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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**RETHINKING TURKEY'S POSITION IN THE  
MIDDLE EASTERN REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX:  
FROM INSULATOR TO REGIONAL LEADER?**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Political Science Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

by Jitlaeka Luenam

Under the supervision of Dr. Marco Pinfari

January/ 2014

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the past decade, debates on Turkish foreign policy have been mostly focused on the considerable changes Turkey has gone through after the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Turkish foreign policy in the pre-AKP era tended to limit Turkey's relations with the surrounding regions, whereas the policy in the AKP era gears towards rapprochement with Turkey's neighbors. The foreign policy of the AKP seems to make Turkey an active player attempting to engage with the surrounding regions, especially the Middle East. This attempt of the AKP to pursue a new foreign policy strategy raises questions about Turkey's new position as part of the Middle Eastern region, which is contrary to its traditional peripheral role.

Countries like Turkey, which are at the periphery of different regions, are identified as outlier states. And they normally play a conspicuous role in the system, thus making it difficult to identify them as part of any particular region. In Buzan and Waever's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), these outlier states are called "insulators". Insulators are not located in the regional security complex but rather sit in-between two or more regional security complexes.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, insulators also play a passive role: either by inhibiting the zone of relative indifference or absorbing the energy of RSCs' periphery.<sup>2</sup> Turkey is acknowledged by Buzan and Waever as an insulator because it is located at the periphery of three RSCs—the EU, the Middle East, and the ex-Soviet. Despite its active participation in the surrounding RSCs, it remains an insulator because, according to these authors, it is not able to bring

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<sup>1</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 483.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

different regional security complexes together to form its own strategic arena or to clearly present itself as a pole in any regional security complex.<sup>3</sup> According to RSCT, a pole is a state that is a part of the Regional Security Complex.

Regional Security Complex Theory may have been accurate in portraying Turkey's regional position in the last decades but it is unclear whether this positioning is still appropriate for Turkey under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). This is because Buzan and Waever positioned Turkey as an insulator back in 2003 when they introduced RSCT as a grand theory in their book, *Regions and Powers*. Since 2003 Turkey has undergone various changes and witnessed many foreign policy initiatives by the AKP government. Therefore, the role of Turkey as an insulator should be reconsidered.

This research proposes to reconsider the position of Turkey by using comparative analysis. Turkish foreign policy in the pre-AKP era and the AKP era will be explored to see evidence of policy changes or continuity. The comparison will be focused on three main themes: the Israeli-Palestinian issue, nuclear policy and the Islamic agenda to assess the interconnectedness of Turkey and the Middle East in the societal and the political sectors. In order to see if the AKP has been the main factor that led to these changes, the research will then analyze dynamics that led to changes in Turkish foreign policy under the rule of the AKP by looking into two different levels: systemic and domestic. By doing so, the research will differentiate between changes in Turkish foreign policy that are primarily reactive and/or determined by changes in the international and regional structure and those that are related explicitly to AKP policies.

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<sup>3</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 395.

## **Research Question**

Recent debates about Turkey continue to be centered on the transformation of Turkish foreign policy after the AKP came to power. These changes raised questions about Turkey's position as an insulator in the Regional Security Complex Theory. This is because the changes of foreign policy made by the AKP has developed new approach towards Turkey's surrounding regional security complexes especially the Middle East RSC. In order to put Turkey after the rise to power of the AKP into a correct category in the RSCT, its position as an insulator has to be reevaluated by examining the foreign policy of the AKP.

The main question of the proposed thesis is: Does Turkey under the rule of the AKP still fit the category of insulator in the Regional Security Complex Theory? In addition, sub-questions will be asked as well in order to help guide the proposed thesis further: Is AKP foreign policy reactive or proactive? Is AKP the main catalyst that led to Turkish foreign policy change?

## **Hypothesis**

My key hypothesis is Turkey does not fit anymore in the category of insulator in Buzan and Waever's Regional Security Complex Theory because the AKP has reformulated Turkish foreign policy on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, nuclear policy and the Islamic agenda, which has transformed Turkey into a pole in the Middle Eastern RSC. According to Buzan and Waever's RSCT, a country can only be promoted to regional power status if it first becomes a pole in the RSC.<sup>4</sup> And for this

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<sup>4</sup> Buzan, Regions and powers, 394-395.

to happen, the country has to be engaged with the processes of securitization or desecuritization that interconnect the countries in the RSC.<sup>5</sup>

Several successful Turkish-European integration attempts such as Turkey's accession to NATO and free trade agreement with the EEC were driven by US external pressure to manage the threat of the Soviet in the region not by European security dynamics.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, without this pressure resulting from Cold War rivalry, Turkey seems to face several problems hindering it from becoming the EU member as can be seen from the 2005 accession negotiation with the EU. The EU's resistance to Turkey's membership resulted from the fear that Turkey would threaten the regional order and the "concentric circles" structure of the EU RSC.<sup>7</sup> This is because Turkey, a country with large population and strong growing economy, has the potential to shift the barycenter of this RSC to the east.<sup>8</sup> The fear of an increasing number of Islamic immigrants to Europe is another significant dynamic that obstructs Turkey's accession.<sup>9</sup> Besides these reasons that hinder Turkey's accession to the EU, Turkey's strategy of using Cyprus as a security concern has no effect on the EU RSC structure; this is because the threat from Greco-Turkish conflict is too small to threaten the actors in the center of the complex; Greece is a relatively weak state and the Cyprus issue seems to be more concerned about the domestic security of Greece and Turkey instead of a regional one.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Greco-Turkish conflict could hardly be widened into a regional security issue that would raise concerns from the center of the complex. As a result of these reasons, Turkey's integration into the EU RSC seems

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>6</sup> Aral, "Making sense of the anomalies in Turkish-European Union Relations", 99-100.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "IMF World Economic Outlook database".

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> McLean, "Regional Security Complex Theory and Insulator States:<sup>SEP</sup>The Case of Turkey", 43-44.

far from possible, and therefore there has been less enthusiasm about Turkish accession to the EU.

The difficulties in achieving the EU membership together with obstacles to operate proactive policies in the Caucasus and in Central Asia due to ‘Turkey’s increasing dependency on Russia’s energy resources and Moscow’s swift recovery after the war in Chechnya’<sup>11</sup> made the Middle East the only remaining area where Turkey can exercise its activism. In addition to that, the power vacuum that resulted from the erosion of the US power after the Iraq war also provided Turkey with the opportunity to fill this vacuum. Since then Turkey under the rule of the AKP began to actively get involved with several issues in the Middle East Security Complex.

The rapprochement with the Middle East has been done through Turkey’s shift of policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue, nuclear policy and the Islamic agenda. The key unifying dynamic within the Middle East is the solidarity with the Palestinian cause; therefore the AKP began to securitize the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which consequently led to a period of increasing tension between Turkey and Israel. The change of Turkey’s stance signaled its alignment more closely with the Middle East. Another unifying dynamic is Islam as the shared identity that facilitates the construction of ‘us’ versus the ‘other’ in the region. For this reason, the “Islamic agenda” became an important card for Turkey in order to affiliate with the Middle Eastern RSC. Without the stress on Islamic identity, Turkey can be perceived as ‘other’ among the Muslim countries in the region, which can result in the loss of interests Turkey could benefit from the Middle Eastern RSC. Therefore, the AKP intensified its Islamic agenda by attempting to position Turkey as a champion for Islamic rights in the region by using its economic story and successful development of

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<sup>11</sup> Ovali, “Decoding Turkey’s Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East, 11.



democracy. Such stories are the clear proof that Islamic identity and liberalization can co-evolve.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the AKP assumed the leading role in the region as a model of successful Muslim country. Nuclear policy is one of the major securitized issues in the Middle Eastern RSC. Turkey is involved in this issue through the AKP's support of Iranian nuclear fuel program and the defence of Iran over attacks from the UN.<sup>13</sup> The change of Turkey's stance on this issue explicitly shows that Turkey chose to identify its security concern more closely with its neighbor and the Middle East. Having this been said, the AKP and its foreign policy have transformed Turkey from an insulator to a pole in the Middle Eastern RSC.

## **Literature Review**

### *The AKP's foreign policy orientation*

Under the rule of the AKP, there have been different debates on the orientation of the Turkish foreign policy. Scholars focused primarily on the characteristics of the new foreign policy since it seems to completely deviate from its traditional trend on passive approach deriving from Ataturk's pronounced motto, "peace at home peace in the world"<sup>14</sup>. Even though at times, in the Turkish history, there have been several attempts for active engagement in the surrounding regions, there has not been a clear break from Turkey's traditional policy of non alignment.<sup>15</sup> The hold on this long-established foreign policy of neutrality has not waned until the era of the AKP rule that began in 2002. When the AKP came to power, there has been an increased active involvement in the regions surrounding Turkey, which was

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<sup>12</sup> André, "The Ankara Moment," 290.

<sup>13</sup> Cagaptay, "Turkey Changes, By the Numbers"; <http://www.cagaptay.com/739/turkey-changes-by-the-numbers>, accessed 05/07/2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Aras, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation", 79.

directed under the AKP's doctrine of "Strategic Depth".<sup>16</sup> Even though the foreign policy of the AKP put a strong emphasis on active involvement in all regions, its main focus during the first term seemed to be toward the European Security Complex due to Turkey's EU accession bid. However, there was a change in Turkey's policy direction toward the EU RSC in the AKP's second term because there were various obstacles barring Turkey from joining the EU. In addition to that, Turkey's membership met fierce opposition from various European states and negative signals from European elites and public. For this reason, the AKP tended to increasingly concentrate on the Middle East security complex instead. As a result, these developments raised questions about the axis shift in Turkish foreign policy.

The literature about the orientation of Turkish foreign policy can be mainly divided into three directions. The first direction argues that Turkish foreign policy remains unchanged even after the AKP came to power. The second direction argues that the change in the AKP's foreign policy is a direct impact of Turkey's Europeanization. And the last direction argues that the AKP's foreign policy is implemented to promote increasing engagement with the Middle East.

Tarik Oguzlu, Nichilas Danforth, and Emiliano Alessandri all argue that there has been no axis shift in the AKP foreign policy, and that changes were done on the basis of pragmatism. They argue that Turkish foreign policy since the time of Kemal Ataturk had been focusing exclusively on the involvement with the West. This traditional foreign policy of the country was done on the basis of pragmatism with an aim to modernize and secularize the country. Active engagement with other surrounding regions, especially with the Middle East, was not a priority due to the

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<sup>16</sup> Aras, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation", 82.

fear that Islam could prevent Turkey from becoming modernized and secularized.<sup>17</sup> However, in the later period, there was more focus on active engagement with other surrounding regions particularly the Middle East, for example, under the presidency of Turgut Ozal in the 1990s, which focused on the improvement of relation with the Middle East on the economic basis since Arab countries were important markets for Turkish export products.<sup>18</sup> Thus, from this perspective, the decision under AKP leadership to become more active in the relation with the Middle East should not be seen as a truly new development but rather a pragmatic move to exploit opportunities to seek for Turkish best interest after Turkey faced problem with the EU accession. Closer ties with the Middle East were developed in a way that serves Turkey's best interest without leading to the point of irreconcilable relation with the EU, Israel, or the US.<sup>19</sup> Even though there was a problem with Turkey's accession to the EU, the AKP did not completely give up on this attempt because they realized the importance of economic and political benefits that they would get from the membership.

More specifically, Nicholas Dansforth stresses on the importance of interests rather than ideology in the AKP foreign policy changes.<sup>20</sup> He believes that there was an overemphasis on domestic identity in analyzing AKP policy, which led to the excessive focus on the ideational factor (Islam).<sup>21</sup> Oguzlu sees the AKP foreign policy as an attempt of "Middle Easternization". However, this move does not suggest a break from the West but rather a way to deal with the growing negative impact of political development in the region to pave a smoother way for its accession.<sup>22</sup> In his view, Turkey's accession to the EU is still a distant possibility due to the growing

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<sup>17</sup> Aras, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation", 83.

<sup>18</sup> Barrinha, "The Ambitious Insulator", 7.

<sup>19</sup> Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy", 94.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy", 3.

threat and insecurity from the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey under the AKP sped up its active relation with the Middle East with an aim to help adopt peace and stability in the region.<sup>23</sup> Emili Alessandri's view on AKP foreign policy also highlights this pragmatic approach. She sees the AKP foreign policy as a continuation of Turkey's quest for a new place in the post-Cold War era. She views policy activism in the Middle East as a source of empowerment for Turkey's position, which could help elevate the importance of Turkey in the eyes of the West after the rivalry between the two superpowers ended in the regions.<sup>24</sup>

The second line of argument toward the AKP foreign policy is based on Europeanization. Ziya Onis and Benli Altunisik's arguments on the AKP foreign policy focus on transformation through Europeanization. Onis explains that in the first era of the AKP, Turkish foreign policy was mainly attached to the European dimension. Turkey went through the EU reform process to comply with the criteria set by the EU so that Turkey could be granted membership in the EU.<sup>25</sup> The process of Europeanization of Turkey can be seen from its use of soft power through its adoption of EU's foreign policy norms in conducting relations with other countries. However, the change took place in the second term of the AKP in power when the EU as a reference point began to lose its prominence due to the opposition to Turkey's EU accession bid. In Onis' analysis, this change does not mean the abandonment of the Europeanization process but rather a change of commitment from "deep Europeanization" to "loose Europeanization".<sup>26</sup> The AKP could not completely give up on this attempt because they realized the importance of economic and political benefits that they will get from the membership. Altunisik, on the other hands, sees

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<sup>23</sup> Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy", 4.

<sup>24</sup> Alessandri, "The new Turkish foreign policy and the future of Turkey-EU relations", 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> Onis, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism", 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 17.

the Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy under a different light. He argues that Europeanization means the “internalization of foreign policy norms of the EU.”<sup>27</sup> The AKP put an effort on policy activism in the Middle East, which is mostly based on multilateral diplomacy, soft power, conflict management, and resolution roles<sup>28</sup> He interprets these attempts of the AKP in conducting relations with the Middle East as the process of Europeanization because the AKP used foreign policy norms of the EU to involve and solve conflicts in the Middle East. He also stresses that Turkey’s more active relation with the Middle East does not contradict Turkey’s relation with the EU and does not mean that the AKP would give up its accession.

The third line of argument highlights the AKP foreign policy as a shift towards the Middle East. Bulen Aras, Andre Bank, Soner Cagaptay, and Sevket Ovah’s arguments lie in this approach. They believe that the Middle East has become a central focus in Turkish foreign policy especially after the opposition to Turkey’s EU accession bid. Turkey’s new ruling elites implanted policies that are radically different from the previous era, particularly towards the Middle East. Within a decade the AKP has transformed Turkey into an important player in the region through numbers of efforts such as the securitization of the Palestinian question, the improvement of its relation with Syria and Iran to solve the Kurdish problem, the expansion of trade relations and cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries, and the promotion of Turkish model in the Middle East especially after the Arab Spring.<sup>29</sup> Sevket Ovah and Bulen Aras argue that the AKP reformulated its Turkish foreign policy to be actively engaged with the Middle East because the party’s self perception

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<sup>27</sup> Altunışık, “Turkey-EU Relations: Creating New Synergies in the Middle East”, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Altunışık, “Turkey-EU Relations: Creating New Synergies in the Middle East”, 142.

<sup>29</sup> Barrinha, “The Ambitious Insulator”, 6.

and ideology are different from the previous era.<sup>30</sup> Andre Bank stresses Turkey's position in the Middle East as a regional leader since 2007; he calls it "Ankara Moment."<sup>31</sup> In his sense, the "Ankara Moment" emerged as a result of domestic political economy factors and the regional development such as demilitarization, economic successes, the erosion of the US power in the region, and the lack of democracy in region.<sup>32</sup> These dynamics provided Turkey with a chance to penetrate into the region and promote itself as the model of Muslim democracy and economic liberalization.<sup>33</sup> According to Soner Cagaptay, even if the AKP implemented an active foreign policy with the surrounding regions based on the principle of "strategic depth", their main focus is the Middle East. This is because the AKP perceived the world as composed of regional blocs and they saw their best interest lied in the Middle Eastern region. Therefore, their policies were implanted with an aim to get more actively engaged with the Middle east rather than embracing the Ottoman realm as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

Even though there have been many academic studies on the AKP foreign policy reorientation, none has been based on Buzan and Waever's RSCT sectoral approach as a theoretical framework. Buzan and Waever's RSCT is one of the most influential theories that was developed to explain the increased relevance of regional politics, thus it is helpful in explaining politics from the regional level of analysis. The proposed thesis aims to fill this gap by using this framework in analyzing AKP foreign policy to establish the understanding of Turkey's position in the context of regional security.

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<sup>30</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 16.

<sup>31</sup> André, "The Ankara Moment", 287.

<sup>32</sup> André, "The Ankara Moment", 289.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>34</sup> Cagaptay, "Turkey Changes, By the Numbers"; <http://www.cagaptay.com/739/turkey-changes-by-the-numbers>. accessed 05/07/2013.

## Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter two explains the theoretical background of Buzan and Weaver's Regional Security Complex Theory and analyzes the Middle East region as a regional security complex. Apart from that, this chapter also explains reasons that led to the adoption of a regional perspective to security studies. Chapter three explores the role of the Islamic agenda in Turkish foreign policy. This chapter compares Turkey's stance toward the issue in the pre-AKP era and the AKP era by investigating Turkish foreign policy in both eras, concluding that Turkey in the AKP era tended to engage more with the Islamic agenda and therefore revealing a new, stronger connection between Turkey and the Middle Eastern Security Complex. In addition to that this chapter also analyzes the determinants of changes to differentiate changes that are primarily reactive and those that are related explicitly to the AKP policies. In Chapter four, Turkish foreign policy concerning the Israeli-Palestinian issue will be examined. This chapter investigates Turkish foreign policy with regards to issue in the pre-AKP era and the AKP era to compare the stance and the framing of the issue in two different periods. In addition to that, it delves more into the Turkish-Israeli relation because it is an important factor for understanding how Turkey approached the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two phases of the Turkish-Israeli relation, one in the pre-AKP era and the other on the AKP era, reflect different stances of Turkey. The change depicts new priorities of Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era. The new approach of the AKP that differs from the traditional perspective leads to the repositioning of Turkey in the Middle East, indicating the new connection between Turkey and the Middle Eastern Security Complex. In addition to that, this chapter proceeds to analyze if the AKP has been the main factor that led to the change of Turkey's stance by analyzing the dynamics that

led to changes of Turkish foreign policy in two different levels: systemic and domestic. Chapter five is mainly about Turkey's nuclear policy. This chapter compares Turkish foreign policy in two different periods to look for evidence of continuity and change in Turkey's stance toward the issue. Two phases of Turkey's stance concerning nuclear program in the Middle East especially Turkey's stance toward Iran's nuclear program reveal the new approach of Turkey to the region and the divergence between the AKP's approach and the traditional stance. This change has an impact on the positioning of Turkey in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex because it led to the new connection between the Middle East RSC and the Turkey. In addition to that, this chapter also analyzes the determinants of Turkey's policy change to differentiate between the changes that are determined by the international and regional structure and those that are related explicitly to the AKP policies. Finally, in Chapter six the main findings of the research are summarized. Furthermore, this chapter provides a final overview of the impact of policy change on Turkey's role in the Middle East.



## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Background:

#### Regional Security Complex Theory and Turkey

##### Understanding Regionalism

The regional perspective had a limited role in mainstream IR because the focus was mainly on the global level; liberals see the world through the concept of internationalism, whereas realists take the state as a reference object and see the world as the system of states.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, regional perspective to security, which is known as “Old Regionalism”, had a chance to arise in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The old regionalists identified three main explaining reasons that led to the interest in regions. Firstly, decolonization led to the emergence of numbers of new states in the international system.<sup>36</sup> The new problems and tension accompanying the expansion of the state system made mainstream IR unable to explain the new emerging dynamics such as regional integration and regional order. Therefore, regionalism arose to provide framework for the analysis of regional “subsystems”. Secondly, the European Community (EC) heavily focused on regional integration.<sup>37</sup> The EC was viewed as a model of regional integration that other regions could follow. As a result, many scholars decided to study the dynamics of the regional integration with specific reference to the experience of the EC. Thirdly, the clout of superpower domination especially of the US started to wane, due to the Vietnam War and the paralysis of

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<sup>35</sup> Kelly, “Security Theory in the New Regionalism”, 197-198.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly, “Security Theory in the New Regionalism”, 202.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Bretton Wood system.<sup>38</sup> Without the meddling of the superpowers, there came a chance for the regions to play some significant role in the system.

The concept of region in this period was loosely defined and weakly conceptualized. There was little consensus among analysts on the basic definition of region and attributes that constituted regional subsystem.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, William Thompson, one of the significant old regionalists, studied and analyzed the major work in regional subsystem literature to construct a standardized definition and identify core indicators of a region. According to his study, the four main variables of a region are regular and intense interaction, geographic proximity, actor's recognition of the subsystem as a distinctive area, and a minimum of two actors.<sup>40</sup> Regular and intense interaction means interaction of national elites with the aim to develop closer relations between nations.<sup>41</sup> Geographic proximity is identifiable boundaries that are territorially determined blocks.<sup>42</sup> When the first two attributes pertain, the actor is bound to be aware of the subsystemic distinctiveness.<sup>43</sup> The regional subsystem would have less heuristic value if the actor is unaware or ignorant of its existence.<sup>44</sup> The membership threshold of regional subsystem, which is at the minimum of two, is set to differentiate region from the nation-state system.<sup>45</sup> Despite the awakening interest in the regions and more studies on the literature, regionalism did not become a permanent trend in the IR study because it started to wane in the 1980s after bipolarity's resumption.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the indicators of a region in the old

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<sup>38</sup> Kelly, "Security Theory in the New Regionalism", 199.

<sup>39</sup> Thompson, "The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory", 91-92.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

regionalism were further developed and incorporated in the new regionalism, which came to life again in the 1990s.

During the Cold War, regions were not treated as a significant actor in the system because the focus shifted to the relationship between the two superpowers, the US and the USSR. Because superpowers competition infiltrated into almost all of the regions, the world was mainly divided into spheres of influence of the two.<sup>47</sup> After the end of the Cold War, the focus on the pattern of international security shifted towards the regional level again. This is primarily because the fall of the USSR marked the termination of power rivalry between the two superpowers (the US and the USSR) that had been intruded in all regions.<sup>48</sup> Without the clout and the meddling of the super powers, regional relations expanded, opening venues for regional conflicts and cooperation more than in the past.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, security in the post-Cold War was broadened to include many new agendas such as terrorism, ethnic nationalism and extremism, religious fundamentalism, transnational organized crime, and illegal migration.<sup>50</sup> This new security environment after the Cold War was influence by regional dynamics. Therefore, the need for regional perspective to security was needed. Since the structure of regional security concentrates on different patterns of international politics that the mainstream IR was unable to explain, a new agenda named “New Regionalism” emerged. New Regionalism builds on previous regional theory, yet adds some more new elements to it. The most important new feature of New Regionalism is its multidimensional approach, based on the suggestion that regions are built on many relevant dimensions such as environmental effect,

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<sup>47</sup> Ruth, "Interregionalism: A Security Studies Perspective", 71.

<sup>48</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Lake, *Regional orders: building security in a new world*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Vural, "The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex", 14.

identities, and trade partners.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, regions in New Regionalism will have different shapes and not to be confined to a single region.

### **Buzan and Waever's Regional Security Complex Theory**

Regional Security Complex Theory is part of the new security studies and new regionalism that was developed by Buzan and Waever to explain security in the post Cold War that traditional security studies were not able to do.<sup>52</sup> They provided a theoretical framework to understand security at the regional level. They also recognized the importance of geographic proximity, which is the approach of old Regionalism. However, their concept of region is not defined by geographical proximity only but also a shared characteristic in accordance with a functional demand in various dimensions such as politico-security axes, economic interactions, identity, and environmental externalities.

Regional Security Complex Theory was first developed by Barry Buzan in "People, States and Fear" with an aim to provide a framework for security studies.<sup>53</sup> In this book, "Regional Security Complexes" (RSCs) were introduced as "set[s] of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another".<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, interactions between states in the RSC created security interdependence and the security interdependence is created within a geographically

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<sup>51</sup> Kelly, "Security Theory in the New Regionalism", 199.

<sup>52</sup> Bilgin, *Regional security in the middle east*, 72.

<sup>53</sup> Coşkun, "The European Neighborhood Policy and the Middle East Regional Security Complex", 43.

<sup>54</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, 12.

coherent grouping.<sup>55</sup> This geographical proximity also becomes the boundaries of the later modified version of RSCT.

In the following years, with the emergence of new security threats that led to changes of regional and global security structures, Buzan and Weaver modified RSCT to make it a more effective framework in analyzing security in the new era. The modified RSCT is defined through a “securitization model”. In a securitization model, the units are connected by the processes of securitization or desecuritization, which create interdependence between units in terms of security.<sup>56</sup> In the case of securitization, the process only occurs when the actors choose to identify the issues or problems as an existential threat; the problems themselves can never spontaneously or automatically constitute threats to security.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, desecuritization is a process that results in the exclusion of an issue or problem from the security agenda, meaning that the issue or problem is no longer treated as an existential threat.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in RSCT whether problems or issues are treated as a threat or not depends on the actors that “securitize” them. The processes of securitization and desecuritization in RSCT have a social constructivist outlook. In Constructivism, reality is not objective but rather constructed, thus it emphasizes the role of norms, identity, and ideas because they have an impact on the meanings that are assigned to material objects leading to action.<sup>59</sup>

Since security is viewed as socially constructed by securitizing actors, the processes of security interdependence between actors are formed differently. Some may be identified as friends, whereas others as enemies. There are different types of

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<sup>55</sup> Buzan, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, 15.

<sup>56</sup> Buzan, *Regions and Powers*, 44-48.

<sup>57</sup> Buzan, *Security: A new Framework of Analysis*, 25-32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory." 177.

pattern of amity ranging from allies and friendship to protection and support, whereas pattern of enmity resulted from fear and suspicion among securitizing actors.<sup>60</sup>

Patterns of amity and enmity play a significant role in defining a security complex. In a regional security complex where pattern of amity prevails, there will be intense security interdependence. This security interdependence will be in a form of positive dependency, thus creating security community.<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, in a regional security complex where pattern of enmity prevails, the intensity of security interdependence will be in a form of negative dependency. This will end up being a conflict formation.<sup>62</sup>

Factors that significantly contribute to the construction of patterns of amity and enmity are history and common culture. One of the examples of historical factor is the long time enmity between Arabs and Jews, whereas the example of the common culture are countries that belong to the same civilizational area such as Europe, South America, and the Middle East.<sup>63</sup> When these criteria for constructing pattern of amity and enmity are applied, the identification of “other ” will be set. When “other” is identified as being neutral, security interdependence will be normalized leading to the formation of security community, whereas when the “other” is identified as being a threat, security interdependence will be in a form of rivalry leading to a conflict formation. In the RSCT, Regional Security Complexes (RSCs) are defined by different patterns of security interdependence. This is for instance the EU RSC is defined as “security community” since pattern of amity prevails in the security complex, whereas the Middle East is defined as conflict formation because pattern of

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<sup>60</sup> Coşkun, “The European Neighborhood Policy and the Middle East Regional Security Complex”, 44-45.

<sup>61</sup> Buzan, *Regions and Powers*, 489-491.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 45

enmity prevails.<sup>64</sup>

In Buzan and Weaver's Regional Security Complex Theory, the world consists of three formations: Regional Security Complexes (RSCs), global level powers, and insulator states.<sup>65</sup> Buzan and Waever defined RSC as "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another."<sup>66</sup> They divided the world into nine distinct RSCs and each has its exclusive members because states do not exist in two RSCs or overlap from one to another.<sup>67</sup> Global level powers are the regional powers and the great powers whose influence and capabilities can be exercised in all areas of the international system.<sup>68</sup> While both powers differ in the scale of influence and capabilities, they both have the ability to penetrate and play a role in the regional security complex.<sup>69</sup>

With regards to the concept of insulator, which is the primary focus of this research, Buzan and Waever explained that an insulator is not located within a regional security complex but rather sits at the margin between two or more regional security complexes.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, insulators also play a passive role – either by inhibiting the zone of relative indifference or absorbing the energy of RSCs' periphery.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the role of an insulator is to act as a border to separate regional security dynamics from each other, preventing the spillover of security interactions from one region to another.<sup>72</sup> For a country to become part of the

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<sup>64</sup> Buzan, *Regions and Powers*, 489-491.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35

<sup>69</sup> Kelly, "Security Theory in the New Regionalism," 208.

<sup>70</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 483.

<sup>71</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 483.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

Regional Security Complex, there must be a degree of interconnectedness between its processes of securitization or desecuritization and those of the other units in the complex.<sup>73</sup> For Buzan and Waever, such processes do not cover only the traditional military and political sectors but also the economic, societal, and environmental ones.<sup>74</sup>

Given this basic structure of the theory, the RSCT is obviously the most comprehensive approach in understanding security at the regional level. However, the theory met criticism particularly about its clear-cut notion of regional space. The way Buzan and Weaver divided the world into several Regional Security Complexes with numbers of states belonging to each raised questions about territorial construction of the security region such as how to draw the line between the inside and outside? When will the state be included or excluded from being part of the Regional Security Complex? And why coherent grouping based in geographical location matters? The clear-cut notion of regional space in the RSCT is not a flaw in the theory as criticized because it is merely an analytical concept applied to help understand security discourses and security practices of the actors more easily. This is because when actors continue to belong to the same Regional Security Complex, there emerge security interdependence. The actions undertaken by one actor in the region inevitably produce repercussions for the other, regardless of whether amity or enmity is involved.

The regional space that has been imposed in the theory is based on functionality in terms of security interdependence between states. This means that the grouping of states as a Regional Security Complex is socially constructed by the security practice of the actors. And since threats tend to travel more easily over short distances than

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<sup>73</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 44-48.

<sup>74</sup> Buzan, *Security: A new framework for analysis*, 1.



over the long ones, the grouping is more likely to be based in geographical proximity. However, geographical proximity is not necessarily an exact guide to its members. A regional security complex can surpass it. The borders of the Regional Security Complex may vary according to how states construct them. Therefore, there can always be a possibility that a Regional Security Complex can undergo transformation concerning numbers of members or type of security interdependence. The actors that continue to affect or to be affected by the actions of other actors in the region will continue to be part of the RSC, whereas those that are not will be excluded.

### **The Middle East as a Regional Security Complex**

According to Buzan and Waever's Regional Security Complex Theory, the Middle East RSC is identified as a standard type, meaning that there are multiple poles with no great powers or clear regional order.<sup>75</sup> At various points throughout modern history, there have been attempts by many contenders such as Nasser, Ghaddafi and the Baathists to lead and become regional leaders but none of them was successful. Even though Nasser's effort to unify people and countries in the Arab world through the idea of pan-Arabism had the potential to lead the regional order, it did not last long and declined over time. Apart from being identified as a standard type, the Middle East Regional Security Complex is characterized as "conflict formation" because hostility dominates the interactions between actors in the region.<sup>76</sup>

In order to understand security dynamics that led to pattern of conflict formation in the Middle East Regional Security Complex, the internal structure of this region should be examined. The main elements in the Middle Eastern Regional

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<sup>75</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 187.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Security that tended to form negative interdependence between actors are ethnicity, religion, and oil reserves.<sup>77</sup> In the Middle East, there are different ethnicities such as Arabs, Persians, Turks, Jews, Kurds, and Turcomans. Among these, Arabs constituted the majority of populations, whereas others are demographically dominant in different countries like Persians in Iran, Jews in Israel, Turks in Turkey.<sup>78</sup> The minority groups such as Kurds and Turcomans are dispersed in different countries like Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.<sup>79</sup> Apart from ethnicity, religion is also diverse in the Middle East. There are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Muslims dominate the region except in Israel where Jews is the majority, whereas other non-Muslims like the Armenians, Maronites, and Orthodox are dispersed in different countries.<sup>80</sup> Even though Islam is the major religion, there are different sects across the region such as Sunni, Shia, Wahabis in Saudi Arabia, Druze and Nusairis in Egypt.<sup>81</sup> Oil reserves are another element that created divergence in the region especially in terms of power and influence. Many times, countries that have this power source are more powerful and dominant than others. Furthermore, when actor in the region is equipped with power, it will contend to be the leader of the Regional Security Complex as at different times Saudi Arabia attempted to. These divergences, ethnicity, religion, and oil reserve, play a significant role in the pattern of security interdependence in the Middle East Regional Security Complex. They define the identification of “other” in a negative way, leading to fear, suspicion, hostility, and power rivalry in the region. As a result, Middle East Regional Security Complex becomes a conflict formation.

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<sup>77</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 203.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

Within the Middle East RSC, according to Buzan and Waever, there are three sub-complexes: the Levant, the Gulf, and the Maghreb.<sup>82</sup> The Levant includes Israel and various Arab countries: Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.<sup>83</sup> Countries in this sub-complex are interconnected by conflict between Israel and other Arab states. This conflict also connected other sub-complexes in the region because they were heavily engaged in the issue especially through the Arab-Israeli conflicts that led to five major wars in 1948-1949, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982.<sup>84</sup> The second sub-complex is the Gulf sub-complex. It includes countries in the Gulf states and also Iran and Iraq.<sup>85</sup> The main issue that characterizes this sub-complex revolves around a “triangular rivalry” between the Gulf states, Iran and Iraq. The last one is the Maghreb sub-complex, which is the weakest one among the three sub-complexes. It consists of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Chad, and Western Sahara.<sup>86</sup> Even though there are different security dynamics that characterized security pattern in each sub-complex, there are some main security dynamics that connected all of them together. The most significant one is centered on the problem of “Arab versus others”.<sup>87</sup>

In the Middle East there has been a widespread hostility against the non-Arabs especially the Israelis, which has its root in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such conflict triggered various interstate wars in the region throughout the history. Until now the conflict has not yet been eased; conversely, the rivalry became more intense due to the increased anger at the Israeli deadly attacks on the Palestinians. Apart from ethnic dimension, religion also gets woven into hatred towards Israel. Israel represents religious differentiation from its Arab neighbors that are mostly Muslims. As a result,

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<sup>82</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 187-188.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

Israel becomes the common threat denominator for the Arab world and such rivalry makes Arab-Israeli conflict the “defining dynamic” of the Middle East RSC.<sup>88</sup>

### **Turkey and The Regional Security Complex Theory**

According to the RSCT, the world consists of regional security complexes, global level powers, and insulator states.<sup>89</sup> The concept of insulator is unique and specific to RSCT, which is used to describe countries that are at the periphery of the regions. An insulator is not part of a Regional Security Complex and sits at the margin between two or more Regional Security Complexes.<sup>90</sup> Insulator is different from a buffer state. A buffer state is in the Regional Security Complex with a role to contain strong security patterns.<sup>91</sup> For example, East Germany was a buffer state throughout the Cold War because it buffered two ideological poles- Communism and Capitalism- in the EU Regional Security Complex. In contrast, an insulator would just inhibit the zone of relative indifference or absorb the energy of RSCs’ periphery.<sup>92</sup>

Buzan and Waever describe Turkey as an insulator because it is located at the periphery of three regional security complexes: the European, the Middle East, and the ex-Soviet.<sup>93</sup> However, Buzan and Waever marked Turkey as a special kind of insulator because it does not play a passive role as insulators usually do. Even though Turkey seems to challenge the concept of insulator by trying to be more active in the surrounding regional security complexes, Buzan and Waever still recognize Turkey as an insulator since it is not able to bring different regional security complexes together

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<sup>88</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 190.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>93</sup> Barrinha, “The ambitious insulator: Revisiting Turkey’s position in the regional security complex theory”, 2

to form its own strategic arena or to clearly present itself as a pole in any regional security complex.<sup>94</sup>

However, it is important to note that Buzan and Waever reached this conclusion back in 2003 when they introduced the RSCT as a grand theory in their book, *Regions and Powers*. Since 2003 Turkey has been through various changes and there have been many of the foreign policy initiatives of the AKP government. More than 10 years later, should Turkey still be described as an “insulator”?

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<sup>94</sup> Buzan, *Regions and powers*, 395.

## Chapter 3

### Turkish Foreign Policy: Islamic Agenda

The aim of this chapter is to compare Turkey's stance on an Islamic agenda in the pre-AKP era and current period by investigating Turkish foreign policy with regards to the issue during both periods. Islamic agenda in this chapter is referred to as "political Islam". Political Islam is identified as the "irruption of Islamic religion in the secular domains of politics".<sup>95</sup> In other words, it can be summed up as the use of the Islamic elements for the political ends. However, it is important to note that political Islam in Turkey is unique and different from that in the Arab world. It was not used as a force to mobilize masses against colonial powers or against repressive government as happened in Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> Nor was it used as a means to seek the Islamic polity through force and violence, even terrorism.<sup>97</sup> In Turkey, political Islam developed within the framework of democratic politics and a secular state. For this reason, the political ends for using Islam was not to become an Islamic state or replace the human law with the Shariah but rather to challenge the strict secularity of the establishment, root in the suppressed Islamic past of the Turks, and unleash forces that were discontent with the existing orders.<sup>98</sup> The comparison of Turkey's approach toward the Islamic agenda or political Islam in the pre-AKP era and the current period shows how Turkey's shift in position has led to different framing of their foreign policy. The approach of the AKP that differs from the Kemalist establishment led to the repositioning of Turkey in the Middle East,

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<sup>95</sup> Hirschkind, "What is Political Islam?", 12.

<sup>96</sup> Hermann, "Political Islam in Secular Turkey", 266.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Tank, "Political Islam in Turkey: A State of Controlled Secularity", 7-8.

resulting in the new connection between Turkey and the Middle Eastern Security Complex.

### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Islamic Agenda in the Pre-AKP Era**

Turkey's stance concerning an Islamic agenda in the pre-AKP era was not consistent. The stance differed between periods. The difference was in terms of level of importance, meaning that in some periods the level of disengagement is more intense than other and in some period there has been more attempts on reengagement than the other due to various reasons such as the commitment of individual policy makers and changes in the power structure of the international system. Turkey's relation with the Middle East was very limited particularly in the early republican period and in the post Cold War as a result of the dominance of the Kemalist establishment. However, there was a short period of reengagement during the later half of the Cold War period. Such attempt was proceeded by Ozal with an aim to develop ties with the Middle East for economic benefits.

#### Early Republican Period

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged as the nationalist leader and founder of the modern Republic of Turkey. His main goal was to put an end to Turkey's backwardness and develop his country to the "level of contemporary civilization", which mostly certainly implies Western countries.<sup>99</sup> Due to the perception of setting the Western countries as a model that Turkey must achieve, Atatürk decisively cut ties with the Ottoman past, especially in terms of religion. For Atatürk, the Ottoman Empire was just the ash of the past glory and Islam was not allowed to tie the Turks to other Muslims because this tie would not bring

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<sup>99</sup> Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey*, 121.

any benefit to the country other than disaster and backwardness as it happened to the Ottomans.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the tie with Islam would force Turkey to protect the Muslim world from Christendom, which would impede its opportunity to operate its development scheme on the Western model.<sup>101</sup> For this reason, Atatürk decided to mark an end with Islam. Symbolically, he abolished the Sultanate in 1922 and two years after the Caliphate. Politically, he applied “secularism” to eliminate religious interference especially Islam in the government affairs.<sup>102</sup> These revolutionary acts of Atatürk created a lasting legacy.

Atatürk’s desire to renounce Turkey’s Islamic past and turn towards the west was the main dynamic that defined their foreign policy in the early Republican period. Turkish foreign policy in this period was clearly pro-Western. This pro-Western approach consequently made Turkey a bystander in the Middle East politics. Turkey viewed the Middle East as a region that was full of complex problems that it should avoid getting involved with.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, in that period many parts of the Middle East were still under the mandate of the Western powers, thus Islamic solidarity with the Middle East had no benefits for Turkey; instead, it would lead to undesired repercussions that could impede the development of the country.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, Turkey’s relations with the Middle East were limited in this period.

### Cold War Period

After the end of the World War II, there was a change in the international system from multipolarity to bipolarity in which the two main powers-the US and the USSR-became the dominant actors in the system. The change in the system also had an

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<sup>100</sup> Dinc, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East,68

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>104</sup> Vural, “The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex”, 53.



impact on the direction of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey, especially during the time of Adnan Menderes's government, attached itself to the Western bloc and defined its interests in accordance with the Western allies.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, Turkey attempted to seek membership to all kind of Western institutions: it was founding member of the United Nations in 1949, member of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation in 1948, member of the Council of Europe in 1950, member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 and associate member of European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963.<sup>106</sup> This engagement with the Western bloc affected Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East especially when it came to the Islamic agenda. In order to preserve its interest from the Western allies, Turkey decided to disengage with any Islamic agenda that could politically bind Turkey to the obligations. For example, Turkey rejected King Faysal's proposal called the "Islamic pact" in 1966.<sup>107</sup> The pact aimed to "unite all Muslims around a common idea, to place Islam on solid foundations, to mobilize Muslims against atheism and communism, to create cultural union and to establish a Muslim common market".<sup>108</sup> The acceptance of this proposal would attach Turkey to the Islamic agenda politically; this attachment could lead to repercussions like suspicion from the Western bloc and the abandonment of the national principle of secularism. Therefore, in Turkey's perception disengagement with the Islamic agenda would benefit it most in this circumstance.

Apart from structural dynamic related to the international system, domestic dynamics also had an impact on Turkey's disengagement with the Islamic agenda. In

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<sup>105</sup> Turkmen, "Turkish-American Relations: A Challenging Transition", 111-112.

<sup>106</sup> Aydın, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures during the Cold War", 110-111.

<sup>107</sup> Steinbach, "Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition, 1950-1974", 128.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Turkey, the military played a significant role in politics. They regarded themselves as the guardian of Kemalism, the revolutionary goal that has to be preserved for the development and the stability of the state.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, whenever there were political parties that tended to be associated with an Islamic agenda, these parties would be shut down either by the military or with the help of constitutional court for violating the principles of secularism set out in the Constitution (Preamble and Articles 2, 19, 57) and the Law of Political Parties (Law No. 648, Articles 92,93,94).<sup>110</sup> The National Order Party, which was the first political party in Turkey had Islamic orientation was closed down by the constitutional court in 1971.<sup>111</sup> Another Islamic oriented party founded in 1972, the National Salvation Party, was outlawed by military coup in 1980.<sup>112</sup> These parties were banned on the ground that they posed threat to the principle of “secularism”.<sup>113</sup>

Despite military tutelage in Turkey, the coup in 1980 had repercussions on internal transformations especially during Ozal’s government. The coup largely wiped out many political parties that were credible opposition and political rivalry of the Ozal government.<sup>114</sup> For this reason, it seemed that Ozal was granted more freedom to operate his policy and move out of the established line. Therefore, Turkish foreign policy began to be shaped in a different direction especially toward the Middle East. Ozal focused on improving relationship with the Middle East specifically economically. Ozal focused on improving relationship with the Middle East particularly in the economic aspect. He emphasized the uniqueness of Turkey’s historical dynamic and geostrategic location; he held the Ottoman past in high-regard

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<sup>109</sup> Jenkins, "Continuity and Change: Prospects for Civil-Military Relations in Turkey", 339.

<sup>110</sup> Tank, "Political Islam in Turkey: A State of Controlled Secularity", 7.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Aras, “National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation”, 79.

and insisted on good relations with those that shared common values particularly the Muslim world to seize new economic opportunities in the Middle East. This proactive foreign policy of Ozal is known as “Neo-Ottomanism”, which later became one of the cornerstones of the AKP’s foreign policy.<sup>115</sup> Ozal’s desire in improving relationship with the Middle East provided Turkey with economic benefits because the region was an important market for Turkey’s export.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, it can be deduced that the Islamic agenda in Turkish foreign policy was limited because it could be deemed as the violation of the principles of secularism. However, at some point, particularly during Ozal’s government, an Islamic agenda in Turkish foreign policy was framed out of the Kemalist line and attempted to achieve rapprochement with the Middle East for economic benefit.

#### Post Cold War Period

Ozal’s proactive foreign policy towards the Middle East still continued in the post-Cold War during his presidency. However, his initiatives were not proceeded by his successors because they resorted to the traditional approach.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, the Islamic agenda in Turkish foreign policy and the rapprochement with the Middle East were abandoned. In late 1990s, there was an attempt to redevelop an Islamic agenda and improve relations with the Middle East by the Turkish Islamist leader, Necmettin Erbakan. Erbakan encouraged the strengthening of Turkey’s Islamic values and develop closer relations with the Middle East instead of the West.<sup>118</sup> However, his ideas were deemed as a threat to the principle of secularism. For this reason, in 1997

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<sup>115</sup> Danforth, “Ideology and pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy”, 89-90.

<sup>116</sup> Özcan, “Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East”, 94-113.

<sup>117</sup> Aras, “National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation”, 80.

<sup>118</sup> Dinc, “Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East”, 70.

the military played a leading role in ousting Erbakan from power.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that Turkish foreign policy in this era was still based on the Kemalist pro-Western approach.

### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Islamic Agenda in the AKP Era**

Turkey's stance on the Islamic agenda in the AKP era is quite different from the Kemalist approach. The regime made use of Islamic values in its foreign policy to culminate closer ties with the surrounding regions especially with the Middle East. This change indicates new direction of Turkish foreign policy, which abandoned the reactive foreign policy of the past and removed it with the proactive one. The proactive foreign policy in the AKP era is the product of Ahmet Davutoglu's initiatives. Davutoglu was appointed foreign minister of Turkey in 2009, he nevertheless was the chief foreign policy advisor to Erdogan's government since 2002.<sup>120</sup> The main guidelines in Turkish foreign policy derived from his book "Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position", which was published in 2001.<sup>121</sup> The two main components of the Strategic depth doctrine, which is also known as the "Davutoglu doctrine", are geographical depth and historical depth.<sup>122</sup> Historical depth is when the country is "at the epicenter of (historical) events", whereas geographical depth is "part and parcel of historical depth". According to Davutoglu, Turkey is situated in the central place within its unique geography that is rich in common culture and history inherited from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>123</sup> For this reason, the strategic depth of Turkey can act as a facilitator to enhance relations with countries that were territories of the Ottoman Empire and maximize its interest in those regions.

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<sup>119</sup> Dinc, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East", 70.

<sup>120</sup> Sariibrahimoglu, "Davutoglu Promoting Strategic Depth in Turkish Foreign Policy.

<sup>121</sup> Danforth, "Ideology and pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy", 90.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>123</sup> Aras, "The Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy", 130.

Since Ottoman heritage is the main dynamic for Turkey's strategic depth, the AKP saw the potential of using Islamic value as a means to facilitate Turkey's rise to be the leading power in the Muslim world. Accordingly, Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era stresses a strong Islamic agenda.

Turkey's strategic depth provided Turkey with ambition to play a hegemonic role in the Ottoman territories; however, the presence of the EU in the Balkans and Russia in the Caucasus limited Turkey's chance to penetrate into those regions. For this reason, the Middle East remains the only area where Turkey could increasingly exercise its activism.<sup>124</sup> For Turkey, regional leadership in the Middle East could not be achieved easily due to its traditional foreign policy operated by the Kemalists, which looked to the West and abandoned Ottoman Islamic values. These approaches of Turkey in the past era created a negative perception among Middle Eastern states.<sup>125</sup> As a result, any Turkish policies toward the region tended to be perceived as an imperialistic mission, equating Turkey with "proxy" of the West.<sup>126</sup> For Turkey to successfully reposition itself in the region, the attitude towards Turkey as "other" has to be eliminated. As a result, the AKP has recreated Turkey's image by putting an emphasis on Islamic characteristics in Turkish foreign policy because Islam is the key unifying dynamic in the region. The Islamic agenda has been framed by the AKP in their foreign policy in three different ways: Turkey as the defender of Islam, Turkey as the model for other Muslim countries, and Turkey as a bridge connecting the Muslim world with that of the Christians.

The AKP puts emphasis to Turkey's contribution to the Middle East as the defender of Islam. Being a defender of Islam means protecting the Islamic value

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<sup>124</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 11.

<sup>125</sup> Aydın, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy" 113.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

system from the outside attack.<sup>127</sup> This assumed role of Turkey could be seen from the AKP's desire to protect their fellow Muslims, the Palestinians, from the outsider's attack of Israel. Furthermore, many times the AKP seemed to prove its role of "defender of Islam" by discrediting Turkey's adoption of the Western model and its engagement with the EU. For example, in Erdogan's statement claiming that, " We did not imitate the arts and sciences of the West but unfortunately its immorality."<sup>128</sup> From this statement, the AKP underlined Turkish adoption of the Western model as the imitation in terms of industrial development only, and the Western value in this respect did not erode the Islamic values that the AKP embraced at all. With regards to Turkey-EU relation, Ali Babacan who was the former Chief Negotiator with the EU argued that the relation was operated to see whether or not a Muslim country like Turkey could become part of the Christian Union.<sup>129</sup> He also added:

We always thought the EU is a big peace project ... but then the enlargement process literally stalled. The open-door policy is no longer there... Moreover, one of the big themes about why Turkey cannot become a member of the European Union is because it is a Christian club. This is in our view very, very dangerous... Everyone is looking at what is going on. And what kind of Europe, what kind of European Union we are going to be seeing in the future is going to be of immense importance in terms of what kind of message our region gets.<sup>130</sup>

This attempt of the AKP to associate Turkey's accession to the EU with expectations of the Muslim world shows that Turkey assumed the role of the defender of Islam.

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<sup>127</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 9.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 9.

The AKP tended to present Turkey as the representative of the Muslim world in the European Union, representing its Islamic identity in the organization that is dominated by the Christians.<sup>131</sup> This similar approach towards Turkey-EU relation was also expressed by Erdogan when he said, “Turkey’s future does not depend on EU membership, but the future of Christianity and Islam does”.<sup>132</sup>

Since Turkey does not have enough military power to shape the Middle East, the AKP decided to rely on soft power known as the “Turkish Model” to facilitate their ambition. The Turkish model refers to Turkey’s economic and political system that could successfully prove that Islamic values and liberalization can co-evolve.<sup>133</sup> The achievement of Turkey in its economic development and the promotion of democracy encouraged the AKP to intensify its position as a champion for Islamic rights in the region because Turkey serves as a model that other Muslim countries should imitate. The following statement of Abdullah Gul, former President of Turkey, shows the AKP’s attempt to set Turkey as a model for other Arab-Muslim countries.

I challenge the view that modernity and democracy based on the rule of law, political and economic participation, and gender equality cannot exist in the Muslim world. The Turkish experience proves otherwise...We have chosen integration with the world rather than isolation and reclusion; cooperation in place of confrontation; reform instead of inertia.<sup>134</sup>

Islamic agenda has been used by the AKP in framing its role as a bridge connecting the Muslim world with that of the Christians. According to K.J. Holsti, the bridge role is based on the communication function, meaning that it is the actor that

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<sup>131</sup> Ovali, “Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East”, 9.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> André, “The Ankara Moment!: The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East”, 296.

<sup>134</sup> Ovali, “Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East”, 9.

would convey information between peoples from different cultures.<sup>135</sup> The bridge role was the idea that was first introduced by the Islamist movement leader in Turkey, Fethullah Gullen, when he met Pope John Paul II in 1998 to enact interfaith dialogue.<sup>136</sup> This initiative inspired the AKP to apply such a role to Turkey because as the inheritor of the Ottoman legacy and defender of Islam, the country can act as a bridge connecting the Muslim world with that of the Christians. Such attempt can be seen from Erdogan's co-sponsoring of the "Alliance of Civilizations Forum", which is a forum that aims to develop intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation.<sup>137</sup> Apart from that, the later statements of Erdogan that disagreed with the clash of civilization rhetoric also indicated the AKP's attempt to act as the initiator of interreligion dialogue between the Christian and Muslim worlds:

Istanbul brings Europe and Asia together. Istanbul is the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa. However, more importantly, Istanbul is a melting pot for different cultures, civilizations, races, religions and languages, and holds a righteous position in the world for that...In this age, where the communication spreads swiftly and the whole world has turned into a small village, our motto is we cannot let societies have inadequate information on one another or have false or biased opinions on one another.<sup>138</sup>

These new approaches of the AKP in the new era indicate changes in Turkish foreign policy. The AKP called for the new understanding of Turkey's root in both historical and cultural aspects with the aim to put an end to Turkey's alienation from the Ottoman past. This estrangement from its historical ties forced Turkey to play a

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<sup>135</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 9.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East", 9.



peripheral role in the region, resulting in the loss of various political and economic opportunities. For this reason, the AKP set the historical and religious elements as integral parts in their foreign policy. They put an emphasis on its Islamic agenda and make use of it to increase Turkey's interest in the Middle East and reposition its role in the region. The new roles of Turkey as the defender of Islam, model for the Muslim world and initiator of interrelation dialogue provided Turkey with new opportunities to engage with the Muslim world and become part of their circle. For instance, the Turkish national was elected as secretary general of the Organization of OIC and Turkey was granted the observer status in the Arab league.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, Turkey could play a prominent role in the D-8, which is also known as the G-8 of the Muslim world.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that the Islamic agenda is obviously presented in the AKP's approach that it transformed the direction of Turkish foreign policy to be more involved with the Middle East and led to the new repositioning of Turkey in the region.

### **Dynamics Leading to Policy Change**

Since changes in Turkish foreign policy with regards to an Islamic agenda occurred after the AKP came to power in 2002, this raises questions about the causes of the change. The policy of states could be the consequences of different dynamics. Therefore, this section of the thesis will identify those dynamics that generated the AKP's new approach on the Islamic agenda. The explanation of policy change with regards to the issue in the AKP era could be divided into two levels: international and domestic. The international dynamics are the weakening of the EU dimension in Turkey and the loss of the US influence after the invasion of Iraq. For the domestic

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<sup>139</sup> Aras, "The Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy", 134.

<sup>140</sup> Allesandri, "The new Turkish foreign policy and the future of Turkey-EU relations", 4.

explanation, the dynamics include the background of the core leadership of the AKP, the disempowerment of the military in Turkey, and the strengthening of the AKP's domestic power.

### International dynamics

The opposition to Turkey's EU accession bid is one of the international dynamics that has an impact on the change of Turkish foreign policy. Since the creation of the Republic of Turkey, the West had always been a reference point of Turkey's development, thus Turkey attempted to seek membership in many Western institutions. Turkish-European integration was one of the key ambitions of Turkey. The attempt dated back in 1959 when Turkey first submitted its application for membership, which resulted in the acceptance of Turkey as an associate member of the EEC.<sup>141</sup> After the initial EEC application in 1959, Turkey still made several attempts to become part of the EEC; however, the applications had always been deferred due to Turkey's inability to meet its political standards. In 1999, four decades after the initial application, Turkey was granted a candidate of the EU.<sup>142</sup> Since then the EU accession looked more likely; the support of the public toward EU membership was high. However, EU as a reference point for Turkey's policy began to lose its prominence after the official talks in 2005. The negotiation process between Turkey and EU concerning Turkey's membership was paralyzed due to fierce opposition from some European states like France, Germany, Austria and Greek Cypriots.<sup>143</sup> In addition to that, negative signals from European elites and public also affected domestic support for Turkey's membership in the EU. This is for example, the "Muhammad Cartoons Crisis" and Pope Benedict's speech in 2006. The

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<sup>141</sup> Oğuzlu, "Middle easternization of Turkey's foreign policy", 4.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Dinc, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East", 73.

Muhammad Cartoon Crisis is the result of the depiction of Prophet Muhammad as a cartoon in the Danish newspaper.<sup>144</sup> Pope Benedict's speech in 2006 led to a controversy because during his lecture on "Faith, Reason and the University", he quoted the Byzantine Emperor's opinion about Islam, "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached". These episodes had an impact on the Turkish public perception toward EU membership. The perceived negative attitude of Europeans towards Islam made many Turks question the compatibility of Islamic and Western identities.<sup>145</sup> As a result, there has been a dramatic decline in the support for EU membership in the Turkish public.<sup>146</sup> The weakening of the EU dimension in Turkey encouraged the AKP to look for other region as an alternative. And the Middle East seems to be the fittest choice where Turkey could possible and potentially play an active role to pursue its interests. In order to engage with the Middle East, the AKP set the historical and religious element as integral parts in their foreign policy. Therefore, the Islamic agenda is largely emphasized in the AKP era.

Another international dynamic that led to policy change in the AKP era is the loss of the US influence in the Middle East. After the second Bush administration in 2005-2009, the US influence in the region began to wane. The erosion of the US power gave rise to many influential actors in the regional arena.<sup>147</sup> This is for instance, the Lebanese war in 2006 empowered the Islamist Hezbollah due to their region-wide resistance against Israel and the Gaza war in 2008-2009 made the Islamist Hamas on

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<sup>144</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 90.

<sup>145</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 90.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91

<sup>147</sup> André, "The Ankara Moment: The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 299.

of the key players in regional politics resulting from their resistance against Israel.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, many players were able to gain influence through the mediator role in major conflicts like Qatar in the Lebanese war.<sup>149</sup> For this reason, the AKP looked at this dynamic as an opportunity to increase their influence in the region because Turkey had the potential to serve the role of mediator. In order to perform such role effectively, Turkey has to reengage with the Middle East. And this could be done through the rapprochement of Turkey's Islamic value that could help bring Turkey more in tune with the region.

### Domestic dynamics

At the domestic level, the political ascendance of the AKP tended to be the most important dynamic in explaining change in Turkish foreign policy. One of the dynamics is related to the background of the core leadership of the AKP. The background of the key figures in the AKP is affiliated with religious and cultural ties with the Arab/Islamic world.<sup>150</sup> Erdogan is a pious Muslim and he graduated from religious vocational high school; Gul worked at the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia from 1983 to 1991; Davutoglu was a professor at the International Islamic University of Malaysia from 1990 to 1993.<sup>151</sup> These backgrounds and experiences of these key figures in the AKP means that they would naturally adopt Islamic values in their personal lives as well as in the political spheres. Many of the AKP's such as increasing the number of religious schools<sup>152</sup>, encouraging girls to attend these schools<sup>153</sup>, instilling Islamic norms in the state's secular schools<sup>154</sup>,

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Berdal, "Making Sense of the Anomalies in Turkish-European Union Relations", 577.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 577-578.

<sup>152</sup> Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey between Secularism and Islamism*, 86-87.

<sup>153</sup> Konuralp, "Kuran Kursuna Ragbet Katlandi" (Interest in the Quran Schools Multiplied), *Hurriyet*, April 4, 2008; [www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/8589945.asp](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/8589945.asp) (accessed September 10, 2014).

strengthening the role of Islamist bureaucrats in the government<sup>155</sup>, and using media to restore Islam's societal role<sup>156</sup>, support this observation. Therefore, it can be deduced that the background of the key leaders in the AKP influenced the direction of Turkish foreign policy, which led to the integration of political Islam in the policy.

Many actions of the AKP had direct consequences on the reorientation of Turkey's foreign policy; one of those is their victory over the military in the 2007 crisis. Throughout the history of modern Turkey, the military always played a significant role in politics because they acted as a guardian of secularism. In various occasions the military intervened in politics when the policies of the government tended to threaten national principles. Thus, politicians especially those from the Islamist camp did not have enough freedom to operate policies as they wanted. The Islamists have always been looked at with suspicion by the military because they are more likely to adhere to Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>157</sup> Accordingly, they have always been accused of their hidden anti-secular agenda, which many times led to the coup and the closure of the Islamic parties.<sup>158</sup> The AKP attempted to eliminate the threat by imposing the charge of Ergenekon (ultranationalist covert network) on the rival military.<sup>159</sup> Ergenekon is the name used to dub the alleged conspirators who incited armed insurgency to overthrow the AKP.<sup>160</sup> Many of the military generals were charged because the grenades and explosives were found in their houses, thus they were accused to have some ties with the group.<sup>161</sup> This is the first time in the history

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<sup>154</sup> Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey between Secularism and Islamism*, 88.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> Criss, "Dismantling Turkey: The Will of the People?", 45.

<sup>158</sup> Dagi, "Turkey's AKP in Power", 26.

<sup>159</sup> Cizre, "Conceiving the New Turkey After Ergenekon", 90.

<sup>160</sup> Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey between Secularism and Islamism*, 79.

<sup>161</sup> Criss, "Dismantling Turkey: The Will of the People?", 45.

of Turkey that those who were accused of the alleged coup were put on trial.<sup>162</sup> As a result, numbers of military officers were detained along with the writers, editors, and professors who were accused of the same charge.<sup>163</sup> This investigation was used as a tool to cleanse the secular opponents of the AKP. For this reason, the AKP had more freedom to operate their policy and integrated the Islamic elements into it without being threatened by the Kemalist establishment. This freedom also provided the AKP with a chance to redefine the role conception of Turkey. Davutoglu's strategic depth analysis generated the new role conception of Turkey as a potential regional power. In order to achieve this ambition, Turkey has to expand its soft power. The soft power of the AKP must be based on the unifying character of the Middle East, which is Islam. Therefore, the AKP focused on Turkey's Ottoman past and Islamic values because these elements could be claimed as Turkey's legacy to attain leadership in the region. Furthermore, the AKP's embrace of Islam would mark Turkey's termination of the estrangement of Middle East as it did in the past era. By doing so, the former negative perception of the Middle Eastern states toward Turkey could be changed, providing new opportunities for Turkey to form closer ties with the region.

Another domestic dynamic is related to AKP's domestic legitimacy and the preservation of the party's voter base. The main supporters of the AKP are the Anatolian middle class. This group became a significant factor in Turkish politics since 1983 due to Ozal's neo-liberal economic policies.<sup>164</sup> The new market economy generated the new middle class in the Anatolian region. Despite the economic development, this new middle class still maintained a strong tie to the small town and

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>163</sup> Cizre, "Conceiving the New Turkey After Ergenekon", 90.

<sup>164</sup> Dinc, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: ", 75.

villages of Anatolia.<sup>165</sup> Therefore, these groups are attached to the Islamic values with which they are familiar and that were taught since their young age.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, they do not see economic development as the enemy of the Islamic values.<sup>167</sup> For them, Islam and modernity can co-exist. Since the AKP shares the same ideology, they became the main supporters of the party. For this reason, the AKP's focus on the Islamic agenda and the reengagement with the Muslim world can be seen as the attempt to boost the party's domestic popularity and preserve voter base.

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<sup>165</sup> Dinc, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: ", 75.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### **Turkish Foreign Policy: Israeli-Palestinian Issue**

The aim of this chapter is to compare Turkey's stance on the Israel-Palestinian problem in the pre-AKP era and the AKP era by investigating Turkish foreign policy with regards to the issue in both eras. Furthermore, this chapter will further investigate into Turkish-Israeli relation because it is an important factor in depicting how Turkey framed the issue of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Two pictures of Turkish-Israeli relation, one in the pre-AKP era and the other in the AKP era, represent different stances of Turkey. The change highlights the new priorities of Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era. The new approach of the AKP that differs from the traditional perspective led to the repositioning of Turkey in the Middle East, indicating the new connection between Turkey and the Middle Eastern Security Complex.

#### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Israeli-Palestinian Problem in the Pre-AKP Era**

Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the major unifying dynamic in the Middle East because it represents the shared sense of Islamic solidarity in the region and the anti-colonial struggle against the Western domination in the Middle East. The stance of Turkey on the Israeli-Palestinian problem in the pre-AKP era had always been supportive of the Palestinian cause. However, during the Cold War Turkey also tried to maintain its good relation with Israel. Therefore, Turkey's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian issue in this period was mainly based on equidistant policy. Despite the



continued support for the Palestinian cause in the post Cold War period, Turkey obviously developed closer relation with Israel that they finally formed cooperation covering several substantial areas. Turkish-Israeli relation in this period was based on pragmatism. The cooperation was formed for the best interest of Turkey in those circumstances. However, Turkey's cooperation with Israel caused a backlash because it created a negative perception among Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors and Turkey had been questioned of its sincerity in fighting for the Palestinian cause. For this reason, Turkey's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian issue during the post Cold War period was different from the Cold War era. Turkey did not maintain an equidistant policy but preferred to cultivate closer relation with Israel than with Palestine.

### Cold War

In the aftermath of the WWII, the change in the world system had an impact on the direction of Turkish Foreign policy. Turkey's threat perceptions from the USSR encouraged it to ally with the Western bloc in order to contain the threat.<sup>168</sup> As a result of this orientation, Turkey received assistance within the framework of the Truman Doctrine. For this reason, Turkish interest in this era was coincided with that of the West especially of the US.<sup>169</sup> For the US, its interest in the Middle East lied in the creation of its alliance in the region as part of its global alliance formation.<sup>170</sup> The strong US support of Israel in the region influenced Turkey's decision to become Israel's regional partner. For this reason, there had been an attempt on Turkey's side to develop its relation with Israel. One of the attempts was Turkey's recognition of the

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<sup>168</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 109.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

state of Israel on 28 March 1949 – the first Muslim nation to do so.<sup>171</sup> The growing tension between the two camps in this period encouraged Turkey to form an alliance in the Middle Eastern states called the “Baghdad Pact” to counter the Soviet threat in the region.<sup>172</sup> Despite Turkey’s effort to pull all Muslim countries together to confront Soviet threat, the alliance resulted in failure. This is because these Muslim countries in the region did not perceive the USSR as a threat; instead, the only threat in the region for them was Israel.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the coup in Iraq in 1958 was another destabilizing factor that had an impact on the Baghdad Pact and marked an end to the alliance.<sup>174</sup>

The failure of the Baghdad pact pushed Turkey to reexamine its relation with Israel. As a result, during the secret visit of Israeli prime minister to Turkey in 1958, both countries signed a pact known as the “Phantom Pact”.<sup>175</sup> The pact is the agreement between the two countries to cooperate in the military, diplomatic and security issues.<sup>176</sup> It is widely agreed that this pact is the seed of the formation of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Israel in 1996.<sup>177</sup> Even though there had been a close cooperation between Turkey and Israel, Turkey also tried to maintain its relation with Palestine through its opposition against the division of Palestinian territories in the UN voting.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that despite Turkey’s cooperation with Israel, Turkey still wanted to maintain an officially equidistant policy to avoid being dragged into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the 1960s, especially in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War in 1967 (Six

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<sup>171</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 109.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Vural, “The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex”, 64.

<sup>178</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 108

Days War), there was a change in Turkey's approach toward Israel. This change was the result of the public opinion toward the issue, which was very supportive of the Arab and Palestinian cause.<sup>179</sup> For this reason, Turkey suspended military cooperation with Israel and did not allow the US to use its Incirlik Military Airbase to support Israel during the 1967 war.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, Turkey agreed and voted for the Yugoslav resolution, which called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops.<sup>181</sup> In the 1973 war, Turkey also operated a pro-Palestinian stance by not allowing the US to use Turkish military facilities and the airbases to help Israel.<sup>182</sup> Another instance of support for Palestinian cause was its recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians and allowing it to open an office in Ankara.<sup>183</sup>

Even though Turkey expressed its active support for Palestine in various ways, Turkey was still cautious of not being dragged into the problem or considered as part of the conflict. This is because the Turkish-Israeli relation was crucial in limiting the negative impact of US lobbies against the interest of Turkey.<sup>184</sup> Turkey was in need of Jewish lobbies in supporting Turkey against the Armenian and Greek lobbies, thus maintaining relation with Israel was for the interest of Turkey's security.<sup>185</sup> For this reason, Turkey still attempted to implement its equidistant policy in the region by maintaining its relation with Israel. Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal in 1986 declared that Turkish-Israeli relation was a result of Turkey's practical needs and, in order to look for solutions to the problems of the Middle East, Israel had to be included.<sup>186</sup> Turkey's attempt to maintain its relation with Israel can also be seen from

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<sup>179</sup> Vural, "The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex", 69.

<sup>180</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 111

<sup>181</sup> Vural, "The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex", 70.

<sup>182</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 111.

<sup>183</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 112.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 112.

its opposition against the decision at the Rabat Summit Conference to cut diplomatic ties with Israel and its opposition to a resolution in 1989 that called for the revoking of Israeli representation in the UN.<sup>187</sup>

### Post Cold War

The fall of the USSR marked the end of rivalry between the two superpowers, which allowed Turkey more freedom to operate its policy without causing tensions with Russia. During the 1990s, this period signaled an increasing relation between Turkey and Israel. Turkish-Israeli relation started off with the development in the issues like tourism, culture and education; several agreements were signed between the two countries during the visits of Turkey's Culture Minister to Israel in 1992 and 1993.<sup>188</sup> Following the agreements, there were several reciprocal visits of representatives of the two countries, including official contacts at the level of heads of states.<sup>189</sup> The major turning point occurred in 1996 when several significant agreements were signed between the two countries: the Military Training and Cooperation Agreement in February, the Free Trade Agreement in March, and the Defence Industry Cooperation Agreement in August.<sup>190</sup> Such close cooperation between the two countries, especially in the area of military cooperation, caused a major uproar in the Arab public opinion and negative perception toward Turkey because their cooperation was perceived as "anti-Arab alliance".<sup>191</sup> The reasons behind Turkey's decision to cooperate closely with Israel could be divided into three main groups. Firstly, Jewish lobby in the US politics was still essential for Turkey in

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 122

<sup>191</sup> Vural, "The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex", 80.

preserving its interest against the Armenian and Greek lobbies.<sup>192</sup> Secondly, Turkey was in strained relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria because they were supporting the PKK, which Turkey saw it as a threat to its security.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, Turkish-Israeli relation could help create deterrence against Turkey's neighbors. And lastly, Turkey could cement its relation with the US. This is because as part of the US scheme to operate the "New World Order", it was in need of strong allies in the Middle East. For this reason, the US positively supported the increased level of Turkish-Israeli relation. The example of the US support of Turkish-Israeli relation could be seen from the case of Reliant Mermaid in January 1998, which the US joined Turkey and Israel in the military exercises in the Mediterranean.<sup>194</sup> The anxiety of the Middle Eastern states toward the Turkish-Israeli cooperation can be seen from criticisms in the OIC meeting and at the Arab League, which called for the reconsideration of the cooperation.<sup>195</sup>

Despite Turkey's approach toward Israel, Turkey also tried to balance its policies with Palestine. Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize the state of Palestine as declared by the Palestinian National Council.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, Turkey was the first country whose head of government, Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, visited President Arafat in Gaza.<sup>197</sup> During this period, Arafat also visited Turkey several times. As a result of their good relation, an agreement on the Cooperation in Education and Cultural Affairs were officially signed between the Turkish and Palestinian governments. The public opinion in the country was very supportive of the Palestinian cause, thus Turkish government tried its best to not pursue its policy toward Israel at the expense of its relation with Palestine. Despite the attempt to

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<sup>192</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 120.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 120.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

maintain its relation with Palestine, Turkey's stance was no longer based on an equidistant policy. This is because the 1996 agreement between Turkey and Israel marked a substantial change in Turkey's approach, which decided to develop closer tie and cooperation with Israel.

### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Israeli-Palestinian Problem in the AKP Era**

In the AKP era, there has been a change of stance toward Turkey's relation with Israel. The divergence slowly increased and Turkey's interest to develop close cooperation with Israel gradually decreased to the point that caused crisis situation and almost brought them to the edge of war. In this period, the AKP expressed a clear stance toward the Palestinian cause, making clear that Turkey is fully supportive of Palestine and ready to harshly criticize every action of Israel against the Palestinians. In a nutshell, it can be said that Turkey in the AKP era no longer tries to position itself at an equal distance from Israel and the Palestinians.

Turkish-Israeli relation began to change during the coalition government of Ecevit in 2001 as a result of the second Intifada in 2001.<sup>198</sup> However, the deterioration of Turkey's relation with Israel gained full momentum in the AKP era. The AKP became critical of Israel's harsh policies toward Palestine and its people. This was the case, for example, in the aftermath of the assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin, when Erdogan postponed his visit to Israel.<sup>199</sup> The AKP's criticism of Israel started to get more intense after Israel attacked the refugee camps in Rafah by arguing that it wanted to eliminate the tunnel that was used to smuggle weapons Egypt.<sup>200</sup> This operation of Israel that led to the deaths of civilians and the demolition of several

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<sup>198</sup> Canan-Sokullu, *Debating security in turkey: Challenges and changes in the twenty-first century*, 38.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Canan-Sokullu, *Debating security in turkey: Challenges and changes in the twenty-first century*, 38.

houses was strongly criticized by Erdogan.<sup>201</sup> Erdogan blamed Israel's operation as state terror.<sup>202</sup> In response to Turkey's strong criticism of Israel's action against the Palestinians, Israeli Foreign minister Shalom expressed Israel's dissatisfaction with Turkey's open criticism.<sup>203</sup> The reciprocal criticism of Turkey and Israel was a severe blow to their strategic alignment; it revealed a change of their perceptions toward each other, which is different from the past era.

Since 2009, crisis in Turkish-Israeli relation emerged. In response to Israel's prohibition to enter Gaza and meet Hamas officials, the Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu cancelled his visit.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, Turkey cancelled a joint NATO maneuver in Turkey, in which Israel should have participated, because Turkey's could not tolerate Israel's attack on Gaza, during which more than 1400 Palestinians were killed, and the blocking of the transfer of material for rebuilding houses in Gaza.<sup>205</sup> At the Davos Summit of the World Economic Forum, Erdogan strongly criticized Israel of its attack on Gaza. He burst out and shouted at Israeli President Peres, "My voice will not be that loud. You must know that. But when it comes to killing, you know killing very well. I know how you hit, kill children on the beach."<sup>206</sup> As a result of this harsh criticism, Erdogan was widely admired and supported by people across the Middle East for his courage and sincerity in fighting for the Palestinians. The boiling point that almost brought Turkey and Israel to the brink of war was the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010<sup>207</sup>. The NGOs such as Turkish charity organization Insan Hak ve Hurriyetleri Vakfi (IHH), Free Gaza Movement, and the European Campaign to End the Seige on Gaza organized a flotilla to transfer humanitarian aid to Gaza but

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<sup>201</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 129

<sup>202</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 38.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>204</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 41.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> Cinar, "Turkey's Transformation Under the AKP Rule", 80.

<sup>207</sup> Cinar, "Turkey's Transformation Under the AKP Rule", 80.

the flotilla was attacked by the Israeli commandos, which resulted in the killing of nine Turkish civilians.<sup>208</sup> Such attack of Israel on Turkish citizens was strongly condemned by the Turkish government through the UN Security Council, NATO, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Turkish President Gul warned Israel of its inhumane action that their relation would never be the same again.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu described Israel's attack on civilians as the 9/11 of Turkey.<sup>210</sup> The crisis in Turkish-Israeli relation reached the point of Turkey's withdrawing of its ambassador to Israel and cancelling the joint military exercise with Israel.<sup>211</sup> Even though Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized for 2010 killings, Erdogan repeatedly denounced it and continued his harsh criticism against Israel.<sup>212</sup> Following Israeli airstrikes in Gaza strip and the crackdown on Hamas in 2014, which led to a huge number of casualties and losses especially on the Palestinian side, Erdogan condemned and described Israeli strike as "attempted genocide".<sup>213</sup> He even went further by making an analogy of Israel's operation with Hitler's Nazis; he escalated the tone of criticism by saying that, "... their barbarism has surpassed even Hitler's."<sup>214</sup> The continued strong rhetoric of Turkey in the AKP era represents the change of Turkey's stance toward Israel. Even though the relation is not broken completely, the AKP's stance is clear in not making an effort for reconciliation. As a result, it seems that Turkish-Israeli relation is unable to reach the point of close cooperation as it did in 1990s.

With regards to relations with Palestine, the AKP tended to concentrate more

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid

<sup>210</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 42.

<sup>211</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 42.

<sup>212</sup> Ant, "Turkey's Erdogan Compares Israel Gaza Offensive to Hitler"; *Bloomberg.com*. accessed 01 Oct. 2014.

<sup>213</sup> Ant, "Turkey's Erdogan Compares Israel Gaza Offensive to Hitler"; *Bloomberg.com*. accessed 01 Oct. 2014.

<sup>214</sup> Baskin, "Gaza Strip: Turkey PM Says Israel Surpasses Nazi Barbarism"; accessed 12 Oct. 2014.



on the Palestinian cause, which some time had an impact on its relation with Israel as can be seen from the consequences of AKP's criticism of Israel's attack on the Palestinians. The AKP government repeatedly attempted to develop a better relation and closer relation with Palestine. For example, both Erdogan and Gul attended Arafat's funeral in 2004.<sup>215</sup> After Hamas's victory in the election in 2006, Turkey invited Hamas leader Meshal to Turkey.<sup>216</sup> This invitation signified its recognition of Hamas as a legal actor in the region; the choice of Turkey to engage with Hamas represents a shift of policy, which has become proactive and not afraid of being dragged into the conflicts as before. Furthermore, in order to engage more with Palestine, Turkey came up with several initiatives to help the Palestinians; Erdogan opened the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) in Ramallah to distribute aid provided by Turkey<sup>217</sup>; the Turkish foreign ministry sponsorship of a Young Palestinian Diplomats Training Program<sup>218</sup>; the Turkish Chambers of Commerce sponsorship of the Industry for Peace project to develop industry in the Gaza strip.<sup>219</sup>

In a nutshell, it can be said that Turkey's stance toward Israel and Palestine in the AKP era took a decisively different direction from the previous course. Turkey no longer tried to balance its relation with both Israel and Palestine. The AKP took a different direction in operating Turkish foreign policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They decided to prioritize the Palestinian cause regardless of the deterioration of Turkey's relation with Israel.

### **Dynamics Leading to Policy Change**

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<sup>215</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 129.

<sup>216</sup> Canan-Sokullu, *Debating security in turkey: Challenges and changes in the twenty-first century*, 39.

<sup>217</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 130.

<sup>218</sup> Linden, *Turkey and its Neighbors* 43.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

Since changes in the policy of Turkey concerning its relation with Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian problem occurred after the AKP came to power in 2002, this raises questions about the causes of the change. The factors explaining policy change could be the consequences of different dynamics. Therefore, this section will identify those determinants that generated the AKP's new approach on Turkey's relation with Israel and the issue of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international dynamic is the improvement of Turkey's relation with its neighbors. For the domestic explanation, the dynamics include the attempt of the AKP to maintain its voter base, the AKP's new role conception, the negative perception of the US, and the curtailment of the role of military in politics.

#### International dynamic

The international dynamic that had an impact on Turkey's policy change is the improvement of Turkey's relations with its neighbors, particularly Syria, Iran and Iraq. In the past era especially in the 1990s, the close cooperation of Turkey with Israel was primarily caused by shared security concerns. Turkey used to be in strained relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria because they were supporting the PKK, which Turkey saw it as a threat to its security.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, its close cooperation with Israel, especially in the military dimension, could help create deterrence against Turkey's threats. Following the victory of the AKP in the 2002 election, Turkey's relations with its neighbors started to normalize and improve. There were high level visits between Turkey and Syria, and for the first time in fifty-seven years the Syrian president officially visited Turkey.<sup>221</sup> Bilateral agreements between Turkey and Syria were signed covering different areas such as economy, trade, tourism, and

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<sup>220</sup> Özcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, 120.

<sup>221</sup> Vural, "The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex", 109.

education.<sup>222</sup> In line with the rapprochement with Syria, the AKP also aimed to build positive relations with Iran and Iraq. Erdogan visited Iran in 2004 and Turkey agreed to sign agreements with Iran covering economy and joint security cooperation against the PKK and PJAK, which was the Iranian branch of the PKK.<sup>223</sup> Regarding Turkey's relation with Iraq, particularly with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), there was an improvement in their relation that led to several agreements in several areas.<sup>224</sup> This attempt of the AKP to normalize its relations with the neighbors made Turkey less dependent on its alignment with Israel. For this reason, the AKP could operate their policy freely toward Palestine regardless of the deterioration of its relation with Israel.

### Domestic dynamics

The AKP chose to play the anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinians card to appeal to their conservative voter base. The main supporters of the AKP are the Anatolian conservatives. These groups are attached to the Islamic values and have Islamic background. Therefore, with regards to the Israel-Palestinian issue, they tended to sympathize with Palestine as can be seen from their sensitivity toward Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and their support of the two Intifadas. For this reason, the AKP played the pro-Palestinians card and anti-Israel rhetoric to appeal to their domestic voter base.

The new role conception of Turkey as a regional leader is another domestic dynamic that brought change to Turkey's stance toward Israel and Palestine. This new role conception encouraged Turkey to engage more with the region. Given that the

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Altunışık, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East Under the AKP", 581.

Israeli-Palestinian issue is the defining dynamic in the region, in order to embrace leadership the AKP must engage with the issue as can be seen in the AKP's desire to speak on behalf of the Palestinians in confrontation with Israel. Furthermore, the AKP made use of Turkey's strategic depth, the uniqueness in Turkey's specific location and history, as basis to claim a legitimate role as the protector of the Palestinians. As explained by Erdogan:

We cannot turn our back on Palestine, Palestinians and Gaza. They are asking us, 'What is Turkey doing in Palestine?' They are asking us, 'What is the reason behind Turkey's growing interest in the Palestinian cause?' ... They are not aware of the responsibility that we have to take on, and this responsibility has been granted to us by Turkish history and by the will of the Turkish people<sup>225</sup>

As already mentioned that the Palestinian problem is the defining dynamic in the region, thus the fight for the Palestinians would highly be supported by the public. For the AKP to successfully claim its leadership in the region, it is a must to gain public support. Therefore, the AKP highly prioritized the issue and made a clear stance to express its sympathy with Palestine. This is for instance, when Erdogan stormed out of a debate with Israeli and increased his tone in criticizing Israel at the Davos Panel, Erdogan's action was highly praised and he immediately became the hero of the Arab people.<sup>226</sup> For this reason, it can be seen that Turkey's policy toward Israeli-Palestinian problem in the AKP era is totally different from the previous era. Turkey no longer attempts to keep an equal distance from both sides because the role of regional leader requires Turkey's activism and involvement in the issue.

The negative perception of the US in Turkey affected Turkey's policy especially

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<sup>225</sup> Sevket, "Decoding turkey's lust for regional clout in the middle east", 7.

<sup>226</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 40.

concerning its relations with Israel. One of the reasons why Turkey kept decently good relations with Israel was to cement Turkey's relation with the US. When there arose anti-American sentiment in Turkey, Turkey's approach toward Israel was likely to be affected. Anti-Americanism sentiment in Turkey drastically increased to the point of making Turkey known as "the most anti-American nation".<sup>227</sup> According to the 2001-2008 survey, during the Bush administration Turkey was one of other 24 nations that was very critical of Bush's policies with 89 percent negative as opposed to 2 percent positive, whereas other Arab countries had a more tolerant approach.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, in a 2008 survey Turkey ranked first in the world with a 77 percent overall negative assessment of the US.<sup>229</sup> The turning point in Turkish-American relation was during the US invasion of Iraq. The focus of the US on Iraq made Turkey uncomfortable. This is primarily because of the Kurdish issue. Turkey has long been securitizing the Kurdish issue for fear of the rebellions and the separatist movement conducted by the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK).<sup>230</sup> Violent acts conducted by the PKK in Turkey since 1984, yet violence came to an end with the capture of the group leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 1999.<sup>231</sup> However, the decision of the US to invade Iraq and change the status quo in the country seemed to affect security of Turkey since it helped revive Kurdish dreams of autonomy. Therefore, the interest of Turkey and that of the US became contradicting. As a result of this interest clash, the Turkish parliament rejected the resolution that would allow the passage of 62,000 American troops towards Northern Iraq through Turkish territory.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, the tension between the US and Turkey was exacerbated by "Sulaymaniyah incident". The

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<sup>227</sup> Türkmen, "Anti-Americanism as a default ideology of opposition", 335.

<sup>228</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years, 2001–2008", p. 10.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Türkmen, "Anti-Americanism as a default ideology of opposition", 336.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Türkmen, "Anti-Americanism as a default ideology of opposition", 336.

incident took place in the Kurdish-held northern city of Sulaymaniyah where the US troops raided the offices of Turkish Special Forces.<sup>233</sup> Eleven members of Turkish force was arrested and detained by the US force claiming that they were plotting a political assassination.<sup>234</sup> This act of American force triggered anger among the Turkish military that “not long afterward, reports began to arise from Turkish military academies in Istanbul of senior military officers declaring that the US is untrustworthy and predicting that it will become an actual enemy of Turkey”.<sup>235</sup> Not only on the Turkish military side that was infuriated by the act; the Turkish people also felt displeased with the incident. The deteriorated relation with the US and the strong wave of anti-Americanism in Turkey partly explains why the AKP was less interested in developing cooperation with Israel. And, in order to seek for new allies, the AKP made use of the Palestinian issue to help Turkey reengage with the Middle East.

The curtailment of army’s role in Turkey is one of the significant factors that led to the shift of Turkey’s policy. In Turkey, the military always played a significant role in politics and the direction of Turkish foreign policy. The close cooperation between Turkey and Israel in 1990s was the result of the military’s approach.<sup>236</sup> The military geared toward a pro-Israel policy because they would benefit from the military training and defence cooperation in terms of intelligence and technical capacities.<sup>237</sup> Thus the AKP’s victory over the military in 2007 and the series of electoral victories provided the AKP with a certain amount of power to reclaim civilian authority on the foreign policy making. For this reason, the AKP chose the Palestinian card instead of

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> David, “Problems of Perception and Vision: Turkey and the US”, 15.

<sup>236</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 38.

<sup>237</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 34-35.

Israeli cooperation because it would serve two purposes: the domestic purpose is to use the Palestinian issue as a means to gain domestic popularity because Turkish public is strongly supportive of Palestine, whereas the regional purpose is to fulfill Turkey's role as a regional leader.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Turkish Foreign Policy: Nuclear Policy**

The aim of this chapter is to compare Turkey's stance on nuclear policy in the pre-AKP era and the AKP era by investigating Turkish foreign policy with regards to the issue in both eras. Turkey's stance concerning nuclear programs in the Middle East especially of Iran reveal the new approach of Turkey toward this issue in the region. The new approaches of the AKP that generated rapprochement with Iran and recognized Iran's nuclear program as a rightful action marked the divergence between the AKP's approach and Turkey's previous stances on this issue. This change has an impact on the positioning of Turkey in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex because it led to the new connection between the RSC and Turkey.

### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Nuclear Policy in the Pre-AKP Era**

Turkey's stance in the pre-AKP era on nuclear policy was identical with the Western community, particularly with the US. It signed major treaties concerning the acquisition and the use of nuclear such as Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (CWC), and Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). This orientation toward the Western community and Turkey's identical stance on nuclear policy resulted from the structure in the international system especially during the Cold war, which was defined by rivalry between the two superpowers- the US and the USSR. This structure had an impact on Turkish policy, which decided to attach itself to the Western bloc and defined its interests in accordance with the Western allies.<sup>238</sup> Turkey became the member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952.<sup>239</sup> This membership provided Turkey with security shield especially when it came to issue of nuclear weapons. As a member of NATO and a US ally, Turkey enjoyed the

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<sup>238</sup> Turkish-American Relations: A Challenging Transition, Turkish Studies p 111-112

<sup>239</sup> Aydın, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy", 110-111.



protection from NATO's commitment to collective defense and the US nuclear umbrella.<sup>240</sup> Turkey signed agreement to host around sixty US nuclear weapons on its territory at Incirlik Air Base close to the southern city of Adanan since 1960s.<sup>241</sup> For Turkey, NATO membership and the station of the US nuclear weapons in its territory created deterrent value against the threat from other nuclear powers especially of the USSR.<sup>242</sup> In order to maintain this security shield, Turkey oriented its policy in accordance with the Western allies. Therefore, when there emerged a nuclear threat in the Middle East according to the Western perception, Turkey did not hesitate to declare its stance in accordance with the Western community. This is for instance, the concern over Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear program. In 1990s, Turkey declared its stance toward the issue in accordance with the Western community, which recognized Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear program as a threat.<sup>243</sup> However, it is important to note that despite Turkey's recognition of the Iranian nuclear issue as a threat, most of the time Turkey remained indifferent on the issue. This is because Turkey was preoccupied with other domestic security threats like the Kurdish problem and the PKK.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, Turkey's stance on nuclear policy would be best described as an non-engagement, which did not involve much with the issue but, when it had to declare its stance, Turkey chose to side with the Western community.

### **Turkey's Stance and Its Framing of the Nuclear Policy in the AKP Era**

Turkey's stance on nuclear policy in the AKP era changed to a mediator. However, when its role as a mediator failed to bring desired solution to the problem of Iran's nuclear program, Turkey's stance toward the issue tended to be different

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<sup>240</sup> Barkey, "Turkey's Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament.", 67-68.

<sup>241</sup> Kearns, *Turkey, NATO, and Nuclear Weapons*, 2.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Stein, "Turkey's Nuclear Ambitions." accessed 6 Aug. 2014.

<sup>244</sup> Barkey, "Turkey's Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament.", 67-68.

from the Western community due to the clash of interest, particularly when it comes to the relation with Iran.

Iran's nuclear program became a priority in the international agenda because there was a widespread conviction that Iran attempted to develop nuclear weapons after the discovery of Iran's two unaccounted nuclear facilities in 2002.<sup>245</sup> The IAEA investigated the issue and concluded that Iran had pursued secret programs for a long time and there were possible military dimensions to their nuclear programs such as activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile.<sup>246</sup> This policy of concealment and the breaches of NPT agreement of Iran displeased the Western community, particularly the US. However, Iran denied the accusation and explained that their nuclear program was operated to generate electricity.<sup>247</sup> The dispute over the issue created tension between Iran and the Western community. For Turkey this dispute directly jeopardized Turkey's interests especially with regards to their policy activism in the region. The AKP's new strategy of "strategic depth" prioritizes Turkey's engagement and cooperation with its neighbors for the purposes of strategic and economic interests. The tension over Iran's nuclear program would force the Western community to pressure Turkey in pursuing a more aggressive approach toward Iran. Therefore, this would contradict the AKP's attempt to normalize relations with Turkey's neighbors. Furthermore, the AKP is concerned with the repercussions of military confrontation. This is because the repercussions of the US invasion of Iraq directly jeopardized Turkey's security.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, military confrontation between the US and Iran would also affect the region's stability and security, which Turkey wants to avoid. For this reason, Turkey had to abandon its role

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<sup>245</sup> Gürzel, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", 37.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Gürzel, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", 40.

as an observer and became a mediator.<sup>249</sup> Turkey would avoid supporting any military solution or aggressive approach toward the issue and would instead prefer to adopt the approach based on the promotion of multilateral diplomatic solution.<sup>250</sup>

Turkey believed that it could mediate between the US and Iran to reach negotiated solution and the settlement would help liberate Turkey from the deadlock in balancing its relation with both Iran and the US. Erdogan noted in October 2008 that Turkey used to have experience in negotiating with Iran, thus Turkey had the potential to mediate between the US and Iran.<sup>251</sup> In response to Turkey's bid for mediator position, the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton embraced it and announced that the US would seek help from Turkey to reach agreement with Iran in the disputed issues.<sup>252</sup> The IAEA director general, Mohamed ElBaradei also asked Turkey to act as a mediator to bring Iran back to the negotiation table.<sup>253</sup> Turkey began to approach Iran by sending Turkish diplomats to Tehran and exchanging messages with the Iranian officials. Many attempts of Turkey could successfully bring Iran to cooperation. In October 2009, there was a discussion in Vienna about the agreement concerning the fuel-swap between the Security Council plus German (5+1 countries) and Iran.<sup>254</sup> The proposal recommended that Iran could place its low enriched uranium (LEU) in Turkey's custody and the Vienna Group would supply Iran with LEU for the production of electricity in exchange.<sup>255</sup> Turkey accepted the proposal and agreed to act as a mediator to try to bring Iran on board. Despite Turkey's attempt, the swap deal between the P5+1 and Iran in 2009 resulted in failure. However, Turkey continued to engage with Iran and tried to reach an

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>255</sup> Gürzel, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", 37.

agreement. As a result of Turkey's mediation effort together with Brazil – two countries that were both non-permanent members of the UN Security Council at that time - in May 2010 Iran finally agreed to have its uranium enriched in Turkey.<sup>256</sup> The aim of this Uranium Swap Agreement between Iran, Turkey and Brazil was to relieve tensions about the Uranium Enrichment Program.

However, contrary to the expectations, the Uranium Swap Agreement did not reduce tensions between the West and Iran. The deal instead provoked the Western community because they were suspicious of Iran's real intention. For them, the agreement signed by Iran was considered “a tactical move on Iran's part, to illustrate that it was willing to use its nuclear material for peaceful purposes”.<sup>257</sup> Being worried by Iran's nuclear ambition, the Western community agreed to level sanction against Iran through the UN.<sup>258</sup>

The failure of Turkey to bring about an acceptable solution to this issue put Turkey in a difficult position. Turkey did not want to take side with either the US or Iran, but the deadlock forced Turkey to do exactly that. Even though Turkey was not completely against the Western approach toward Iran, Turkey's stance tended to be different and challenged the Western stance. Turkey repeatedly expressed its support for Iran and defended it over attacks from the West. Being displeased with the nuclear swap deal and Iran's nuclear ambition, the US brought the issue to the UNSC, which resulted in the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1929 with the aim to level sanctions against Iran.<sup>259</sup> Turkey voted against the resolution, bringing to the fore the divergence on the issue between Turkey and its traditional allies.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, during the NATO summit in 2010, Turkey protested the decision on the issue of Iran

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Altunışık, “Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East Under the AKP”, 574.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

and refrained from describing Iran as a “threat”.<sup>261</sup> In fact, Turkey does not perceive Iran’s nuclear program as an existential threat. Turkey supported Iran’s nuclear program and believed that Iran has the right to pursue its nuclear program for peaceful purposes.<sup>262</sup> This stance of Turkey on the issue is reflected in Erdogan’s words, “I think that those who take this stance, who want these arrogant sanctions, need to first give these [weapons] up. We shared this opinion with our Iranian friends, our brothers. We want to live in a region completely purged of nuclear weapons. We want to live in a world in which nuclear weapons no longer exist”.<sup>263</sup> Turkey also criticized the hypocrisy of the West for attacking Iran’s right to produce peaceful nuclear energy, while ignoring other countries’ possessions of nuclear weapons especially Israel. Turkish political leaders often raised issues about Israel’s nuclear weapons; during the party’s annual meeting, Abdulla Gul said, “ if the Iranian nuclear weapons are dangerous, then so are the Israeli ones”.<sup>264</sup> When asked about Iran’s nuclear ambition, Erdogan often responded by being critical of the Western stance, “countries opposed to Iran's atomic program should give up their own nuclear weapons, and attacked as "arrogant" the sanctions imposed on Ankara's neighbor”.<sup>265</sup> In response for Turkey’s support for Iran, Iranian President Ahmedinejad several time voiced thanks and appreciation for Turkey.<sup>266</sup>

The support for Iran that has been expressed by Turkey was done mainly to bolster ties for the benefit of Turkey’s economic, energy and security interests. In the AKP period, Turkish-Iranian relation has dramatically improved and enjoyed the best period of cooperation. Comparing to the pre-AKP era, relation between Turkey and

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<sup>261</sup> Vural, “The Middle East As A Regional Security Complex”, 112.

<sup>262</sup> Barkey, Henry J. "Turkey's Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament.", 71.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> "Turkey PM: If You Don't Want Iran to Have Nukes, Give Yours up"; *Haaretz.com*. accessed 10 Aug. 2014.

<sup>266</sup> Altunışık, “Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East Under the AKP”, 583.

Iran was not quite good due to ideological differences. The 1979 Iranian Revolution created fear in Turkey that the Islamists in the country would imitate Iran and threaten national principle of secularism. In addition to that, Turkey also was suspicious of Iran that it supported the PKK and encouraged Islamic groups to engage in violent activities.<sup>267</sup> When the AKP came to power, the relationship between Iran and Turkey began to change. The party's strategy of using its "strategic depth" to pursue national interest encouraged Turkey to normalize relations and actively engage more with its neighbors. For this reason, Turkey did not perceive Iran as its threat and sought for chances to improve its bilateral relation. The tie between the two countries is essential for Turkey in terms of energy, security and economic dimensions. For this reason, the sanction and the aggressive approach toward Iran would be a massive blow to Turkey's interests. Therefore, Turkey tried its best to approach the issue in a non-aggressive way by trying to mediate between the West and Iran. However, when the failure did not bring the desired outcome, Turkey tended to prioritize its relation with Iran by refraining from recognizing it as a threat and criticizing attacks on Iran. For Turkey, the stance toward the militarization of nuclear power has always been consistent that Turkey is against it. What has been changed in the AKP era is the approach toward Iran, which has been in a milder way. The AKP chose to deviate from its traditional stance and bolster ties with Iran in several aspects to maintain benefits Turkey acquired from the cooperation.

### **Dynamics Leading to Policy Change**

Since changes in the policy of Turkey concerning its nuclear policy and the relation with Iran occurred after the AKP came to power in 2002, this raises questions

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<sup>267</sup> Barkey, "Turkey's Perspectives on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament.", 71.

about the causes of the change. The factors explaining the change of Turkey's stance could be the consequences of different dynamics. Therefore, this section will identify those dynamics that generated the AKP's new approach towards the issue, which are the repercussions from the US invasion of Iraq and the erosion of confidence in NATO's collective defense.

### Dynamics

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 had an impact on the Turkey's approach toward the issue of Iran's nuclear program. The repercussions of the US invasion of Iraq directly jeopardized Turkey's security.<sup>268</sup> It revived Turkey's fear of an independent Kurdistan. Also, the war dragged the whole region into chaos and insecurity. Turkey never wanted such situation because the calm and peaceful region would benefit Turkey more particularly in terms of economic development. For this reason, military confrontation between the US and Iran would also affect region's stability and security. Turkey tried its best to avoid supporting any military solution or aggressive approach toward the issue and would instead prefer to adopt the approach based on the promotion of multilateral diplomatic solution.<sup>269</sup> This is because Turkey believed that aggressive approach toward the issue either military confrontation or sanctions could not coerce Iran to follow the line set by the West, on the contrary, it would make Iran more isolated and encircled that they had to resort to military approach, leading to the unwanted war in the region. In order to liberate itself from being locked up in such situation, Turkey abandoned its role as an observer and

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<sup>268</sup> Gürzel, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", 40.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 38.

became a mediator with the hope to clear tension and help create peace in the region.<sup>270</sup>

The erosion of the confidence in NATO's collective defense is another dynamic that led to Turkey's adoption of milder approach on the nuclear issue. In fact Turkey started to question the effectiveness of NATO's collective defense and US umbrella since 1990s. This is because of the reluctance of NATO members in responding Turkey's request for military assistance during the Iraq-Kuwait war.<sup>271</sup> During the war, Turkey demanded the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Force in Turkey to prevent the threat from Saddam but NATO members rejected because they believed that the Middle East was not in the operation zone of NATO. However, Turkey still maintained its good relation with NATO because NATO was perceived as part of Turkey's western identity.<sup>272</sup> In addition to that, its objective of EU membership still remained an important factor for Turkey. The reluctance of the NATO members to provide help for Turkey occurred again in 2003 and this time it made Turkey lose confidence in NATO's collective defense guarantee. In 2003 Turkey asked NATO to activate article 4 of the Washington Treaty to protect Turkey from Iraq's missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) but the demand was again rejected by the NATO members.<sup>273</sup> Since then the perception of Turkey toward NATO was merely an organization serving the US interest for the purpose of becoming a hegemonic power.<sup>274</sup> The loss of Turkey's confidence in security shield provided by NATO forced Turkey to depend on itself. In order to avoid being dragged into conflicts and insecure situation, Turkey chose to normalize relations and encourage cooperation with its neighbors. Therefore, Turkey's stance toward Iran on

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<sup>270</sup> Gürzel, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", 38.

<sup>271</sup> Kearns, *Turkey, NATO, and Nuclear Weapons*, 68.

<sup>272</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 83.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>274</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 84.



the nuclear issue became different from the west because Turkey is more concerned with maintaining good relation and cooperation with its neighbor for the purpose of security and economic concerns.

The stance of Turkey that became milder toward Iran's nuclear program is related to Turkey's security concern, particularly about the PKK. The issue of PKK had a binding effect that tied Turkey and Iran together. Iran was occasionally attacked by the PKK's affiliate in Iran known as the Party of Free Life of Iranian Kurdistan (PJAK). For this reason, Iran defined the PKK as a terrorist organization, thus Turkey saw the opportunity to cooperate with Iran on the issue of eliminating the PKK's threat.<sup>275</sup> On 17 April 2008, Turkey and Iran agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding about the PKK and the statement following the 12<sup>th</sup> High Security Commission between the two countries stated, "the increase in some terrorist movements in the region damages both countries, and the most influential way to battle this problem is the exchange of intelligence and security cooperation".<sup>276</sup> The fact that Turkey and Iran were both vulnerable from attacks by the PKK is one of the factors that geared up the rapprochement and cooperation between the two countries. For Turkey, Iran is not perceived as the existential threat but a friend that they could work together to achieve the shared interests.

Apart from the security concern, economic interest is another reason that made Turkey avoid any aggressive stance on the issue of Iran's nuclear program. Economic development is essential for the AKP's rule in the country. This is because the impressive economic growth and success was a significant factor that helped preserve the AKP's domestic legitimacy and popularity. Iran is one of Turkey's important

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

partners that Turkey could seek benefits from both in terms of economic dimension and energy. Iran and Turkey are trade partners; Turkey is one of the top-five trading partners of Iran with 5.6 per cent of total imports and exports.<sup>277</sup> Turkey has put an effort to raise their bilateral trade to twenty billion US dollars.<sup>278</sup> To facilitate their bilateral trade, in March 2009, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to cooperate in air, land, and sea transportation.<sup>279</sup> With regards to energy, Turkey is dependent on oil and gas from Iran. This can be seen from its deficit in its energy imports from Iran. Turkey and Iran signed several agreements about energy cooperation. This is for instance; in February 2007 Iran signed an agreement to let the Turkish Petroleum Corporation to explore energy reserves in Iran.<sup>280</sup> In addition to that, the two countries signed agreement to transport 30 billion cubic meters annually of Iranian gas through Iran and Turkey to the EU.<sup>281</sup> Turkey is dependent on Iran for energy, whereas Iran is dependent on Turkey as the key route to the west. This dependence between the two countries developed cooperation for the shared benefits in several aspects. Since Turkish economy had a fast growth rate, this pressure on the government to further improve economic performance forced Turkey not to risk losing its important trade partner and source of energy dependency. For this reason, Turkey tended to refrain from declaring any aggressive stance on the issue of Iran's nuclear program.

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<sup>277</sup> Oktav, *Turkey in the 21st Century*, 85.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Linden, *Turkey and its Neighbors*, 37.

<sup>281</sup> Linden, *Turkey and its Neighbors*, 37.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Turkey has become a pole in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex?**

The methodology of this research is based on theory-guided process tracing to reach the conclusion by using Buzan and Waever's Regional Security Complex

Theory as a guide to establish whether Turkey's position under the rule of the AKP still fits into the category of an insulator. Buzan and Waever acknowledge Turkey as an insulator because it is located on the periphery of three regional security complexes; the European, the Middle East, and the ex-Soviet.<sup>282</sup> However, Buzan and Waever described Turkey as a special kind of insulator because it does not play a passive role as insulators usually do. Despite Turkey's foreign policy activism, Buzan and Waever still recognize it as an insulator since it is not able to bring different regional security complexes together to form its own strategic arena or to clearly present itself as a pole belonging to any regional security complexes.<sup>283</sup> For a country to become part of the Regional Security Complex, there must be a degree of interconnectedness between its processes of securization or desecurization and those of the other units in the complex.<sup>284</sup> For Buzan and Waever, such processes do not cover only the traditional military and political sectors but also the economic, societal, and environmental ones.<sup>285</sup>

In order to see if Turkey has already lost its status of an insulator and become a pole in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex, the research investigated Turkey's policies in two different eras: pre-AKP era and AKP era. The Islamic agenda, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and nuclear policy are the three main themes that the research has focused on because they are significantly constructed as a process of securitization that link countries in the Middle Eastern RSC together. The research compared Turkey's framing of the three issues and its stance in the two periods, looking for evidence of continuity or change. In addition to that the research also analyzed the main factor that led to the change of Turkey's stance by analyzing

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<sup>282</sup> Barrinha, "The Ambitious Insulator", 2.

<sup>283</sup> Buzan and Waever, *Regions and powers*, 395.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-48.

<sup>285</sup> Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis*, 1.

the dynamics that led to changes of Turkish foreign policy in two different levels: systemic and domestic. The main findings of the research indicated the change of Turkey's stance and the way the issues are framed. With regards to the Islamic agenda, Turkey's stance varied between periods. Turkey's relation with the Middle East was very limited in the early republican period and in the post Cold War due to the power structure in the international system and the dominance of the Kemalist establishment. Nevertheless, there was a short period of reengagement during Ozal's government but it was done purposely only for the economic benefits. The Islamic agenda was approached and framed differently when the AKP came to power. It was used as a foreign policy instrument to establish closer ties with the Middle East and achieve regional leadership in the region. The change of Turkey's stance toward the Islamic agenda was directly influenced by the AKP's new doctrine, "Strategic Depth". The doctrine encourages the AKP to make use of Turkey's historical dynamics and geostrategic location to engage with the neighboring regions. Therefore, Turkey used the Islamic agenda to propel a pro-active approach toward the Middle East, contrary to the reactive practices of the past period. The reengagement with the Middle East in the AKP era was not done only for the economic purpose but rather for inclusive interests and effectiveness of Turkey in the region that could help Turkey achieve leadership status in the region whether as the defender of Islam, the model for other Muslim countries, or as a bridge connecting the Muslim world with that of the Christians. With regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Turkey whether in the pre-AKP era or the current period has always been supportive of the Palestinian cause. It was rather the approach toward Israel that varied between periods. During the Cold War, Turkey's foreign policy could be best described as equidistant policy because Turkey tried to balance its relation with both Palestine and Israel. The

equidistant approach started to lose its prominence in the post Cold War. Turkey started to cultivate a closer tie Israel, which eventually led to the 1996 agreement covering their cooperation in several areas. Turkish-Israeli relation began to change in the AKP era. The AKP's interest to develop close cooperation with Israel gradually decreased and there was increasing support for the Palestinian cause instead. The AKP confronted Israel and became critical of Israel's harsh policies toward Palestine and its people. The continued strong rhetoric of the AKP against Israel significantly deteriorated their relations that finally reached the crisis point and almost brought them to the edge of war. With regards to nuclear policy, Turkey's stance in the pre-AKP era could be best described as disengagement. Although Turkey's stance toward the acquisition of the nuclear weapons was identical with the West, Turkey did not get involved much with the issue because it was preoccupied with other security threats, namely the Kurdish question and the PKK. When the AKP came to power, they got involved more with the issue especially with the Iran's nuclear program that the AKP finally transformed the role of Turkey to a mediator. This is because the disputes and military confrontation between Iran and the West could directly jeopardize Turkey's interests and security. For this reason, the AKP attempted to mediate between the two sides to reach a negotiated solution. The settlement would maximize Turkey's interest because it could help liberate Turkey from the deadlock in balancing its relation with Iran and the West. However, the role of the Turkey as a mediator did not produce a satisfied outcome. For this reason, Turkey's stance toward Iran's nuclear program started to deviate from the West. In order to maintain a good relation with Iran for the economic and security interests, Turkey avoided any aggressive approach toward the issue of Iran's nuclear program.

The interactions between Turkey and the Middle East concerning the Islamic agenda, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and nuclear policy became stronger in the AKP era. Turkey made use of the Islamic agenda and the Israeli-Palestinian problem to develop closer ties with the Middle East, whereas the milder stance of Turkey on the issue of Iranian nuclear program signified Turkey's attempt to approach its neighbors. These changes are meaningful to reconsider Turkey's position in the Middle Eastern regional security complex. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory, Turkey was positioned as an insulator. This position is correctly assigned only to Turkey in the pre-AKP era but to also describe Turkey in the AKP era as an insulator is problematic. It can be seen from the table that Turkey's stance in the pre-AKP era toward the three issues were very limited in this period because Turkey attempted to distance itself from the region and the problems that they might be dragged into. This approach signifies the insulating character of Turkey. However, this character started to wane when the AKP came to power in 2002. The foreign policy practices in this era on the three issues are obviously different from Turkey's previous foreign policy directions, showing that that Turkey is no longer attempting to distance itself from the region. These changes indicated new connection between Turkey and the Middle East. Even though the new pattern of interaction between Turkey and Middle East is not strong enough to bring them together to form a new coherent strategic arena, it is meaningful enough to present itself as part of the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex. For this reason, the position of Turkey in the AKP era should be changed from an "insulator" to a "pole" in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex.

This new positioning of Turkey may be countered by the argument that the prospect of Turkey potentially joining the EU, which is still possible, cannot make it

as a pole in the Middle East. This argument is not convincing because of two reasons. First, the scope of this thesis is to reconsider Turkey's position in the AKP era. And it is obvious that, after the problems in the negotiation talk concerning Turkey's EU accession bid in 2005, for the AKP the EU is no longer a reference point. They then looked for other regions as an alternative to engage with where Turkey could effectively exercise its proactive policies and spread its influence. The reason that the AKP still keeps the EU prospect open is not because Turkey could achieve this goal soon but rather to prevent the internal struggle for power. The EU prospect has always been the critical importance for Turkey, thus if the process is completely abandoned, the rivals of the AKP particularly the old Kemalist elites could use this element to blame the AKP and make a swift comeback.

The second reason against the argument of EU membership prospect is the complexity of European debates, which made Turkey's membership in the EU far from being realistic and achievable. The debates on the impact of Turkey's accession to the EU are mainly concerned with issues such the size of Turkey may grant Turkey a primary role in terms of voting rights and representation in the Council<sup>286</sup>, Turkey as the only Muslim country contradicts EU's identity of the "Christian Club"<sup>287</sup>, Turkey's membership raised fear about the invasion of Turkish migrants that already hosted large communities in many European countries. For this reason, Turkey's membership met fierce opposition from various European states and negative signals from European elites and public. Another point that has come into notice is the accession timeline of Turkey and other candidate countries. Despite the same complicated accession process, the accession process of other candidates took lesser time than Turkey. The countries that used to counter the complicated accession

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<sup>286</sup> Tocci, *Turkey's European Future*, 54.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



process like Spain, Poland, and Croatia did not take more than a decade to achieve the accession, whereas Turkey has been in the process for over three decades.<sup>288</sup>

Therefore, it can be seen that Turkey as a member of the EU is far from being a realistic and achievable goal, making Turkey unable to become a pole in the EU any time soon. And since the insulating character of Turkey began to change when the AKP came to power because of their different approach toward the issues of Islamic agenda, Israeli-Palestinian problem, and nuclear policy, it is logical to conclude that Turkey has become a pole in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex.

In addition to the comparison between Turkey's stance on the themes of Islamic agenda, Israeli-Palestinian problem, and nuclear policy in the pre-AKP era and the current period to look for evidence of continuity or change, the study also investigated the determinants that led to the changes of Turkish policy to see if they are determined by the changes in the international and regional structure or they are explicitly related to the AKP policies. The main findings in this scope are summarized in the table below.

Issues	International Dynamics	Domestic Dynamics
<b>Islamic Agenda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The weakening of the EU dimension in Turkey</li> <li>- The loss of the US influence after the invasion of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The background of the core leadership of the AKP</li> <li>- The disempowerment of the</li> </ul>

<sup>288</sup> Tocci, *Turkey's European Future*, 48.

	Iraq	<p>military in Turkey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The strengthening of the AKP's domestic power</li> </ul>
<b>Israeli-Palestinian Problem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The improvement of Turkey's relation with its neighbors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The attempt of the AKP to maintain the party's voter base</li> <li>- The AKP's new role conception</li> <li>- The negative perception of the US</li> <li>- The curtailment of the role of the military in politics</li> </ul>
<b>Nuclear Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The repercussions from the US invasion of Iraq</li> <li>- The erosion of confidence in NATO's collective defense</li> </ul>	

Even though the changes in Turkish policy were partly determined by the changes in the international and regional structure, it is obvious that the AKP is the main driving force that led to these changes. This observation is based on three factors: the

AKP's Strategic Depth, the AKP's determination to embrace a new role for Turkey, and the curtailment of the role of the military in politics. Without the initiatives and proactive approach of the AKP, Turkey might still maintain its insulating character and limit its engagement with the surrounding regions. One of the AKP's initiatives that impelled changes of Turkey's stance and the way Turkish foreign policy is operated is the doctrine of "Strategic Depth". This doctrine is the backbone of Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era that offered a pro-active policy towards the neighboring regions contrary to the past practices. Strategic Depth acted as a facilitator to enhance relations with countries that were territories of the Ottoman Empire and maximize Turkey's interests in those regions. As a result, the AKP took advantage of the uniqueness of Turkey's historical dynamic and geostrategic location to develop relations with its neighbors through cultural, economic, and diplomatic interactions. The peculiarity of the AKP that made Turkish foreign policy different from the past is its determination to embrace new roles for Turkey. Such approach represents a rupture with the past, since Turkish foreign policy in the past era was mainly characterized by the unquestioning western orientation. For the AKP, the unidimensional character of the traditional foreign policy prevented Turkey from responding to changes in the surrounding environments, resulting in the loss of several political and economic opportunities. Therefore, there were intense efforts to introduce new roles for Turkey. Those roles include the defender of Islam, the model for other Muslim countries, regional leader, moderator, and a bridge connecting the Muslim world with that of the Christians. The determination to embrace these new roles for Turkey were often shown and reflected in the AKP core leaders' speeches and interviews. In order to achieve these ambitions, the AKP reformulated policies that led to Turkey's new approach toward the Islamic agenda, the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict and the nuclear policy. As a result, the changes led to the increasingly intense engagement with the Middle Eastern affairs and the decreased interest in western orientation. The AKP also played a significant role in curtailing the power of the military. Throughout the history of Turkey, the military always played a significant role in politics; many times the military would step in and intervene in politics. The victory of the AKP over the military in the 2007 crisis reclaimed civilian authority on the foreign policy making. As a result, the AKP could freely operate policies that engaged more with the Islamic values, Palestinian-Israeli problem and nuclear policy without any interruptions from the military establishment. These three factors suggest the intention of the AKP to change the direction of Turkish foreign policy and transform Turkey's position from an insulator to a pole in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex.

The rapprochement with the Middle East is imposed by the AKP with the motive to achieve the role of powerful regional leader in the region. Such attempt could be seen from Turkey's success in transforming relations with many states in the Middle East over the last decade. At different times, Turkey tried to act as a credible mediator and facilitator in regional conflicts and talked to different ethnic and religious communities with self-confidence. The AKP did not forget to grasp an opportunity that was provided by the 2011 uprising in the Middle East to bolster Turkey's image as a progressive and pro-democratic Muslim government and set Turkey as a model of the coexistence between traditional values, notably Islam, on the one hand and the requirements of a modern life, notably secularism, pluralism and liberalism. The success of the AKP to approach and regain Turkey's influence in the region is mainly through the communication with the people. The AKP's several condemnations against Israel's attack on the Palestinians and the support for the

people's revolution against the despotic regimes in the Arab Spring bolster Turkey's reputation in the region. Such popularity helped facilitate Turkey's move to become a pole in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex.

The new position of Turkey as a pole in the Middle East offered Turkey opportunities to maximize its interests as the AKP expected until the outbreak of the Arab Spring. At first, the uprisings were seen by the AKP as the opportunity to expand Turkey's influence in the region through the use of Turkish model. The AKP offered strong support to the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and to the opposition group in Syria so that they could become Turkey's political partner and key force in the region. However, the change of the dynamics in the region in the post Arab Spring impeded the AKP's aspiration. The military's coup in Egypt that overthrew the Islamist government put Turkey in helpless situation and isolation in regional politics. In addition to that, the situation in Syria, which became increasingly violent caused the AKP to worry about the spillover of the conflict into Turkey's borders. As the clash in Syria continued, Turkey could not avoid the spillover. Turkey had to deal with refugee crisis by accepting more than 500,000 refugees into its border.<sup>289</sup> And since the situation in Syria is still unstable, the return of these refugees is unpredictable. A huge flow of refugees from Syria burdened Turkey with financial, political and security costs. This is because the government started to lose control of the human flow across the border resulting in the movement of smugglers, radical Islamists, and PKK militants between the two countries.<sup>290</sup> One of the examples of the threat caused by this destabilizing factor is the terrorist attack in Reyhanlı, a district in Hatay province, where 52 people were killed.<sup>291</sup> As the conflict keeps continuing,

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<sup>289</sup> Matusiak, "Turkey: Has the AKP Ended Its Winning Streak?", OSW (accessed 22 Nov. 2014).

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

threat and destabilizing factor in Turkey are growing. Therefore, stability and security in Turkey are directly jeopardized. Furthermore, even if the Assad's regime is defeated, which is the desired scenario, Turkey will still have to deal with an unstable neighborhood and the spillover of conflict remains unavoidable. Apart from the security crisis that Turkey has to deal with, its credibility as a potential regional player in bringing about a new regional order in the Middle East has proven to be in a downturn, particularly following the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's regime against its opponents. The problem was not resolved by Turkey but rather by an agreement between the US and Russia. The way in which the major global powers dealt with such incident suggests that Turkey's concerns and priorities are not being given due respect and attention. The crisis in Syria demonstrates that Turkey's ability to influence the interests and policies of regional and international actors is already limited. For this reason, there is possibility that the future shape of Turkey's relation with the Middle East will be changed because the AKP could no longer use its most efficient tool of "Turkish model" in the region. In the following years, the AKP will still continue to use the Israeli-Palestinian issue as a tool to engage and gain support from the Arab states as well as their domestic voter base. However, the limitation of opportunity to expand Turkey's influence in the Middle East will possibly force Turkey back to the position of an insulator.

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