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Resolution Efforts in the Middle East

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Transformative Conflict Resolution in an Unstable Neighbourhood: Turkey's Conflict Resolution Efforts in the Middle East

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Abstract

Turkey had pursued a foreign policy in the Middle East that focused on transformative conflict resolution until the beginning of the "Arab Spring". This transformative conflict resolution approach had aimed at bringing holistic and systemic change to the entire region. Turkish foreign policy had aimed at transforming the conflict-producing structures, tried to engage positively with the actors and elites and attempted to change the security-dominated agenda into a multi-dimensional agenda. Despite the dominant discourse of the transformative conflict resolution, in practice the most effective conflict resolution methods and tools that Turkey utilised during this period fell under the management approaches. Turkey's normative concerns and priorities did not overlap with the priorities of other influential actors in the region. Furthermore the gap between transformative discourse and management practice has widened since Turkey became involved more directly with ongoing crises in the region.

Key Words

Conflict Resolution, Conflict Transformation, Turkish foreign policy, Middle East conflicts.

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Introduction

In the ruling Justice and Development Party's (JDP) tenure (2002-present), Turkish foreign policy decision makers have forged a new vision and a new foreign policy identity for Turkey in the Middle East. Their grand vision is one of becoming a "centre country", and Turkey's new role is that of an "order-instituting country". In order to actualise this role, Turkey has changed its foreign-policy discourse and mobilised practical foreign-policy tools and instruments that had previously been partially neglected. Turkey has acted like a regional peace-broker, and it has been actively involved as a third party in many conflicts in the region. It has also tried to de-securitise its foreign policy agenda by improving cultural and economic integration with its neighbouring countries, and it has paid special attention to structural peace-building efforts.

Turkey's third-party efforts in the neighbouring region have been inspired by a holistic notion of regional order

in which Turkey plays a central role.[1] The Turkish approach to settlement mediation, conciliation and negotiation has tried to challenge the pre-existing political and socio-economic *status quo* in the Middle East. These efforts have aimed to transform the political, economic and cultural structures and relations, which still have residues of the Cold War, and the authoritarian political regimes in the region. Turkish efforts at regional stabilisation and conflict resolution (CR)[2] can be defined as "transformative" because they have aimed to gradually change conflict-producing structures, issues, relations and communication norms in a systematic way rather than solely focusing on trying to address immediate problems. On the other hand, Turkey has been trying to institutionalise an order based on good neighbourly relations and increased trade and cultural exchange at the grassroots level.

> The Turkish approach to settlement mediation, conciliation and negotiation has tried to challenge the pre-existing political and socio-economic status quo in the Middle East.

Those policies were pursued systematically until the civil wars in Libya and Syria, where Turkey clearly sided against the regimes that tried to maintain the authoritarian *status quo*. Although Turkey's success in the Middle East diplomacy was due to this new paradigm, transformative CR approaches have faced certain limitations in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring,[3] and Turkish foreign policy has gradually incorporated coercive foreign policy tools. Contextually, the centrifugal tendencies were accelerated after the civil war in Syria and Turkey is now trapped on one side of this polarisation. Turkey's transformative potential has been constrained due to this contextual uncertainty. In this new milieu Turkey has taken a side role rather than playing the role of third party. This study examines Turkey's conflict resolution efforts towards Middle East until the Arab Spring.

Transformative Conflict Resolution in the Middle East

In the academic literature, "conflict management", "conflict prevention", "conflict resolution", "conflict transformation" (CT) and "conflict reduction" are often used interchangeably. There are conceptual differences between these terms, and those differences have practical implications. CT refers to "the longer term structural, relational and

cultural changes that are brought by conflict resolution".[4] Proponents of CT[5] often exaggerate the differences between CR and CT in favour of the second term. However, as Mitchell emphasises, the concept of "transformation" emerged because of the misuse or corruption of the original term "resolution".[6] Since CR is widely used to define the field in general and is the most well-known term, this concept is preferred in this study. Turkish conflict-resolution efforts fit better with the "transformative approach" rather than the "resolution" or "management" approaches, since the former aims to bring a systemic change in the region. Rather than CT, "transformative CR" is preferred as the term that best denotes Turkey's CR efforts within the designated era.

Conflict management (CM) is the constructive handling of difference and divergence, and it focuses on practical and achievable ways to bring opposing parties together into a cooperative process. CM does not struggle to address the underlying sources of conflict in a holistic way or to change the *status quo* in a systemic way.[7] It is based on the assumption that conflicts are rarely completely resolved or eliminated, but that they can be managed by negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration, and sometimes through deeper institutional reform of the security sector and good governance.[8]

Once the conflict among the parties is managed, new relationship forms can emerge. CM often does not aim to bring systemic and sustainable changes to the conflict-producing environments.

Turkish foreign-policy decision makers strategically pursue transformative CR, which has a more ambitious agenda of change than do the settlement, management and resolution approaches.

CR tries to "address underlying causes of conflict by finding common interests and overarching goals"[9] and it involves attitudinal and structural changes to address the root causes of conflicts. Ramsbotham *et al.* consider CT, in contrast, as the deepest level of change and the extension of conflict resolution to a broader level.[10] CT emphasises addressing the structural roots of conflict by changing existing patterns of behaviour and creating a culture of nonviolence. While the peaceful settlement and termination of conflicts are emphasised in CR, CT problematises violence rather than conflict. A deeper level of change to transform conflict-producing emotions and culture is emphasised in CT.[11] CR promotes the termination of conflict by addressing the conflict's root sources. CT also aims

to incorporate processes to address the residues of conflict, including trauma, fears, hurts and hatreds.[12]

According to John Paul Lederach, one of the leading theorists in this area, CT respects and includes cultural and human resources within a particular setting rather than imposing an outsider answer.[13] CT accentuates empowering disenfranchised parties and allowing emotional and cultural expressions as important elements of transformative practice.[14] CR, in contrast, focuses on the termination of the underlying sources of conflict and addressing the needs, interests and value-oriented concerns of the actors involved. CT stresses changes at the personal, structural and relational levels[15] Turkish foreign-policy decision makers strategically pursue transformative CR, which has a more ambitious agenda of change than do the settlement, management and resolution approaches.

From Discourse to Practice: Transformative Conflict Resolution in Turkish Foreign Policy

A new role and foreign policy identity

Turkey's foreign-policy vision in the region as an "order-instituting actor"[16]

became visible starting in the second term of the JDP administration.[17] The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Balkans are the main areas where this new policy has been actualised. Turkey has played active third-party roles in the Iranian nuclear crisis, between Syria and Israel, between Syria and Iraq, and between the fighting factions and groups in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. Turkey has actively used conflict-resolution and conflict-management instruments to implement its role as an "order-instituting actor". Turkish NGOs and civilian actors have become important stakeholders in this transformation. These official diplomatic efforts are only a limited aspect of a comprehensive policy of conflict transformation. Interventions at the grassroots levels and unofficial levels have been crucial elements of successful transformation.[18]

The role of an "order-instituting actor" is a complicated and multifaceted one, one that encapsulates leadership roles in the fields of regional politics, culture, economics, structural peace building and security. This role has necessitated a substantial transformation in Turkey's foreign policy vision and practice as well. New foreign-policy instruments in addition to the methods of traditional diplomacy, balance of powers and coercive diplomacy are crucial in order to maintain a transformative foreign policy.

Turkish foreign policy still tries to build the institutional infrastructure and capacity to implement these instruments on a regular basis, yet Turkey has recently emphasised them as priority agenda items in its foreign policy. For example, the protection of human rights, support for peace, security, democratisation, development, humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies and development, as well as an emphasis on intercultural dialogue, are highlighted as Turkey's vision for its UN Security Council candidacy for 2015-2016.[19] This vision also marks the changes in Turkey's foreign-policy approach.

Peacemakers' transformation practices fall into four analytical categories: actor transformation, issue transformation, rule/norm transformation and structural transformation.[20] Turkish conflict resolution efforts tried to incorporate all these pillars. At the practical level Turkish conflict resolution efforts can be categorised under four transformative agendas: "tackling the structural challenges at both regional and global levels"; "forging a multi-dimensional issue agenda"; "crisis free communication and institutionalised cooperation efforts"; and "efforts to invent new rules and norms of constructive communication". Many policy practices fall under these four main strategies; however, it is difficult to evaluate the dispersal and overall effectiveness of these practices.

Tackling the structural challenges

Turkish decision makers' interpretation of the problems and conflict-producing structures and processes in the MENA region is a holistic one. Local or state-level conflicts and problems are often considered part of a malfunctioning system. Structural intervention techniques are related to these diagnoses. At the regional level one of the most significant regional challenge is the persistent polarisation and fragmentation due to ideological, religious, ethnic or sectarian differences and the artificial political territories that do not reflect the cultural, demographic and economic integrity of the region. According to the mentor of this new foreign policy, Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoğlu, a just, peaceful and sustainable order in the region can only be reached in a holistic way and with the genuine involvement of all local actors.

Davutoğlu argues that borders and political divisions in the region are artificial and lead to conflict, and claims that those borders can only be managed in a holistic way with the consent of grassroots-level local actors.[21] Political divisions in the region were shaped according to the interests of colonial powers during the colonial era and the security concerns of rival ideological blocs during the Cold War:

> The incompatibility between the physical geography and the political geography that was shaped by the post-colonial state structures is one of the most significant contradictions in Middle East geopolitics. This incompatibility is at the same time one the most fundamental reasons for intra-region crises.[22]

Ideological rivalries and enduring violent conflicts in the region have created political and, more importantly, invisible psychological barriers between the peoples of the region, and those barriers have been institutionalised by authoritarian regimes and elites that are alienated from their own people. Transforming the conflict-producing political and economic structures and improving human potential and resilience is the main objective of efforts of structural transformation. Turkey's official and unofficial contributions to regional conflict resolution and development efforts are consistent with this viewpoint. Turkey would also be one of the primary beneficiaries of regional peace and integration therefore Turkey's efforts also aim to serve its own political and economic interests as well.

Turkey's holistic interpretation of regional and global problems has resonated both at the policy level and at the rhetorical level. Making official contributions to regional peace-building efforts and encouraging Turkish NGOs to become more involved in those efforts

have emerged as one of the pillars of Turkey's foreign-policy agenda. Issues such as foreign-development aid;[23] peace support missions in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia and Kosovo; and energy/pipeline diplomacy have become priority areas for Turkey. In the process, Turkey has attempted to shift from a military-based foreign policy approach to one that is proactive, multi-directional and has multiple tracks.[24]

> Turkey would also be one of the primary beneficiaries of regional peace and integration therefore Turkey's efforts also aim to serve its own political and economic interests as well.

Turkey redefined its criteria for contributions to peacekeeping and peace-support missions on 15 March 2005. According to this document, Turkey required a UN Security Council decision on the legitimacy of such operations; Turkey's priority areas are designated as the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East; and the international organisations that should collaborate in these areas are NATO, the EU, the UN and the OSCE.[25] In addition to these criteria and priorities, Turkey also included a cost-benefit analysis and a clear mandate as part of the general principles for contributing to the peacekeeping and

peace-support operations. Turkish President Abdullah Gül also chaired the UN Security Council summit on "Peacekeeping- Peace Building". Broader collaboration with regional organisations and increasing civilian capacity have been emphasised by Turkey's decision makers.[26]

Security is reinterpreted in a more comprehensive way, and holistic human security has become a focal point in Turkey's development aid. Although issues related to "hard security" are still Turkey's strategic priorities, military security is no longer Turkey's top concern in its regional foreign-policy practice. Turkey has started to perceive security and foreign policy in a regional and multidimensional way and has incorporated economic stability, cultural cooperation, and identity issues, as well as human needs, into its foreign-policy agenda.

Figure 1: Turkey's foreign official development aid (in million US $)
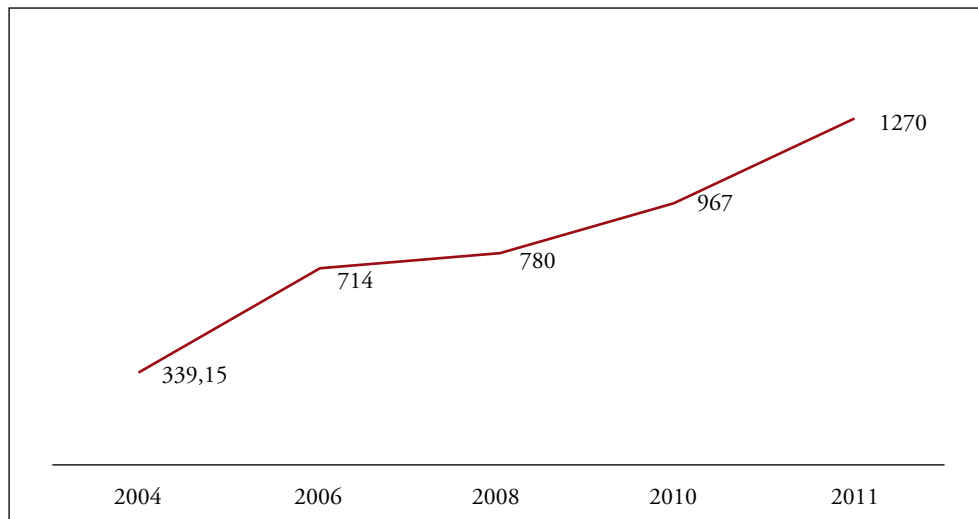
Source: Data compiled by the author from Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), at http://www.tika.gov.tr/en/ [last visited 12 November 2013].

Turkey's official development agency, the Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency (TIKA),[27] and NGOs such as the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) have been investing in the field of structural intervention and peace building.[28] With its official and non-

governmental investments, Turkey is becoming one of the emerging donors in development and peace building.[29] Turkey has taken over the Secretariat of the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) office and held the UN's Fourth LDC Summit in Istanbul.[30] Turkey's involvement in the LDC secretariat represents a commitment to the problems of LDC countries for at least the next decade. Turkey has also undertaken important responsibilities to rebuild Somalia, which has been suffering from hunger and a humanitarian crisis because of ongoing political instabilities.

> Istanbul and Ankara are becoming locations where various official and unofficial actors from the region can come together and express themselves to a broader audience.

In addition to its constructive role and active third-party approach in regional affairs at the rhetorical level Turkish leaders have voiced systemic criticism of the malfunctioning institutions and processes at the global level where those structures are seen as obstacles to regional peace and stability. These systemic criticisms resonate with Turkish leaders' ambitions to become a more significant global actor. Turkey has used international forums to criticise policy practices that contradict

the value orientations of the Turkish people. Economic inequality and structural problems in underdeveloped countries, problems of the UN Security Council, cultural discrimination and Islamophobia, unilateral military intervention in international conflicts and the disproportionate use of force have been the main themes of Turkey's public criticisms and moral appeals. Turkey's criticism of the US occupation of Iraq,[31] its clear condemnation of Israel for operations in Lebanon and Gaza,[32] its efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem through diplomatic channels, and its critical attitude towards the delegation of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO secretary-general because of his passive attitude during the cartoon crisis that insulted Islamic values in Denmark[33] have been perceived negatively in the West. However, Turkey has also received significant public support in the MENA region for its stance on these issues.[34] Through these criticisms and interventions, Turkey has also wanted to demonstrate that its foreign policy is independent and principled, one that allows it to condemn its allies when there are controversies over values.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's reprimand of Israeli President Shimon Peres at the World Economic Forum meetings and his call to Egypt's Hosni Mubarak to step down were memorable. These same discourses and criticisms
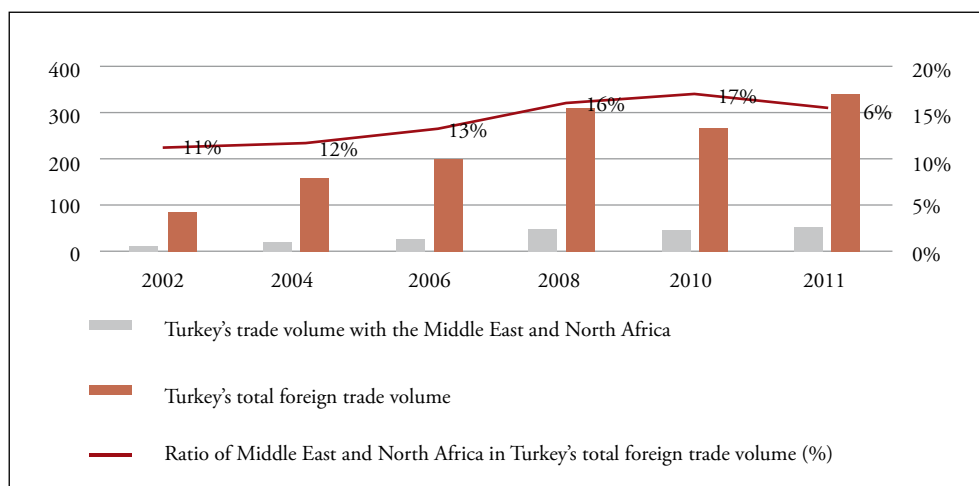
generated scepticism both in Western public opinion and domestically. Those criticisms and condemnations were considered by the critics of JDP's foreign policy in debates about the "axis shift or change of direction in Turkish foreign policy"[35] and the "Middle Easternisation of Turkish foreign policy".[36] Generating controlled tensions and using these tensions to express commitments and moral positions is a widely used instrument of Turkish foreign policy. However, Turkey's material contributions to structural peace building efforts had much more concrete impacts.

Forging a multi-dimensional agenda

In its foreign policy, Turkey has gradually evolved from a passive and security-oriented actor[37] into an actor that can undertake a proactive role in regional peace and stability. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have started to play a more active role in Turkey's multi-track diplomacy.[38] Without any doubt, this has become possible because of Turkey's political stability and economic growth, as well as its efforts to rediscover its cultural, historical and geographical depth. Istanbul and Ankara are becoming locations where various official and unofficial actors from the region can come together and express themselves to a broader audience. Turkey has tried to prioritise economic and cultural issues and to transform the security-dominated agenda in the region.

Enabling contact and engagement between peoples and cultures through trade, visa-free tourism, cultural exchanges and popular culture such as soap operas, movies, music and TV shows is another pillar of Turkey's foreign policy in the region. Those engagements and civilian interactions have changed people's attitudes and perceptions towards each other in positive ways[39] and helped dissolve psychological and cultural barriers between peoples in the region. Trade and travel in the region have increased drastically in the last several years[40] and many people have benefitted from these interactions. As demonstrated in Figure 2 Turkey's overall trade volume with Middle Eastern countries and neighbours has increased dramatically. Nowadays, there is a wide base that supports further cultural and economic integration and engagement. The Turkish government has encouraged and supported Turkish companies' attempts to invest in the region and to create job opportunities for people in the region. By creating a mutual dependency, Turkish policy makers have also aimed to increase Turkey's political and economic leverage in the region.

Figure 2: Turkey's foreign trade volume with MENA countries (in billion US $)

Source: Data compiled by the author from Turkish Statistical Institute, at http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/Start.do;jsessionid=ydj0TfFLhGpvPZc9t3s3W02hW540h5TNmLyTfJHpyM49BVrZvSp2!-138871134 [last visited 12 November 2013].

Non-state actors such as NGOs, business organisations and charitable organisations have started to play a more active and effective role in making foreign policy.[41] As trade,[42] tourism, education, culture and non-governmental activities have come to prominence, the actors carrying out these activities have strengthened their position in the making of foreign policy. These elements have eventually become major components in Turkey's soft power.[43] Turkish manufactured goods and cultural products have created some sympathy towards Turkey in northern Iraq. Furthermore, actors that benefit from trade and other interactions with Turkey have advocated for an improvement of relations between northern Iraq and Turkey. Regional interdependency based on cultural and economic exchange has helped to reduce the potential for conflict and focused relations on mutual gains rather than strategic competition. Because of the contextual transformations in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring", especially because of increasing tensions in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, security-oriented issues have started to dominate Turkey's policies in the region as well.

Figure 3: Travel records of citizens of Middle East and North Africa countries (based on individuals)
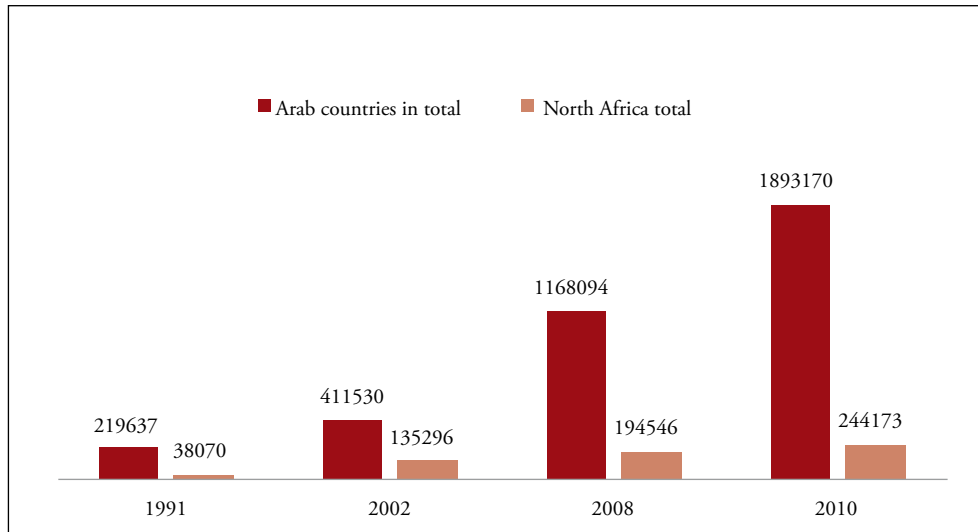
Source: Data compiled by the author from Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, at http://www.kultur.gov.tr/?_dil=2 [last visited 16 November 2013].

Crisis-free communication with existing actors

At the relational level Turkish policy makers have tried to deepen their communication and cooperation with regional actors, including non-state actors, in a crisis-free environment. However, while engaging and empowering non-state actors and extending some compensation in order to integrate them into political processes has become one of the pillars of Turkish foreign policy, this has led to scepticism about Turkey's regional intentions. Turkey faces certain limitations and challenges in performing third-party tasks in the region. First, because of its Ottoman imperial legacy, Turkey used to have a quite a bleak public image in the region. Second, the security-oriented agenda of the Cold War era disconnected the peoples of the region from each other. One of the important pillars of Turkey's activism in the region has been the task of building trust and transforming its public image at both the elite and popular levels. Turkey's main goals have been to de-securitise regional policy, invest in soft power[44] and increase the region's cultural and economic integration[45] and become an influential regional actor as

an active peace broker. All these tasks are interrelated in its holistic foreign-policy enterprise.

> One of the important pillars of Turkey's activism in the region has been the task of building trust and transforming its public image at both the elite and popular levels.

At the official level, Turkey has established certain cooperation and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Platforms such as the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform and the Alliance of Civilisations project, together with the establishment of high-level strategic councils with Russian Federation, Greece, Iraq and Syria, show an attempt to institutionalise communication, cooperation and conflict-management efforts. Turkey also took over the secretariat of the UN's LDC office and conducted the LDC's fourth summit. Together with Finland, Turkey launched the "Mediation for Peace" initiative in September 2010. On 22 June 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on mediation by consensus, which was initiated by Turkey. The economy, cultural exchange, public diplomacy, crisis-management instruments, confidence-building measures, mechanisms of

sustained dialogue and structural peace building are becoming essential pillars of contemporary Turkish foreign policy. Overall, Turkey's third-party approach and conflict-resolution initiatives in the region constitute a coherent style.

Turkey has shifted its diplomatic practice from a crisis- or conflict-oriented policy to a communication- and conciliation-oriented one. The notion of rhythmic diplomacy aims to ensure Turkey's active participation and intervention in regional and global forums as a responsible member of the international community. Turkey has tried to keep regular contacts with international actors and to pursue dynamic peacetime diplomacy. The policy of promoting maximum regional cooperation and collaborative decision-making even before the emergence of crises or problems has been pursued both at official and unofficial levels. Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu has described this strategy as "rhythmic diplomacy". The aim of Turkey's "rhythmic diplomacy" has been to move Turkey's diplomatic relations with its counterparts from negative peace to positive peace where there is common understanding, trust, and collaborative decision making.

Turkey's strategy has aimed to generate a consensus based on a mutual agreement

on positive future relations and has continued through different paths such as joint actions in international forums and organisations, free-trade agreements (FTAs), high-level cooperation councils, high-level strategic dialogues and high-level strategic cooperation councils. Turkey has developed political-consultation mechanisms with Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. It has also become part of the Turkish Arab Cooperation Forum and initiated the High-Level Strategic Dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council. It also signed FTAs with Egypt (2005), Syria (2007), Jordan (2009) and Morocco (2006). In its bilateral relations, Turkey formed high-level strategic cooperation councils with Iraq (2008), Syria (2009) and Lebanon (2010). Through these mechanisms, Turkey has tried to deepen its relations with MENA countries.

Turkey has also undertaken leadership roles and initiatives within international organisations. In addition to its non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (2009-2010), it is also a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the G-20 and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), for which it is currently serving a term as president. Furthermore, Turkey

has also taken a more active role in the international organisations of which it is a member. The Alliance of Civilisations (AoC), Turkey's joint initiative with Spain, is an important initiative for macro-level CR[46] that tries to address the problems of cultural and religious intolerance and misunderstanding. Turkish diplomats and politicians have tried to use these international forums to shape public opinion and express their vision to a broader audience. Overall, the objective of Turkey's rhythmic diplomacy is to set a sustainable agenda to deepen its relations in order to reach positive peace and maximum cooperation with the countries and international organisations around Turkey.

> The notion of rhythmic diplomacy aims to ensure Turkey's active participation and intervention in regional and global forums as a responsible member of the international community.

Another important policy to transform the actors has been to engage with the non-state actors and to a certain extend the actors that are considered as "spoilers". The Turkish government has tried to empower marginalised actors, some of which are considered spoilers,

and rather than isolating and containing them, Turkey has tried to integrate them into the political processes. "Spoilers" are defined as actors that are actively engaged in violent actions aimed at undermining a peace process.[47] There are many groups, some of which have wide constituent bases and social legitimacy, in the Middle East that are not in favour of peace or a negotiation processes. Ethnic, sectarian, religious, tribal and political divides in the Middle East do not allow for the formation of monolithic political entities that ensure fair representation of all groups. Davutoğlu has argued that it is not possible to achieve holistic and sustainable peace and order in the region without negotiating with all the important political actors. Anchoring those actors to political processes is considered to be a better option to contain the spread of violence. Turkish leaders have tried to develop relations with those leaders who have legitimacy in their ethnic, religious and sectarian communities.

> Hamas and Hezbollah as signs of their social and political legitimacy in their communities.

Prevailing regimes in the region have failed to represent the political aspirations of all these groups, which motivates some of those groups to not participate in a system of democratic government. Within such a context, armed militias and illegal organisations turn into political actors. Turkey has tried to maintain its contact with political representatives of non-state actors, some of which are considered spoilers, including Hamas, Hezbollah and Iraqi Sunni resistance groups. The main objective of this policy has been to keep communication channels open with all the central stakeholders in multi-ethnic countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and Lebanon.[48]

Turkish decision makers have taken the electoral success of organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah as signs of their social and political legitimacy in their communities. Furthermore, it has been considered a better strategy to recognise those groups as political actors in order to curtail their tendency to resort to violence. This strategy indicates a clear change in the guiding principles of Turkey's foreign policy, because in the past Turkey often refrained from publicly and officially engaging with non-state actors. Turkey has even advocated on behalf of some of these groups and tried to empower them as political actors, thus gaining leverage with them. Turkey's acceptance of Hamas and its efforts to keep communication channels open with political factions in Iraq, Palestine,

Lebanon and Syria have been criticised by Turkey's Western allies and neighbours like Iran and Syria.[49] The Turkish government has tried to empower and legitimise those groups to a certain extent by providing them a forum to express their views. Overall, Turkey has acquired some leverage on these spoilers groups, but it is not clear whether this leverage can be used effectively during periods of crisis.

Inventing new rules and norms of constructive communication and cooperation

Building trust and developing relationships based on constructive communication norms has been one of the characteristics of Turkey's regional policies. An important aspect of Turkey's foreign policy as a holistic enterprise was to transform communication norms not only with its neighbours but also among its neighbours. As a communication and third-party intervention method Turkish leaders have tried to resort to local idioms and cultural codes.

Turkey has used communications-oriented third-party approaches such as mediation, facilitation, good offices, crisis management, shuttle diplomacy and informal consultations in its recent foreign-policy practice. Turkey's efforts to improve its bilateral relations and deepen relations with its neighbouring regions have been the key policies in its third-party activism. For several years Turkey had tried to develop positive relations with Bashar al Assad of Syria in order to transform Syria into a more constructive player in the region. Together with Brazil, Turkey also tried to find non-coercive methods resolve the Iranian nuclear issue. Turkish leaders have tried to intervene quickly in situations of political tension to prevent the further escalation or spread of the conflicts, and to bring all the parties to the table or at least keep them as potential negotiating partners. Those efforts have often not received publicity because of the undisclosed nature of the engagements.

Other regional actors have occasionally interpreted Turkey's interventions as pro-Sunni, yet Turkey has often defended a post-sectarian position as part of its vision of regional order.

Turkey has put special emphasis on mediation efforts in international conflicts, and, together with Finland, it launched the "Mediation for Peace" initiative in September 2010 at the UN. This initiative aimed to highlight the importance of preventive diplomacy

and mediation in the resolution of international conflicts and called for the allocation of more resources for mediation and other preventive efforts not only by the UN but also by regional organisations. Turkey organised a summit titled "Peacekeeping- Peacebuilding" on 23 September 2010 with the participation of President Abdullah Gül. Turkey's resolution, which was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 22 June 2010, is the only resolution about mediation that has been adopted by the UN.

Turkey has gained access to almost all ethnic, sectarian, and religious groups in the region as a consequence of this activism. Turkish officials have also got in touch with most of the influential political leaders throughout the region. Especially in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine, Turkish efforts have tried to bridge sectarian and factional divisions. Other regional actors have occasionally interpreted Turkey's interventions as pro-Sunni, yet Turkey has often defended a post-sectarian position as part of its vision of regional order. Ankara has also acted as a mediator between Israel and Syria while making efforts to reach a consensus between Iraq and Syria.[50] Together with Brazil, Turkey has conducted active diplomacy to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis through diplomatic channels.[51] The nuclear swap deal failed due to the differences

of opinion with regard to the future of relations with Iran, but the provisions of the deal may prove useful for future agreements. Turkey has made successful attempts to engage Sunni groups- which support resistance ones- more actively in the future of a united Iraq.[52] Turkey has also played a mediator role between Hamas and the PLO in Palestine.

Foreign-policy makers have tried to reduce the security concerns of its neighbours, thus opening a space for better-quality engagement.

Turkey's interventions as a third party are not simply communication and facilitation strategies, nor can they be explained solely as a pragmatic attempt by Turkey to safeguard its own security. Turkey has a specific notion of inter-communal peace and regional order, and a holistic vision of security that is inspired by a *pax Ottomana*. There are no explicit references to the Ottoman legacy or a *pax Ottomana* in Davutoğlu's discourse as a mediator, but his practice is inspired by Turkey's historical legacy in the region. Davutoğlu believes that, because of its historical experience in ruling the region for centuries, Turkey has many advantages that can allow it to communicate and cooperate with

all parties, understand their concerns and interests succinctly and discuss all issues sincerely. The distinctive features of Turkish mediation in recent years are the strong historical references to and inspirations from a *pax Ottomana*. As opinion surveys[53] also show, Turkey's efforts in conflict resolution and active third-party initiatives have been received positively in the region.

The principle or vision of "zero problems with neighbours" is the most well-known and most frequently mentioned objective of Turkey's new foreign-policy vision. The "zero problems with neighbours" discourse should also be considered a natural consequence of the notion of a *pax Ottomana* or from Turkey's efforts to reconnect positively with the people in its neighbourhood. Indeed, Turkish foreign policy is identified with the slogan of "zero problems", which is quite an inaccurate reading of Turkish foreign-policy practices during the last several years. This vision has tried to de-securitise Turkey's relations with its neighbours, thus opening a space for more constructive engagements in the cultural and economic fields. Turkey has also tried to build trust with its neighbours by indicating a clear commitment to peace and friendly relations rather than competition for power and influence in the region. Turkish foreign-policy makers have tried to reduce the security

concerns of its neighbours, thus opening a space for better-quality engagement.

This "zero problems with neighbours" policy had enabled a constructive transformation of Turkey's relations with its neighbours until the deterioration of its relations with Syria. The main logic behind this policy is to change the prevailing notion of "we are surrounded by enemies" within Turkish society with a notion of "all our neighbours are our potential friends", and cooperation is a better way to deal with problems rather than competition or confrontation.

The mismatch between the discourse and the actual policy performance can be explained with the limitations of the transformative CR approach, Turkey's constraints and wide scale contextual transformation in the region.

Nowadays, the vision of "zero problems with neighbours" is subject to heavy criticism because Turkey is experiencing tensions with political elites in Syria and Iraq and tense relations with Israel. The vision of "zero problems with neighbours" has never been the fundamental pillar of Turkey's overall objective of being an "order-building actor". The "zero

problems with neighbours" vision is a discursive intervention that has aimed to reframe the often passively interpreted motto of Turkish foreign policy, "Peace at Home, Peace in the World".

What Went Wrong? The Limits of Transformative CR in the Middle East

Turkish foreign-policy decision makers have systematically tried to promote the holistic notion of peace and order through transformative CR. These policies are compatible with Turkey's interests and priorities in the fields of regional security and economic integration. The most visible aspect of Turkey's proactive diplomacy has been the official third-party efforts implemented by bureaucratic and political elites. This proactive foreign policy can be considered a paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy.[54] However, this paradigm shift could not achieve its goals of transforming the conflicts in the region. The political instability in Syria has demonstrated that, within the dynamic security environment of the MENA region, the role of an "order-instituting country" and the tasks of transformative CR necessitate both more effective coercive tools and better coordination with other regional and global actors.

The mismatch between the discourse and the actual policy performance can be explained with the limitations of the transformative CR approach, Turkey's constraints and wide scale contextual transformation in the region.

As Ryan mentions the transformative agenda necessitates a normative consensus, a normative judgment about what is wrong about the situation and what needs to be changed.[55] Turkey's normative judgments about the region based on the notion of a *pax Ottomana* and its diagnosis of the sources of the problems in the region is not shared with the other important regional players such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, nor with other global actors such as US, Russia and China. On the other hand those policies were not purely normative oriented policies: they also aimed to promote Turkey's regional interests and ambitions. Turkey's efforts to overcome political, economic and social fragmentations in the region were perceived sceptically by other powers in the region in the aftermath of contextual transformations. Furthermore, it is quite difficult to lead such a transformation without the use of coercive tools and techniques where there are strong *status quo* forces. Turkey's third-party roles have been constrained after its more direct involvement in disputes with

Israel and Syria and tensions with the Maliki government in Iraq.

Limitations inherent to Turkey's transformative conflict-resolution practices can be summarised as the problem of acceptability and the antagonistic attitudes of potential rivals in the region. Third parties can only function with the acceptance and approval of the primary parties involved in the conflicts in the region. Turkey's foreign policy agenda is not solely defined by normative concerns, indeed holistic notion of collective security and economic benefits out of broader trade and human mobility have served Turkey's interests more than its competitors in the region. Furthermore, Turkey's engagement and contacts with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iraqi Sunni groups, its tensions with Israel due to the *Mavi Marmara* and Davos crises, and its neutral position on the issue of the Iranian nuclear crisis have disturbed Turkey's European allies and the USA.[56] Those actors wanted to see Turkey as a loyal ally rather than a neutral or critical actor in the Middle East, and Turkey's policies in these areas created a trust vacuum for a while. Turkey's strategic vision for the region and regional interests have contradicted with the interests of other regional players, and thus Turkey has lost the status of trusted and neutral third party.

Another significant limitation of these policies is that transformative CR tries to avoid coercive foreign policy tools as much as possible. Turkey invests less in military security and has constrained the arms race in the region. Some analysts argue that this "soft foreign policy" has limited Turkey's deterrence potential in the region, thus making it less secure in times of tension. Those limitations constitute serious challenges to Turkey's ability to execute policies based on transformative CR. Turkey has abandoned the holistic collective security and peace approach and returned to a balance of powers approach, especially in Syria and Iraq. The uncertainty caused by the Arab revolts and the political crisis in Syria have generated serious security challenges for Turkey, which cannot be addressed solely with the tools of CR.

> The more limited and less ambitious agendas of conflict prevention and conflict management were relatively more successful in Turkey's conflict resolution practice in the Middle East.

Lastly, the tectonic change in the MENA region due to the Arab revolts has led to uncertainties. No single country or group of countries was able to predict

and shape the course of this structural transformation. Although Turkey has mobilised significant resources both at the civilian and official levels, Turkish efforts to transform the region and institute order have been too ambitious because of the tensions and violent conflicts in the region are so widespread. CT in Turkey's neighbourhood can only be achieved with the participation of more stakeholders and with better coordination with international or regional organisations and local network building. The more limited and less ambitious agendas of conflict prevention and conflict management were relatively more successful in Turkey's conflict resolution practice in the Middle East. It seems that CM will continue to be more compatible with Turkey's foreign policy objectives in the post-"Arab Spring" context.

Endnotes

1   Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı", *Radikal*, 26 February 2004. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu has challenged the frequently used bridge metaphor that locates Turkey between the East and West, Europe and Asia. Davutoğlu instead emphasises the metaphor of a "centre country", which signifies an important change in Turkey's new foreign policy. See, Lerna K. Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity after the End of the Cold War", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2009), pp. 531-549.

2   Several terms are used to define the "field", including "conflict resolution" (CR) "conflict transformation", "conflict management" and "peace studies". In this study, I prefer to use CR, which is the earliest and most widely accepted term to define the discipline. In this study, I further distinguish between "CR" and "conflict resolution" in order to avoid confusion. The former is used to denote the discipline, while the latter is used to denote the practice.

3   In the popular and academic literatures, the term "Arab Spring" is frequently used to denote the series of political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa, which started with the popular revolts in Tunisia in December 2010. I have adopted this term because it is the one most commonly used to define the ongoing political transformation in the MENA region.

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