. The constitutional changes consolidated AKP's dominance over the judiciary and military bodies (Inbar, 2011, p.18).

Following the September 2010 referendum, the AKP won its third consecutive electoral victory, an unprecedented achievement in Turkish politics with almost half of the total votes. The success of the AKP led to overconfidence, the checks and balances of the previous decade had gradually replaced by more accumulative power in the hands of Erdogan. With the absence of external actor such as the EU to pressure Turkey, the AKP third term became characterized by deepening polarization and moves towards an illicit democratic system.

Domestic institutions

As mentioned above, the gradual decline of the military's power over domestic and foreign policies and its demise of veto power to block policies and strategies of the elected government likewise affected Turkish-Israeli relations, as the military was the primary driver of Turkish-Israeli relations (Tür, 2012, p.47). Moreover, the Bureau of the Chief Advisor on Foreign Policy was made more influential during the AKP, the bureau headed by Davutoglu became source of strategic and ideological support to foreign policy formulation (Sözen, 2012, p.108-9).

Conclusion

The international system is in a process of transformation. The short period of a unipolar international system dominated by the United States is gradually transforming itself towards a multipolar structure. Whereas the developed economies of the world shares of global trade was 54 % in 2004, it declined to 43% in 2014(Öniş & Kutlay, 2017, p.164).

The U.S relative decline has created a dynamic but uncertain international structure, nevertheless has it opened opportunities for regional powers to shape their own region according to their own preference countries such as China, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey (Öniş & Kutlay, 2017, p.164).

During the 1990s, the Kemalist establishment did not adapt to the structural changes by formulating a new grand strategy to guide their foreign policy, rather they stuck to their traditional security-oriented foreign policy strategy. They internalized the external threat perception from the PKK, Syria, and Iran, and pursued confrontational policies which at times came to the brink of War, as with Syria during the 1998 October crisis, moreover the shared threat perception from Syria and Iran was a major factor in solidifying the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership.

The Kemalist military's decision-makers viewed a partnership with Israel as the most optimal policy to address their internal and external threats, relations between the two quickly developed into a security oriented strategic partnership. The relations with Israel during much of the 1990s was designed to counter threats their common enemies Syria and Iran. However, by the end of the 1990s, internal, regional and global development led to the slow decline of the military's dominance over domestic and foreign policy.

The Refah government had been forced to resign and was declared illegal, Syria and Turkey were on the brink of War but the signing of the Adana Accords, which eased tension, and more profoundly Turkey started implementing the EU reforms that led to drastic change of balance of power between the civil and military authorities, favoring the former.

The AKP electoral victory in 2002, initiated a process which would have drastic effect on Turkish foreign policy strategy, the 2003 Iraq War opened the opportunity for the AKP to establish closer ties with Syria and Iran. During the first tenure of AKP rule, the party took a rather cautious approach to regional issues, within Davutoglu's strategic framework, Turkey tried to mediate in

various regional conflicts. However, after its second electoral victory, Erdogan and his Party consolidated domestic power, the military's role in politics were severely limited, which presented the AKP with the opportunity to pursue independent foreign policy objectives (Cerami, 2013, p.130). Subsequently relations with Israel deteriorated, the prime driver of their relations- the military no longer exerted its strategic foreign policy preference on the AKP government.

The following setbacks in Turkish-Israeli in 2008 due to Operation Cast led and then the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, culminated in the termination of relations. Moreover, it was in this period that Turkey went from a neutral mediator towards a more assertive role in regional conflicts utilizing the Palestinian question for domestic and regional support.

The AKP, embolden by its third consecutive electoral victory in 2011, saw a window of opportunity to shape the Middle East in its own mirror, nevertheless the AKP's initial optimism of the Arab Spring rapidly developed into a detrimental affair, which increasingly isolated Turkey as it came in odds with former and new partners.

It is within this context that Turkey re-establish ties with Israel in 2016, and starts a revision of its foreign policy strategy.

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