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National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation: the ideational bases of the Justice and Development Party's foreign policy activism in the Middle East

BÜLENT ARAS and AYLIN GORENER

Introduction

Turkey's foreign policy since the end of the cold war has been marked by a significant reorientation from a long-entrenched passive and isolationist stance to one of active engagement particularly in the affairs of the Middle East. This dramatic change in foreign policy outlook has become more pronounced since the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came to power in 2002. Observers have increasingly noted that Turkey's previously uncontested Western-oriented identity and foreign policy has come under attack from Islamist forces. Thus, because of its Islamist roots, the AKP government's active involvement in the Middle East has often been mistaken for signalling a shift in Turkey's state identity.¹ However, an identity-based explanation for Turkey's new foreign policy activism in the Middle East is seriously lacking for a number of reasons.

First, the main focus of Turkish foreign policy continues to be on European Union (EU) membership, and there has been no departure from the commitment to the EU membership as a seal of approval of Turkey's Western identity. Although AKP's initial activism in this process has stalled, this is largely due to the rising ambivalence, if not outright hostility, of a number of EU countries towards Turkey's membership, and the concomitant disenchantment of a large segment of Turkey's population with the EU. Turkey's relations with the USA experienced a major setback in the early years of the Iraq war due to Turkey's refusal to allow American troops to enter northern Iraq via its territory. However, the two sides have repaired relations, which seemed to reach a new high with President Obama's visit in April 2009. Thus it is not plausible to argue that the traditional emphasis of Turkish foreign policy on relations with the EU and the USA has been abandoned.

Second, Turkey's engagement with the Middle East does not contradict the expectations and actions necessary for EU membership. On the contrary, Turkey's actions in the region are guided by a normative and multilateral approach that is very much characteristic of EU foreign policy. Turkey is currently engaging with the Middle East much like a European state,² demonstrating its successful socialization into European norms and guidelines, at least in foreign policy.

¹ Stephen Larrabee, 'Turkey rediscovers the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 86(4), July–August 2007, pp. 103–104.

² Tark Oğuzlu, 'Middle Easternization of Turkey's foreign policy: does Turkey dissociate from the West?', *Turkish Studies*, 9(1), 2008, p. 16.

Third, an explanation in terms of identity is bound to fail primarily because of how international relations theory conceptualizes identity. Most recent literature treats state identity as monolithic and a product of largely impersonal forces.³ This paper argues instead that states may hold a number of identities, and that what matters most for foreign policy is the role conceptions that shape the ruling elite's imagination. National role conceptions are the cognitive constructions of decision-makers of 'what the nation naturally stands for and how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena'.⁴ They can be considered as the core of a grand policy vision through which policy-makers explain the world around them and their state's existence therein. This approach assigns the capacity to construct or articulate new role conceptions to the elite, while depersonifying the state. From this perspective, the active engagement of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East is best accounted for by the construction of a newfound national role that envisions Turkey as a global actor simultaneously fulfilling multiple roles in separate issue areas and geographical regions.

This paper has two goals. One is to clarify the national role conceptions of the ruling AKP elite through a content analysis of statements by Prime Minister Erdoğan and the Party's chief foreign policy architect, the current Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. The second goal is to assess the power of the national role conceptions variable to explain Turkish foreign policy's novel orientation to the Middle East as opposed to larger structural forces.

This paper is based on several assumptions about the foreign policy process and the actors involved in it. First, we take the view that various international and domestic factors have an impact on a government's foreign policy behaviour and these influences are channelled through a group of foreign policy elite who identify, decide and enact foreign policy actions. An understanding of foreign policy as a deterministic response to larger forces operative in the international system has long been discredited.⁵ Current research has demonstrated the value of approaching foreign policy as a decision process that emphasizes the significance of elite perceptions of external and institutional constraints.⁶ Elite decisions are not merely responses to external stimuli and contextual variables. Whatever the deep structural forces at work, foreign policy decisions always require determined efforts of policy-makers who impose their own vision on basic redirection necessary in foreign policy. Major shifts in the international system or in the configuration of domestic balances of power can either open new avenues or set boundaries for action, but the perceptions and belief systems of policy-makers with respect to their internal and external environment are significant variables in accounting for foreign policy change.

³ Jonathan Mercer, 'Anarchy and identity', *International Organization*, 49, Spring 1999, pp. 229–252.

⁴ Jacques E. C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 18.

⁵ Richard Herrmann, 'The empirical challenge of the cognitive revolution: a strategy for drawing inferences about perceptions', *International Studies Quarterly*, 32(2), 1988, pp. 175–203; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1991.

⁶ Alexander George, 'The operational code: a neglected approach to the study of political leaders and decision-making', *International Studies Quarterly*, 13, 1969, pp. 190–222; Joe D. Hagan, 'Does decision making matter? Systemic assumptions vs. historical reality in international relations theory', *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 2001, pp. 5–46.

There is no dearth of evidence in support of this approach.⁷ Holsti, through a comprehensive study of eight cases, found that among the various external and domestic sources of explanation, leadership qualities and shifts in perceptions stood out as the most powerful explanations of major foreign policy realignments.⁸ In *Vulnerability of Empire*, Kupchan points out that the process of adjustment to a new international context is shaped predominantly by elite belief systems, claiming that his study 'demonstrates the critical importance of taking beliefs seriously, of treating beliefs as variables that shape how elites interpret events and formulate policy'.⁹

Second, in addition to placing actors at the centre of the foreign policy process, this study does not adhere to the false assumption that an objective reality is readily accessible to policy-makers. Even if structural constraints and opportunities, at least partly, drive policy, it still needs to be explained why decision-makers often fail to respond to, or alter their course of policy in accordance with, new international realities. History is replete with examples of states engaging in self-defeating policies in the face of systemic imperatives given their power capabilities.¹⁰ In light of the extensive literature indicating the difficulty of inferring policy choices from material constraints, we share the assumption that actors' belief systems, together with their unique experiences leading them to form specific foreign policy orientations, play an important role in accounting for their policy preferences. Policy-makers are called upon to define and interpret international and domestic imperatives that do not always correspond to what other actors, even in the same political environment, consider as 'objective reality'. As Robert Abelson puts it, 'it is a mistake to assume that leaders experiencing the same political event have similar goals and will choose similar responses without information suggesting that their definitions of the situation and beliefs are somewhat equivalent'.¹¹ Different actors within the same state can hold remarkably different conceptions about their own nation, and so depending on the belief systems and identity conceptions of the ruling elite and the allocation of power between different actors within the state, different approaches to foreign policy can emerge. Thus there is no doubt that integrating perceptual variables and a cognitive dimension enriches our understanding of the foreign policy process.

National role conceptions and foreign policy motivation

There is an increasing amount of empirical work investigating elite perceptions of both domestic and international operational environments.¹² One of

⁷ Margaret Hermann, Thomas Preston, Baghat Korany and Timothy M. Shaw, 'Who leads matter', *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 2001, pp. 83–131; Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, 'Let us now praise great men: bringing statesman back in', *International Security*, 25, 2001, pp. 107–146.

⁸ K. J. Holsti, *Why Nations Realign*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1982.

⁹ Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1994, p. 490.

¹⁰ Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, op. cit., pp. 114–133.

¹¹ Robert Abelson, 'Beliefs are like possessions', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 16, 1986, p. 225.

¹² Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer and Michael D. Young, 'Presidential operational codes in the post-cold war world', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43(5), 1999, pp. 610–625; Scott Crichlow, 'Idealism or pragmatism? An operational code analysis of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres', *Political Psychology*, 19(4), 1998, pp. 683–706.

the most successful approaches to relating elite perceptions to foreign policy behaviour is using national role conceptions. The notion of national role conceptions entails applying role theory from social psychology to studying relations between states. A role can be understood as a comprehensive pattern of behaviour and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations.¹³ It is a combination of an actor understanding of what his/her behaviour should be, society's expectations and the particular context in which that role is enacted. Roles are best thought of as a road map that actors rely on for navigating a complex world and for imposing a modicum of order on their environment.

Holsti was one of the first international relations theorists to apply role theory to the international context. He defines national role conceptions as

policy makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system ... It is their image of the appropriate orientations and functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment.¹⁴

In short, national role conceptions are policy-makers' understanding of what their nation stands for in the international arena. They are the source of norms and standards that pattern government actions and responses under different circumstances. According to Jacques Hymans, this approach demands that 'we must drop down the level of national identity as a social fact and instead look at what the leader has adopted as his or her specific interpretation, or "conception" of the national identity'.¹⁵

At the same time, however, this emphasis on policy-makers' orientations in the international system as determinants of foreign policy behaviour, by no means, implies a discounting of various objective domestic and external variables. The notion of national role conceptions does not strive to explain state action on the basis of decision-makers' personal idiosyncrasies alone. Rather its utility lies in integrating contextual variables into the formation of actors' national conceptions. As Hollis and Smith argue, roles are a 'two-way process between structure and actor',¹⁶ because policy-makers emerge from a domestic and an international environment and have been exposed to numerous situational variables that shape their personal image of their nation in the international system. Role theory emphasizes the interaction between the external variables placing demands on the actor and the actor's self-defined interests and goals. Ascertaining the roots of policy-makers' national role conceptions is beyond the scope of this paper, although an extensive body of thought points to the strength of actors' socialization into mainstream national role conceptions and the resultant consistency of these images from one leader to

¹³ Stephen Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1987.

¹⁴ K. J. Holsti, 'National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, 14(3), 1970, pp. 245-246.

¹⁵ Jacques C. Hymans, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁶ M. Hollis and S. Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990, p. 167.

the next.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that a multitude of identity conceptions exist, particularly in pluralist societies. Because these conceptions are constructed and not intrinsic, it is to be expected that foreign policy actors will draw on these to develop their own subjective conception of their nation's function in the international system.

How and why a particular conception assumes precedence depends to a great extent on the result of domestic power struggles between actors with different role conceptions. As Bozdağlıoğlu argues:

through domestic institutional arrangements or elections, the role of domestic political groups ... or individuals in the foreign policy making process can be altered. In this case, the foreign policy discourse can be dominated by entirely new organizations or individuals with different identity conceptions.¹⁸

It is also to be noted that external stimuli, especially in the form of major changes in the international system, will enable certain role conceptions to gain salience and find support from the wider public.

Having established in general what the notion of national role conception entails, we can now proceed with a discussion of the typology of national roles articulated by Holsti. Classifying different national role conceptions is essential to empirical study as the goal is to ascertain their relevance as independent variables in foreign policy analysis. Holsti fashioned his study through a comprehensive survey of foreign policy statements from 71 governments. He and other scholars following in his footsteps have concluded that national role conceptions are strongly related to a state's foreign policy behaviour.¹⁹ Different national roles produce different preferences and impulses concerning foreign policy issues. Thus, a well-classified national role conceptions scheme can provide the researcher with a useful tool for explaining variations in foreign policy behaviour.

The particular contribution that Holsti's typology makes to the empirical study of national role conceptions is his recognition that it is not unusual for policy-makers to hold multiple role conceptions that may be relevant in different international settings and institutions or in different issue areas.²⁰ For example, a state may be willing to act as a leader in economic affairs while deferring to other states in military–security issues. Membership of two different international organizations may alter the salience of the policies associated with a national role conception, perhaps requiring an altogether renewed conceptualization of the state's assumed function in a specific institutional setting. Holsti has found that there is a positive correlation between the number of national role conceptions and active involvement in international affairs.²¹ Written at the height of the cold war, his study includes nine role types on a scale ranging from 'active international involvement' to 'passive foreign policy behaviour'. Active roles associated with leadership include 'regional protector', 'bastion of revolution'

¹⁷ Hymans, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–21.

¹⁸ Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity*, Routledge, New York and London, 2003, p. 25.

¹⁹ Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

²⁰ Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

²¹ Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

and 'bloc leader'. Other roles associated with a more collaborative orientation toward other states include 'regional sub-system collaborator', 'mediator-integrator' and 'bridge'. At the lower end of the scale we find 'isolate' and 'protectee' role types.

There have been many efforts to improve Holsti's scheme and make it more relevant to the post-cold war international era. Of these, the typology developed by Chafetz *et al.* is the most useful model, as it is the most recent study of its kind and does not depart significantly from Holsti's original formulation. Like Holsti, their argument is that foreign policy elites often express a national role conception that defines the boundaries of appropriate actions and tasks that their state should perform in the international system.²² They start from the premise that any inquiry into a state's foreign policy preferences must incorporate policy-makers' understanding of, and the meaning they attach to, their nation's role in the international system. They offer their typology as a framework to make sense of the incredibly rich and complex foreign policy orientations in the international system, and this forms the starting point for our inquiry into Turkey's new activism in the Middle East. We also begin with the premise that national role conceptions define the parameters of sensible and required actions in foreign policy and give meaning to policy outputs. Thus, by clarifying the national role conceptions of Turkey's current ruling elite, we seek to explain the driving goals of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East.

The discussion is organized as follows. We begin with possible explanations for Turkey's shift in orientation towards the Middle East, before arguing that the notion of national role conceptions stands out as the most compelling explanation. We then proceed to clarify the national role conceptions of AKP's foreign policy elite, as an indicator of their general orientation towards the external world, based on a content analysis of their written statements and policy speeches. Finally, we provide a detailed overview of Turkey's various initiatives in the Middle East as manifestations of the preferences and expectations associated with the current elite's newly adopted role conceptions.

National role conceptions of Turkish foreign policy elite

The literature on national role conceptions argues that different states have different predominant foreign policy preferences. These can be traced back to the early or formative experiences of the state, and are shaped to a great extent by the political, cultural and personal characteristics of the founding elites. In the case of the Turkish Republic, the original guiding values underpinning Turkish foreign policy were firmly established by the founder of the Republic, Kemal Atatürk, who fixed his own interpretation on the content and major orientation of foreign policy and created an apparatus of institutional safeguards to prevent any deviation from the established line in years to come. Since then, the republican elite who were granted a privileged role in the formulation of foreign policy, have strongly held onto a Western-oriented, isolationist and passive foreign policy stand, while effectively excluding mass society from constructing alternative role

²² Glenn Chafetz, Hilel Abramson and Suzette Grillot, 'Role theory and foreign policy: Belorussian and Ukrainian compliance with the nuclear nonproliferation regime', *Political Psychology*, 17, 1996, pp. 727–730.

conceptions. Paradoxically, joining the West has forced Turkey to adopt more open and democratic processes which have in turn allowed actors from different socio-economic backgrounds to enter Turkish political life. Thus, as the political elite have become more diverse, alternative visions of Turkish foreign policy have begun to be articulated and publicly voiced.

However, it was not until Turgut Özal who came to power in the first elections after the military coup of 1980 that traditional republican national role conceptions began to lose their dominance in shaping the main contours of Turkish foreign policy. This is not to say that an absolute consensus on what the role Turkey should play existed prior to Özal, but rather that alternative conceptions had either been effectively silenced, or lacked the necessary institutional power base to be voiced in political discourse. Özal was also greatly helped by domestic and international developments in articulating a new role conception for Turkey. The military coup had largely discredited and effectively eliminated all of his political rivals from the Turkish political scene. The lack of a credible opposition granted Özal more freedom to break from the established policy line. The end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union created new predicaments, thus allowing more room for leadership qualities in interpreting and responding to the new strategic environment. Thus, the activism in Turkish foreign policy in the early 1990s has often been attributed to new systemic requirements.²³ It is certainly not plausible to argue that Turkey would have followed the same policy line after the end of the cold war regardless of who was in power, as there was hardly consensus among the political actors about the role Turkey should play in this new environment. As Sedat Laçiner argues:

Kemalists suggested retuning to the early Republican policy of isolation. They agreed that after the Cold War, the West's aim was to disintegrate Turkey as witnessed in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia ... Islamists suggested a common market between the Muslim countries. However, Özal's prescription was quite different.²⁴

Özal brought his unique personal background and experiences into the formulation of a novel national role conception in relation to the changing international conditions. His singlehanded determination to change the course of Turkish foreign policy nowhere met more resistance than over his decision to ally Turkey firmly behind American policy in the first Gulf War.²⁵ This decision marked a clear break from Turkey's long-established policy of neutrality and non-alignment in Middle Eastern and inter-Arab affairs. Özal's perception of international stimuli, and his choice of strategies in response, clearly served as the main force behind Turkey's foreign policy reorientation at this time.

Delving more deeply into Özal's foreign policy vision is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a few points need to be clarified, as Özal's policies are widely credited for serving as a main referent to current AKP foreign policy

²³ Alan O. Makovsky, 'The new activism in Turkish foreign policy', *SALS Review*, 19(1), 1999, pp. 92–113.

²⁴ Sedat Laçiner, 'Özalizm (neo-Ottomanism): an alternative in Turkish foreign policy?', *Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 1(1), 2003–2004, p. 175.

²⁵ Ramazan Gözen, 'Türk Dış Politikasında Karar Alma Mekanizması, Turgut Özal ve Körfez Krizi', *Yeni Türkiye*, No. 9, May–June 1996, pp. 286–302.

preferences.²⁶ A brief analysis of Özal's foreign policy statements and policies suggests two dominant national role conceptions: regional leader and bridge. There are repeated references in his speeches asserting Turkey's position in a broadly defined regional setting, and Özal's initiatives, such as the formation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) zone, stand out as examples of his desire to extend Turkey's influence into areas that had traditionally been regarded as outside Turkey's foreign policy interests. The following statement by Özal sums up his foreign policy position:

Many things have changed in Turkey ... My conviction is that Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in active foreign policy ... The reason I made this call is because we are a powerful country in the region.²⁷

Consequently, under Özal, Turkish foreign policy abandoned its exclusive orientation towards the West and took significant steps towards establishing itself as the political and economic centre of a region covering the Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus, the Balkans and the Black Sea rim. Özal's slogan of 'from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall' is indicative of the scope of his regional interests.

Turkish foreign policy's active engagement with the surrounding regions under Özal is also closely linked to his conception of Turkey as a bridge between East and West. He strongly believed that extending Turkey's sphere of influence to the East, while maintaining its Western focus, would make it possible to fulfil the role of being a bridge. Turkey's regional initiatives in this era were largely motivated by the desire to break from an excessive dependence on the West and to engage with a greater variety of actors. Özal emphasized Turkey's unique history, societal dynamics and geostrategic location to promote Turkey's unique positioning as an intermediary for the much needed rapprochement between the East and the West in the post-cold war era. However, it should be acknowledged that Özal's conceptualization of the bridge encapsulated not so much having two feet in both camps, but rather the presentation and promotion of Western values in the East.²⁸ It cannot be overemphasized that Özal's unique conception of Turkey's position and function in the international system accounted for much of the changed vision and operation of Turkish foreign policy. This has become all the more apparent since his death, as successive leaderships have resorted to the traditional one-dimensional foreign policy approach and most of his regional initiatives have been abandoned. Özal's leadership remains consistent with the contention that policy-makers who perceive a large domain of influence or strong leadership role for their nation will pursue an active and multi-dimensional policy line.

So far then, we have demonstrated that Turkey's foreign policy choices can be explained by the policy elite's own conceptions of their nation's role in a regional context or in the wider international context. These conceptions make certain diplomatic involvements plausible and shape or constrain the leaders'

²⁶ A. Murinson, 'The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), 2006, p. 947.

²⁷ *Milliyet*, 3 March 1991.

²⁸ Sedat Laçiner, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

imagination. The changes in Turkish foreign policy during Özal's era demonstrate that policy-makers can articulate entirely new national role conceptions, which are then translated into policy choices contingent on the domestic distribution of power and enabling external stimuli. Our goal is now to delineate the national role conceptions of the AKP leadership as crucial variables that account for the dynamism and activism of Turkish foreign policy in recent years. It is important to point out that the aim here is not to analyse the domestic and external sources responsible for forming AKP's national role conceptions. However, it should be noted that the domestic political reform process has weakened the leverage of traditional actors in the foreign policy process, and has made it possible for new actors with different role conceptions to participate in foreign policy discourse. AKP's decisive victory in both the 2002 and 2007 elections has granted its foreign policy elite an uncontested authority to orient Turkish foreign policy in line with their role conceptions. Strong societal support, the positive reception that the new foreign policy vision has received in the region and more widely internationally have facilitated the consolidation of the AKP elite's national role conceptions.

What follows is an extensive content analysis of transcripts of the interviews and speeches of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, and his former foreign policy advisor and current Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu is known as the intellectual architect of the AKP's foreign policy, and has been influential in a number of major foreign policy developments. There is a consensus that it was Davutoğlu who changed the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy, bringing to it a dynamic and multi-dimensional orientation. He set the vision and the style of the new foreign policy line and provided a framework for pursuing it. Davutoğlu's influence is mainly due to former Foreign Minister and current President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan's willingness to appropriate his vision in the implementation of foreign policy.

In order to find indicators of these two actors' national role conceptions, we have closely analysed their speeches, interviews, books and articles. We have focused on all statements indicating a policy vision, motivational orientation or perception of state status and classified them according to the role categories established by Chafetz *et al.* By associating each statement with a particular role category, we have been able to determine the presence or absence of a particular role conception. The results of this analysis indicate that the most frequent role statements of the two AKP actors belong to the categories of 'regional leader', 'regional protector', 'regional sub-system collaborator', 'global sub-system collaborator', 'example' and 'bridge'. We also found that, over time, self-identification as a 'regional leader', 'regional protector' and 'global system collaborator' has increased while 'bridge' role has become less pronounced. This may have to do with the AKP's increasing confidence in foreign policy and its resultant adoption of more active and influential roles. We can also assert with confidence that AKP's foreign policy elite have articulated and maintained quite consistent role conceptions since coming to power in 2002. We can now look closer at the role conceptions that AKP foreign policy-makers appear to hold.

Regional leader

The majority of the AKP leaders' statements are couched in language that indicates a strong self-identification as a regional leader. This role refers to 'duties and special responsibilities that a government perceives for itself in its relations to states within a particular region'.²⁹ The strategic vision that has animated much Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government has a very strong regional emphasis. The two main components of this strategic vision, known as the Strategic Depth doctrine, include geographical depth and historical depth. The architect of the Strategic Depth doctrine, Ahmet Davutoğlu, describes Turkey's unique historical legacy as follows:

Countries like Turkey, China and Japan have deep historical roots in their regions ... During the transit from the 19th to the 20th century; there were eight multi-national empires across Eurasia: Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, China, Japan and Turkey. Now these countries are experiencing very similar problems with their prospective regions. As these countries possess historical depth they form spheres of influence; if they fail to do this they then experience various problems.³⁰

According to Davutoğlu, Turkey as a result of its historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, possesses a unique geopolitical position that cannot be associated with a single region:

Turkey is not just any old Mediterranean country. One important characteristic that distinguishes Turkey from say Romania and Greece is that Turkey is at the same time a Middle East and Caucasus country ... Indeed, Turkey is as much a Black Sea country as it is a Mediterranean one. This geographical depth places Turkey right at the epicenter of many geopolitical areas of influence.³¹

The Strategic Depth doctrine calls for a new understanding of Turkey's historical and cultural roots in its immediate neighbourhood, and an end to a forced alienation from its own past. Turkey's estrangement from its historical ties in the region is perceived to have led to years of squandered political and economic opportunities. This new regional 'repositioning' provides Turkey with an expanded set of tools for engagement with its neighbours. Thus, although the distance between Turkey and other countries remains the same, a new recognition of Turkey's historical and cultural depth in the neighbouring regions is changing perceptions of these geographies under the premises of a new geographic imagination. The physical distance and prior difficulties of getting involved in these geographies no longer make sense in policy circles and among the public. What has emerged is a process of discovery of the 'closeness' of these geographies and their 'availability' for Turkey's involvement through the instruments of remembering past relations, unfolding cultural and civilizational affinities, and exploring opportunities for engagement.

²⁹ Holsti, op. cit., p. 261.

³⁰ 'The strategic depth that Turkey needs, an interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu', *Turkish Daily News*, 15 September 2001.

³¹ Ibid.

Regional protector

This national role conception implies more than an active regional involvement, by indicating a special leadership position with the 'function of providing protection for adjacent regions'. Turkey's foreign policy rhetoric seems to increasingly embrace 'an order instituting role', rather than an emphasis on merely widening regional influence. This is where AKP's perspective on regional matters is distinct from Özal's regional activism, which was primarily driven by a powerful economic initiative. AKP's regional initiatives are often motivated by a normative moral framework. That is, Turkey is developing a strongly pronounced sense of responsibility to provide stability for the people and countries of the region with which it shares a common historical heritage, as the following examples demonstrate:

Davutoğlu: Turkey should make its role of a peripheral country part of its past, and appropriate a new position: one of providing security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring regions.³²

Davutoğlu: Turkey now enjoys an image as a responsible state which provides order and security in the region.³³

Davutoğlu: Beyond representing the 70 million people of Turkey, we have a historic debt to those lands where there are Turks or which was related to our land in the past. We have to repay this debt in the best way.³⁴

Erdoğan: I believe that Turkey has a lot to do in the Middle East. We are aware of this responsibility. We are here for this.³⁵

Regional sub-system collaborator

This national role conception implies more than an occasional intervention in areas of conflict, including a sustained effort and 'far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities'.³⁶ Increasing dialogue with all political actors, various mediation initiatives, undertaking facilitator and promoter roles among the states in surrounding regions can all be considered as part of a larger aspiration to formulate all-embracing policies in regional matters, with a goal of constructing a new regional order. AKP's leadership envisions an important role for Turkey in constructing a stable and cooperative regional security environment in the Middle East.

Erdoğan: Before we came to power, we promised that we would develop relations with our neighbors and included this in our action plan. We did not make any discrimination among our neighbors. Regional peace will be set up this way.³⁷

³² Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's foreign policy vision: an assessment of 2007', *Insight Turkey*, 10(1), 2008, p. 79.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁴ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/devlet-bakani-ve-basbakan-yardimcisi-sayin-ali-babacan-ile-disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-devir-teslim-vesilesiyle.tr.mfa>, 2 May 2009.

³⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 2 May 2005.

³⁶ Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

³⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 29 July 2004.

Davutoğlu: Today, it is important for Turkey to establish its position in the Middle East. This position must rest on four main principles. First of all, security for everyone, not only for this group or that group, this country or that country, but common security for the entire region.³⁸

Erdoğan: We are ready to do everything in our power to ensure peace and stability in the region.³⁹

Global sub-system collaborator

The global sub-system collaborator role conception often includes references to supporting the global order. Emphasis on compliance with international rules and norms and active participation in global and regional arrangements is a fair indicator of the existence of this role conception. Active participation in peace initiatives outside the region, as well as a commitment to establish strong economic and political links with peripheral areas where Turkish interests have remained low in the past, also provide support for a global role conception. In current Turkish foreign policy discourse, the evidence of a strong perception of power and influence in the global setting is clearly evident:

Erdoğan: From now on, neither the world can carry on without Turkey nor Turkey can carry on without the world. Our country is in the process of becoming a global player and this is an irreversible process.⁴⁰

Davutoğlu: Turkey's aim is to intervene consistently in global issues using international platforms, which signifies a transformation for Turkey from a central country to a global power.⁴¹

It is worth noting that Turkish foreign policy in neighbouring regions does not assume a hegemonic role for Turkey, but rather aims at an inclusive approach for building peace and security based on the dynamics within these regions. Following this line of thought, Turkish foreign policy-makers have gained the self-confidence and political will to pursue peace attempts in the neighbouring regions. Turkey now hosts Middle Eastern, Eurasian and African leaders, as well as high-level politicians and officials from Western countries, and facilitates platforms for the solution of conflicts in various geographies. Turkish policy-makers have been trying to overcome differences between countries in conflict through confidence-building measures and by acting as a mediator and facilitator to find solutions to chronic regional problems. This new approach of AKP policy-makers has enabled Turkey to emerge in the role of peacemaker at the periphery of the international system. As the driving force behind these developments, Davutoğlu's vision aims to prepare the ground for a new peace consciousness in a wide geography extending from the Middle East to the steppes of Eurasia.

³⁸ Davutoğlu, op. cit., p. 84.

³⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 4 January 2009.

⁴⁰ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 5 February 2005.

⁴¹ Davutoğlu, op. cit., p. 87.

Example

This national role conception emphasizes ‘the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies’.⁴² There are repeated references in AKP policy-makers’ statements promoting Turkey’s state–society model as an example. The projection of Turkey as a Muslim nation with a secular state and democratic regime also finds a receptive audience in domestic and international settings. Turkey’s strong commitment to political reform, particularly in the expansion of individual freedoms finding a ‘balance between freedom and security’, even in the fight against terror,⁴³ is indicative of a pronounced desire to serve as a model to other countries in the region. The changed tone of Turkish foreign policy discourse, and the willingness to adopt a multilateralist stance that prioritizes dialogue and cooperation, also contributes to the perception of Turkey as a new centre of attraction. Thus, Erdoğan claims that:

Turkey has achieved what people said could never be achieved—a balance between Islam, democracy, secularism and modernity. [Our government] demonstrates that a religious person can protect the idea of secularism. In the West, the AKP is always portrayed as being ‘rooted in religion’. This is not true. The AKP is not a party just for religiously observant people—we are the party of the average Turk. We are absolutely against ethnic nationalism, regional nationalism and religious chauvinism. Turkey, with its democracy, is a source of inspiration to the rest of the Islamic world.⁴⁴

With its stability, success in development, status within the West, rich historical heritage and identity, Turkey will be a symbol of harmony of civilizations for the 21st century.⁴⁵

Bridge

This role conception is depicted in the literature as relatively passive. The role implies ‘acting as a translator or conveyor of messages and information between peoples and different cultures’.⁴⁶ However, in the context of the post-9/11 world, where enhanced dialogue and cultural understanding between different civilizations has taken on an added significance, the concept of a bridge country has developed a more elevated status. For example, Davutoğlu argues against envisaging Turkey simply as ‘a bridge country which only connects two points’, but rather as a ‘central country’ located at the crossroads of the different geographies, cultures and civilizations that have shaped the constituent elements of Turkish identity.

The effects of having diverse Caucasian, Balkan, Middle Eastern, Iraqi Turcoman and Anatolian elements, even in small groups, are seen in everyday life in today’s Turkey, where diverse cultural elements meet under the umbrella of the Turkish state.⁴⁷

⁴² Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

⁴³ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 15 October 2008.

⁴⁴ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Newsweek*, 12 May 2008.

⁴⁵ *Turkish Daily News*, 9 July 2005.

⁴⁶ Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

⁴⁷ Davutoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

Because of its unique history and geopolitical position, the AKP foreign policy elite perceives Turkey as particularly suited for facilitating intercultural dialogue and Turkish foreign policy seems to have capitalized on that position. For example, the AKP government served, alongside Spain, as an active patron of the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, and has become increasingly comfortable with confronting and promoting its Eastern heritage.

Erdoğan: Turkey has a special role in strengthening dialogue between religions due to its location at the intersection of Asia and Europe.⁴⁸

The fairly limited number of possible roles a state can play in the international system has already been identified by previous researchers, so our goal has been to show how many of these roles match the policy statements of AKP actors that we examined. We have found that the AKP foreign policy elite hold multiple role conceptions, and this is consistent with the theory's prediction that multiple roles are associated with foreign policy activism. It is evident that the current policy elite's perception of Turkey's position and function in the international system is comprehensive, consistent and cannot be reduced to one category. The AKP foreign policy elite conceive of Turkey in terms of multiple sets of relationships and multiple roles and functions. For example, according to Erdoğan, 'If [Turkey is] more influential in the Middle East, it is an asset for [Turkey's] process in Europe, it is an asset in NATO.'⁴⁹ How this perception translates into actual policy choices in the Middle East, and whether or not actions conform to the prescriptions of the role conceptions we have identified, will be the topic of the next section.

AKP's foreign policy activism in the Middle East

The AKP government has launched a number of foreign policy initiatives in the Middle East that have signalled a clear break from the established policy line. Among these initiatives, Turkey's invitation to, and ongoing engagement policy with Hamas has drawn more attention than any other, and has been the centre of criticism. Hamas's victories in the local elections of 2005 and in the Parliamentary Legislative Elections in 2006 opened a new era concerning the Palestinian question. Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel is presented as the main concern of the international community, and the USA and the EU have started to discuss possible measures to force Hamas to recognize Israel. However, Turkey's ruling elite under Davutoğlu's guidance, responded to Hamas's victories in a different way, favouring diplomatic engagement with the group to pre-empt possible problems. The current Turkish position, as expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is that all related parties should respect the result of democratically conducted elections, and that it would be contrary to democratic principles if outside actors attempted to weaken the newly elected order by imposing economic measures against the Palestinian administration.⁵⁰ According to Turkish policy-makers, Hamas has been seeking allies in the Middle East to put

⁴⁸ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Turkish Daily News*, 17 May 2005.

⁴⁹ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Newsweek*, 12 May 2008.

⁵⁰ Fikret Bila, 'HAMAS'ın Ankara Ziyaretinin Hassas Yönleri', *Milliyet*, 17 February 2006.

an end to the economic and political blockade it has been facing from the international system. In such an environment, without Turkey's intervention, the only possible solution for Hamas would be the Iran–Syria–Hezbollah axis.⁵¹

Turkey's position is therefore to include Hamas in the political process. Davutoğlu's aim has been to persuade Hamas to return to a truce in exchange for Israel's lifting of its Gaza blockade. Turkish policy-makers have asked Hamas to declare a ceasefire and work towards political accommodation of different groups within Palestinian politics.⁵² Davutoğlu has met twice in Syria with Khaled Mashal, Hamas's leader-in-exile, with his second visit coming about as a result of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's request for help from Erdoğan. In this sense, Turkey has started a mediation process between Hamas and other international actors, while maintaining regular contacts with Fatah, the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian President, Abbas. Ankara's contribution at this point has been to motivate Hamas to take pragmatic steps and ensure a rapprochement among the Palestinian factions.

Professor Richard Falk, the UN's special reporter on the occupied Palestinian territories, underlined the importance of Turkey's Hamas engagement with a specific reference to Hamas's invitation in 2006 as follows:

It is tragic that this effort failed, and was at the time criticized. In retrospect, both the wellbeing of the Gazan civilian population and the security of Israel would have been greatly benefited by taking advantage of the Turkish initiative, and moving to implement the readiness of Hamas to establish a long-term truce.⁵³

Davutoğlu participated in Sarkozy's meeting with Syrian President Bashar Assad, Javier Solana and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security, in Damascus in January 2009. During Sarkozy and Assad's joint press conference, Sarkozy expressed his appreciation of Davutoğlu's active contribution to the solution of the problem.⁵⁴ A number of Western and Middle Eastern media joined Sarkozy in this exclusive acknowledgement of Davutoğlu's role with a further notice of his role in the truce between Hamas and Israel.

As another example, under the strong influence of Turkey's new regional profile, Turkish policy-makers have presented Turkey as the only country that can pursue constructive relations with all Iraqi actors and Iraqi neighbours. Erdoğan has pointed out that his government is pursuing continuous and equal relations with all ethnic groups to motivate them to promote Iraq's unity and welfare.⁵⁵ In order to contribute to political stability in Iraq, Turkey has followed four complementary paths of diplomatic relations, exemplifying Davutoğlu's multi-dimensional foreign policy approach and rhythmic diplomacy, through the UN Security Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Iraq's neighbours, and ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. Among these initiatives, the Platform for Iraqi Neighbours has arguably been the most important.

⁵¹ Yasemin Congar, 'Meşal, Esad, Bush, Erdogan', *Milliyet*, 3 July 2006.

⁵² İsmail Küçükkaya, 'Davutoğlu Erdoğan'ın Neden Öfkelenildiğini Anlattı', *Akşam*, 21 January 2009.

⁵³ Richard Falk, 'Understanding the Gaza catastrophe', *Today's Zaman*, 4 January 2009.

⁵⁴ 'Gazze'de BM Okuluna Saldırı', *CNN Türk*, available at <<http://www.cnntrk.com/2009/dunya/01/06/gazzedebm.okuluna.saldiri/507680.0/index.html>> .

⁵⁵ *Prime Minister's Speech*, 9 January 2007, available at <www.basbakanlik.gov.tr> .

The platform met for the first time in Istanbul on 23 January 2003 to find a peaceful solution and continued its activities after the beginning of the second Iraq war.

As part of this platform, the foreign ministers of related countries have met formally 11 times and informally 3 times in different locations such as Istanbul, Baghdad and Tehran. Through the platform, Iraq's neighbours all agreed on the territorial integrity and political unity of Iraq. Some of the meetings were attended by EU and UN representatives, as well as the Secretaries General of the Arab League and the OIC. The UN Security Council has taken these meetings seriously and has requested further regional cooperation on the Iraqi question. Inspired by this initiative, the UN Secretary General established a consultation group involving the platform members.

Turkey has also played an active role in making the Arab League and the OIC more sensitive to the ongoing issue of Iraq engaging in backstage diplomacy to bring together the Americans and the Sunnis on several occasions. During one such meeting before the elections in Iraq, the Sunnis agreed to end Sunni terror, while the Americans agreed to provide the conditions for a fair election.⁵⁶ In addition, Ankara brought major Iraqi Sunni opposition figures and US envoys together to ensure Sunni participation in Iraq's national elections on 30 June 2005. Tariq-al Hashimi, a prominent Sunni leader and Vice-President of Iraq, met former US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Istanbul in another initiative aimed at involving all groups in Iraq's political process.⁵⁷ As part of its contribution to the democratic process in Iraq, Turkey also organized training programmes for 350 Iraqi politicians from various political parties.⁵⁸ As these efforts demonstrate, Turkey's ruling elite now enjoy a newly developed self-confidence that Turkey can play a constructive role in the Middle East, including Iraq. Turkey's Iraqi policy has been an asset in Turkish-American relations and a significant stimulus to President Barrack Obama's projected model partnership on a number of issues, ranging from the future of Iraq to Afghanistan's stability.

Turkey's relations with Syria represent another foreign policy area where the national role conceptions of the AKP foreign policy elite have been translated into new policy goals and instruments. Current Turkish policy-makers are in favour of the idea that a constructive Syrian policy line in the Middle East will help remove Turkish suspicions of Syria, in addition to easing tension in the region. In the new regional rhetoric of Turkish policy-makers, Syria is now a potential ally and friend. From their perspective, as former Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül expressed, Turkey and Syria have legitimate concerns about the future of Iraq and should cooperate in every possible way, as they already have started doing, to enhance peace and stability.⁵⁹ During Erdoğan's visit to Syria in December 2006, Assad expressed the Syrian leadership's positive perception of the new Turkish attitude, stressing the fact that "Turkey and Syria have common views on regional issues and [that] his country appreciates Turkey's efforts to restore peace in the Middle East."⁶⁰ Syria and Turkey then

⁵⁶ T. Akyol, 'Neden Türkiye basardı', *Milliyet*, 6 December 2005.

⁵⁷ S. Idiz, 'Türkiye'nin "Kolaylastırıcı" Rolü Ağırlik Kazanıyor', *Milliyet*, 5 December 2005.

⁵⁸ *Prime Minister's Speech*, 28 February 2006, available at <www.basbakanlik.gov.tr>.

⁵⁹ *Milliyet* (Turkish Daily), 2 February 2007.

⁶⁰ *Radikal* (Turkish Daily), 6 December 2006.

signed a free trade agreement with the understanding that the agreement should be expanded to a regional level to promote cooperation and interdependence for enduring peace and stability, which would provide an exemplary pattern for other neighbouring countries to follow. The shift in Turkey's stance toward Syria is remarkable. While Turkey was previously criticized for cooperation with Israel, and accused of forming a coalition against Syria in the 1990s,⁶¹ a new, cooperative vision now exists. As Syrian leader Bashar Assad remarked, 'Turkey became one of the friendliest countries toward Syria in the region, one which pursues not only good relations at a bilateral level but also cooperates with Syria on a number of regional issues.'⁶²

Turkish policy-makers now try to utilize their developing relations with Syria to influence Syrian policy with the aim of promoting peace and stability. The increasing levels of trust on both sides have made Turkey a potential mediator in the decades-long Syrian–Israeli conflict. Turkey has been pursuing a multi-dimensional policy line, in part, to foster just such a role in the region, and has already enjoyed some degree of success. For example, in light of Israeli and Palestinian assertions that Syria's intervention would help bring about a solution to the Lebanon crisis in August 2006, which escalated after Palestinian militants captured the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Erdoğan sent Ahmet Davutoğlu to Damascus. Davutoğlu conveyed Turkey's position to the Syrian president, including concerns about the escalation of violence and the spread of the crisis to the whole region.⁶³ Turkey's involvement in this crisis stood in stark contrast to its former stance of deliberate non-involvement in Syria's regional affairs and Middle Eastern conflicts in general, which again demonstrates the confidence of Turkish policy-makers that Turkish–Syrian relations were in such good standing that Syria would respond positively to Turkish demands in regional matters.

Turkish policy-makers are confident that they can play a constructive role in the resolution of the Israeli–Syrian dispute. They are aware of the complicated nature of the problem and the difficulties of bringing the sides together. However, they believe that Turkey's new activism in the Middle East prioritizes regional stability and security, and Turkish policy-makers aim to play a role in initiating Israeli–Syrian negotiations. Prime Minister Erdoğan, after a visit to Damascus in April 2008, confirmed Turkey's mediating role in the initiation of negotiations between Syria and Israel for a peaceful resolution of the dispute about the strategic Golan Heights. He further stated that he would attempt to restart direct talks between Syria and Israel.⁶⁴ Former Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, evaluated the situation from a more realistic standpoint and stressed that the resolution of this chronic dispute would require 'strong political determination' from both sides adding that the two sides were still 'at the very beginning of the process'.⁶⁵ In an initial success for this mediation effort, Israeli and Syrian authorities declared on 21 May 2008, that they had started indirect

⁶¹ Interview with Professor Abboud Sarraj of Damascus University, Istanbul, 25 May 2006.

⁶² 'Esad ile özel roportaj', *CNN Turk* (Turkish TV), 6 April 2005.

⁶³ 'An interview with the prime minister', *CNBC-E* (Turkish TV), 7 November 2006.

⁶⁴ *Radikal*, 30 April 2008.

⁶⁵ *Today's Zaman* (Turkish Daily), 30 April 2008.

talks under the supervision of Turkish diplomats in Ankara. The two sides had their fifth round of talks in November 2008 in Turkey.

Turkish–Syrian relations have created a way for the Syrian administration to get out of its vicious cycle of isolation in the post-September 11 era. Davutoğlu has visited Syria more than 20 times as chief advisor to the Prime Minister, and he played a key role in confidence building and the development of relations with Syria. Turkey has thus become a gateway to Europe, and a country that knows how to accommodate the differences within international society. The deliberate establishment and strengthening of ties between Turkey and Syria holds promise for both. In 2007, the total volume of Turkish trade with Syria increased to US\$1.2 billion, up from US\$797 million in 2006. The implementation of a free trade zone in 2007 between Syria and Turkey should further increase this. In general, both sides are clearly willing to overcome obstacles in the interest of improving trade and business relations, as can be seen in the signing of an agreement to strengthen bilateral economic relations during President Bashar Assad’s visit in October 2007, and talks about coordinating joint investments in a subsequent visit by Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Dardari. During the latter’s visit, every aspect of bilateral economic relations was discussed with a view to overcoming any pending obstacles.⁶⁶ Turkey’s south and south-eastern regions have a new orientation toward the Syrian economy and there are promising prospects for tourism in the near future. Turkey’s civil–economic and soft power is visible in Syria, and both sides see the benefit of improving political and economic relations.

Conclusion

We have argued that individuals who make foreign policy in the name of states do so on the basis both of their perceptions of the roles of their states in the world, and of which roles will have the backing of domestic constituents and international actors. Policy-makers develop these conceptions as guiding principles which are then translated into policy decisions. Several factors, varying from the political structure of the state to enabling international stimuli, can impinge on the articulation and launching of the role conceptions. The fact that states hold multiple identities and different role conceptions at any given time suggests that the dominance of a particular conception has to do with the domestic political balance of power and leadership skills. We have found that an agent-centred foreign policy approach, such as the concept of national role conceptions, has provided the most compelling explanation for the changed rhetoric and policy instruments of Turkish foreign policy since 2002. By clarifying the national role conceptions of the ruling elite, we have been able to uncover the ideational bases of recent Turkish policy activism in the Middle East. We have found that AKP foreign policy-makers, led by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, have envisioned Turkey as holding multiple roles in world politics, whereas these were previously thought of as incompatible. In conformity with these multiple identities, Turkey’s foreign policy interests have been extended to a much larger realm, escaping the constraints of a single focus. Turkey’s continuing commitments to involvement with the West, while deepening

⁶⁶ ‘Suriye’den Turk yatirimcilara ozel davet cikti’, *Referans* (Turkish Daily), 4 February 2008.

connections with the Middle East, constitute the hallmarks of the new foreign policy vision.

The reverberations of the novel national role conceptions, as articulated by the AKP foreign policy elite, have been clearly observed in numerous policy domains. Turkey's neighbouring capital cities have seen more Turkish foreign policy elites and politicians in the past several years than they had in previous decades. Turkey now hosts major summits of international organizations ranging from the Water Forum and the Least Developed Countries to the Caribbean Community. Turkey also hosts direct and indirect talks between the sides of disputes from the Middle East to the Eurasian steppes. Recent examples include the indirect talks between Israel and Syria and the direct negotiations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey has also acquired a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and an observer status in the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Organization of the American States (OAS). Turkey's development assistance exceeded US\$700 million in 2008 and it is emerging as a donor country in the United Nations. All of these developments are consistent with what the role conceptions articulated by the AKP foreign policy elite stipulate.

In conclusion, Turkish policy-makers' recent role conceptions of Turkey as a regional leader, protector, global player, example and bridge state have found clear and consistent expressions in Turkey's foreign policy initiatives towards the Middle East. However, it should also be noted that it is one thing to articulate role conceptions that find resonance in the domestic constituency, it is another thing to guarantee the success of the resultant policy decisions which is contingent on several external variables. The fact that Turkey's policy initiatives have received a warm welcome in the Middle East is promising. Turkish policy-makers have successfully countered the suspicion and mistrust that has served as a main impediment for closer relations in the past. The constructive and non-patronizing approach of the new Turkish foreign policy, with its sensitivity to delicate regional dynamics, has yielded positive results. The changed rhetoric of the Obama administration towards the Middle East and its proclaimed policy of engagement with all actors, including Hamas, Syria and Iran, will further remove the constraints on Turkey's activism in the region. Turkish policy initiatives are also in conformity with the EU's own policy stance towards the Middle East, and have so far received wide support from member states. It seems that various domestic and internal factors have combined to create a suitable environment for the successful execution of the AKP's policy vision in the Middle East. As long as the AKP government maintains its strong hold on the domestic balance of power, the main contours of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East will continue to be shaped by the national role conceptions of its ruling foreign policy elite.

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