

THE ANTITHESIS OF TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY

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On the 28th of August, Ahmet Davutoğlu became the new Prime Minister of Turkey succeeding Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and giving his position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. Erdoğan's Turkey emerged as a new challenger for regional hegemony and the new heads of Turkey's foreign policy are undoubtedly working toward this goal. Davutoğlu's promotion to prime minister seems to come as a reward for his foreign policy initiatives up to now, while Çavuşoğlu's move from the Ministry of EU Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflects AKP leadership's satisfaction for his stance on the issue of Turkey's EU candidacy.

Since the rise of the AKP to power in 2002, Davutoğlu's spirit has dominated Turkish foreign policy. First, he served as foreign policy advisor to Erdoğan and afterwards, as a foreign minister from 2009 to 2014. As an academic, he wrote the *Strategic Depth* describing his views on Turkey's regional and world role. His contribution was in line with the old Neo-Ottoman rhetoric conceptualizing the strategic framework towards regional hegemony. Consequently, it differs from Kemalist principles of status quo preservation, which were in harmony with the post-1923 nation-state logic and not with the old imperial practice. Davutoğlu criticized Kemalists accusing them of neglecting to acquire 'a strong position in the international system'. In

contrast, they implemented 'a strategy for preserving the borders of the National Pact (Misak-ı Milli)' (2010a: 123).

According to Davutoğlu, Turkey has to respect her historical 'khalīfah' and imperial role and increase its power acquiring the status of the regional hegemon. In the post-war era, many alternative Neo-Ottoman versions, such as Turgut Ozal's maximalist and Necmettin Erbakan's multi-dimensional foreign policy have got known and Davutoğlu's analysis is not an exception (Murinson 2006: 947). They are all based on the same logic; the rise of Turkey to a status of great power with her own sphere of influence in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and such broadly as the Turkic world in Central Asia. Under this prospect, while being minister of foreign affairs, Davutoğlu stated that he is 'not a minister of a nation state only' (2010b: 9-10).

Specifically, with regard to the position of Turkey in the Middle East, Turkey's new prime minister has offered a detailed analysis on how the Turkish-Israeli relations have historically harmed Turkish-Arab world. He supports that Turkey's gains derived from her cooperation with Israel are very few. He supports that Turkey's gains derived from her cooperation with Israel are very few, mainly because Jerusalem keeps a balanced diplomatic stance in the regional arena (2010a: 635). According to Davutoğlu, even Arab nationalism has been boosted due to the Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation (2010a: 551-552), since it rose as a counter-balancing movement after Turkey's pro-Israeli stance and the consequent dissolution of a possible Pan-Islamic alliance. In this sense, if the close Turkish-Israeli relations of the previous decades represented the reason of Ankara's alienation from the Arab world, her best bet would be to dissolve this close strategic partnership. Indeed, this has taken place during the last years. Events such as Erdoğan's stance at the Davos World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in 2009 and the Mavi Marmara incident in 2011 reflect this change.

On the other hand, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has not presented any detailed analysis depicting his views on Turkey's foreign policy. Nevertheless, he has been very active with regard to relevant issues, since he was in charge of the major EU

pillar of the Turkish foreign policy. His remark towards the EU, after its critic regarding the government handling of the Gezi Park protests, was indicative: 'I invite our European friends to avoid voicing preconceived notions while commenting on issues related to Turkey's internal affairs that also have political aspects, and to be more cautious' (Today's Zaman 2013a). Similarly, in the case of Syria, he advised that 'the American nation doesn't want any intervention after its mistakes in Iraq and Afghanistan' (Today's Zaman 2013b). In this respect, he supported Davutoğlu's anti-western choices.

Moreover, in autumn 2013, he criticized Iran for its sectarian policy in the Middle East specifically with regard to the clashes between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq stressing that 'Iran acts in a sectarian way, which is so wrong, so dangerous. These are the things that we oppose' (Today's Zaman 2013b). In the case of Iran, he made the afore-mentioned statement recognizing Tehran's stance as competitive to Turkey in search of a leading role in the Middle East. His comments never remained in Turkey's bilateral relations with her neighbors but expanded further in parallel with Davutoğlu's maximalist grand strategy goal.

Undoubtedly, Çavuşoğlu's figure has been connected with the hard-liners of the AKP and thus, his rhetoric stayed absolutely in line with Davutoğlu's principle of autonomy and self-help. Besides, before assuming ministerial duties, he was the Vice Chairman of the AK Party in charge of Foreign Affairs from January to December 2013, while it is worth to be referred that his ministerial service started with Turkey refusing to sign a communiqué in a counter-terrorism meeting in Jeddah on the 11th of September.

In general, the way the AKP analyzes the international system and Turkey's participation in international regimes in a very different way. Turkey's participation as a great power determining regimes' function is regarded as a basic principle. Besides, in his critique to Kemalism, Davutoğlu states that 'instead of modern Turkey's rise to a status of an alternative or competitive actor to the west, her simple participation in it was preferred' (2010a: 123). In other words, international regimes are not regarded as fora for cooperation, but as means for implementing hegemonic inclinations. Her behavior is in

conflict with the ideal of multilateral cooperation, since self-centered actions and great power self-perceptions have been adopted.

However, these have not proved to be wise options, since they tend to be completely in opposite with Turkey's need for a balanced foreign policy in an unbalanced region. 'Multi-dimensional foreign policy' principle never became real. Instead, it was a change from a clearly pro-western foreign policy orientation to one identified with possible cooperation with al-Nusra in Syria and severe disruption of relations with the US and the EU counterparts. Furthermore, Turkey has not neglected the option of integrating the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an alternative to the EU. In this sense, international institutions are transformed to tools and lose their relevance, which is to represent a specific foreign policy inclination and highlight the country's standing in the world.

Realistic foreign policy does not mean inconsiderate foreign policy. In the unstable region of the Greater Middle East, unilateral balancing is impossible and alliances are necessary. Under this prospect, two remarks can be made. Firstly, it is a self-help world but no country can balance its threats by itself. Wise options are needed in accordance with the rational choice criterion. To put it clear, there are regional actors powerful enough to counter-balance Turkey especially if they decide to ally. Secondly, an actor has to be reliable in order to attract partnerships. This means that it has to set clear strategic goals and implement its foreign policy in the margins of the state-centric system excluding paramilitary or even terrorist organizations from this spectrum. In case it has a contradictory stance, no stable strategic partnership can be sustained and of course, this is exactly the antithesis between rhetoric and actual policy-making.

Nowadays, Turkey feeds such thoughts. Under Davutoğlu, Turkey has acquired many more enemies instead of 'zero problems with neighbours', since its foreign policy has been contradictory instead of multi-dimensional. As it has been already described, conflicting messages with regard to her foreign policy orientation continue to be sent at least in the beginning of the new government, for instance in the case of Syria and the ISIS.

For the above-mentioned reasons, it seems that a new government with the same way of thought has come to power. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Ahmet Davutoğlu, as well as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have proved to be strong supporters of a specific – Neo-Ottoman – ideological framework which permits Turkey to present relevant continuity regarding her foreign policy priorities, goals and used means.

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