Man vs. the System: Turkish Foreign Policy After the Arab Uprisings

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This chapter examines Turkish foreign policy toward the Arab uprisings during the 2011–2015 period from a neoclassical realist approach.[1] Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East during this period can be characterized as an ambitious attempt to establish itself as a regional hegemon and, as explained below, be the "order-maker" in the region. It represents an important discontinuity with the traditional Turkish policy of moderation towards the region, both in terms of means and ends, that emphasizes collaboration with regional and global powers, opposing

[1]For neoclassical realism as an approach rather than a theory, see Donnelly in this volume.

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separatism, irredentism, and regime change and emphasizing territorial integrity and regime stability in the region. Turkey has been a status quo power in the Middle East since the establishment of the Republic in 1923. This was true for the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) initial tenure from 2002 up until mid-2009, when Ahmet Davutoğlu became Foreign Minister as well. Starting from late 2009, Turkish foreign policy became more assertive and active with an eye towards reshaping the regional order and, with the start of Syrian uprising in 2011, the transformation of Turkish foreign policy became clear. Turkey's military and economic power did not change in any meaningful way during this period, nor did the regional balance of power shift significantly. In other words, structural factors cannot explain this significant discontinuity in Turkish foreign policy. A neoclassical realist approach that brings in the individual and domestic variables into the analysis, on the other hand, can help us explain this puzzle.

Neoclassical realism (NCR) assumes that the leaders' beliefs about the international system, domestic political calculations, and domestic political institutions have a significant role in shaping states' foreign policies. While they acknowledge neorealism's assumptions that systemic pressures constrain actors in world politics, neoclassical realists argue that it is necessary to examine the impact of political, institutional, and bureaucratic factors within states and cognitive processes of decision makers in order to understand foreign policy. In this sense, neoclassical realism bridges the gap between International Relations (IR) and foreign policy analysis (FPA) along with decision-making theories. As Turkey is a middle power in the international system, it is important to understand individual (perceptions, beliefs, heuristics, analogies, cultural references) and domestic (public opinion, electoral processes, and Turkey's own ethno-religious structure) variables in order to grasp Turkish decision makers' policy toward the region. It is impossible to explain tensions derived from the asymmetries between the roles and motivations prescribed by the state's leaders and the state's actual capabilities by examining only systemic factors. In this context, explanations regarding domestic politics and beliefs of leadership become important. Examining how Turkish decision makers reach specific decisions through interpreting structural pressures and their state's role in the region, and how they synthesize these elements, with the necessities of domestic politics, will contribute to an explanation of the decisions that seem unintelligible at a first glance.

Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy[2]

Gideon Rose, who coined the term "neoclassical realism" in a 1998 *World Politics* article, argues that neoclassical realism:

> [E]xplicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical. (Rose 1998: 152)

Neoclassical realists thus aim to analyze the workings of systemic pressures and unit-level variables such as domestic political structures and decision makers' perceptions as influences on a nation's foreign policy. Works by Randall Schweller (1998, 2004), Fareed Zakaria (1998), Thomas Christensen (1996), Jack Snyder (1993), William Wohlforth (1993), and Aaron Friedberg (1988) all posit that, "systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables to produce foreign policy behavior" (Schweller 2004: 164). Thus, neoclassical realism provides a comprehensive framework to analyze the foreign policy behavior of states. However, as a general approach it is underspecified for purposes of applied analysis, particularly as to: (1) how the ideas of leaders affect their behavior; (2) how these ideas can be operationalized; and (3) which domestic factors affect leaders' assessments of foreign policy challenges. In addition, although in the long run relative power capabilities may determine foreign policy outcomes, foreign policy behavior may not reflect those underlying structural constraints in the short term. As a result, relative power may not be a good predictor of foreign policy behavior in the short to medium term. To address this problem, role theory (Holsti 1970) will be used as a systematic way of analyzing the relevant ideas of political leaders since it argues that the way leaders perceive the position of both their own states and other states and the roles they ascribe to their states are highly influential in their foreign policy behavior.

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[2] Adapted from Devlen and Ozdamar (2009).

Our argument is based on neoclassical realist foundations in the following three ways. First, as an explanation of foreign policy behavior, it clearly falls outside the purview of structural theorizing (e.g., Waltzian neorealism, offensive realism), which concerns itself with "pattern[s] of outcomes of state interactions" (Rose 1998: 145). Waltz (1979; Keohane and Waltz 1986) clearly posits that his theory is not (and indeed cannot be) a theory of foreign policy. By contrast, much neoclassical realist theorizing is explicitly concerned with how states respond to changes in their relative power positions (Rose 1998: 154). Thus, neoclassical realism explicitly theorizes foreign policy behavior and enters into the realm of foreign policy analysis. Second, as pointed out by Rose (1998) and Schweller (2004), neoclassical realism brings the political leader back in. The neoclassical realist focus on the perceptions of political elites regarding the international system places agency squarely in the center of analysis, in contrast to structural theories in which such a focus on agency is consciously omitted. Our argument centers on the political leader and the leader's beliefs about the international system and domestic political calculations. In this sense, it makes the neoclassical realist choice of bringing the state leaders back in more explicit. Lastly, neoclassical realism, in contrast with structural versions of realism, takes seriously the impact of domestic structures in explaining foreign policy choices. We emphasize that political leaders are constrained by both domestic political concerns and their leadership roles and styles when choosing among different policy options during crises.

In line with neoclassical realist theorizing (Rose 1998: 147), we suggest that the position of the state in the international system defines the boundaries of the possible range of policies it can adopt in the long term. States' relative power constrains what they can do. Their placement within the distribution of power also shapes, in the long run, the interests and aspirations of states; for example, ascending states have different aims than declining states. During system transitions, when polarity changes, states try to adjust themselves to the newly emerging structure. Revisionist states might try to exploit the uncertain nature of the distribution of power or the distraction of the great powers during such times. While system-wide changes, such as one in system polarity, are occurring, it becomes more difficult to gauge "objective" systemic constraints. Therefore, leaders in these situations are more likely to rely on their beliefs about systemic effects, which may or may not reflect the actual distribution of power within the international system and the availability

of a great-power patron or regional ally. The leader's perceptions of the international system and the nature of the adversary can distort the picture presented by the objective distribution of power.

Furthermore, the existence (or lack) of domestic political constraints also shapes how the leader chooses to respond to systemic pressures. If these individual- and unit-level factors lead to policy choices that are not in line with the actual capabilities of the state, then the systemic pressures could eventually result in a corrective reaction that would bring the foreign policy back in line with the necessities of the distribution of power. In other words, while the individual- and unit-level factors can lead to foreign policy *behaviour* that is not in line with systemic imperatives in the short to medium term, power—particularly the distribution of material power—will eventually determine the foreign policy *outcome*.

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE ARAB UPRISINGS

In this section we examine Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab uprisings, focusing on two important variables: the leadership's role conceptions and domestic political constraints. We argue that the neoclassical realist perspective gives us insight to understand both the reasons behind Turkey's "ambitious" foreign policy between 2011 and 2015 and why these policies were not as effective as hoped. At the outset of the Arab uprisings, Turkey attempted to behave like a classical middle power, particularly at the level of discourse. For instance, in the Libyan case in early 2011, it first adopted a cautious policy and expressed reservations about an international military intervention, but later changed tact and supported the NATO operation. Similarly, at the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, Turkey leaned towards regime change in Tunisia and Egypt but soon after, faced by a quickly evolving regional political confrontation, it took responsibility for both Syria's regime change and the political survival of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, while seeking to preserve and continue its bumpy relations with Israel, Iraq, and Iran.

Why did Turkey abandon its initial cautious foreign policy and seek to play a more assertive role in the Middle East? We argue that two variables (role conceptions of the leadership and domestic politics) provide insights for understanding how and why Turkey adopted this particular foreign policy approach during this period, which has since then been criticized for not being practical and pragmatic enough. With respect to role conceptions, Turkey during Ahmet Davutoğlu's Foreign Ministry

(2009–2014) sought to go beyond its material capacity (including military and intelligence). Davutoğlu criticized previous foreign ministers for not using Turkey's capacity in full while claiming that he was the first political leader to do so (Zaman 2011; Milliyet 2010). As a middle power in the international system, Turkey's claim to be the "central country" and "regional leader" and adopting policies according to these roles were two obvious signs of this self-perception (Özdamar 2014). In other words, Turkish leadership during the period after 2011 overestimated Turkey's capacity, capabilities, and position within the international system and that had significant consequences for Turkish foreign policy.

The second variable is the *lack* of domestic political constraints. In this respect, the unusual freedom of movement the AKP enjoyed in terms of foreign policy and national security and the absence of an effective domestic political opposition contributed to the non-traditional, ambitious foreign policy. The power of the bureaucracy was highly restricted as a result of the AKP's long reign since 2002. The impact of bureaucratic groups, which were traditionally involved in Turkish foreign policy making and imposed their own preferences on civil officials, has been to a large extent reduced. The AKP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's uninterrupted and overwhelming successes in elections, unprecedented in the history of the Turkish Republic, have practically eliminated the impact of opposition parties on foreign policy. Turkey's involvement in the Arab uprising and regional politics has been possible thanks to the marginalization of bureaucratic groups such as the National Security Council (NSC) and the Foreign Ministry, which used to have direct impact on foreign policy, as well as the incompetence of opposition parties.

FROM "MEDIATOR" TO "RULE MAKER"[3]

The AKP was more or less committed to Turkey's traditional global and regional roles during the 2002–2009 period (Onis and Yilmaz 2005, 2009; Onis 2011). From the perspective of role theory, in this period Turkish foreign policy adopted the roles of "global and regional

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[3] This discussion has been adapted from Özdamar (2014) and Özdamar et al. (2014).

collaborator" and "balancer".[4] Moreover, it is remarkable that it also adopted the roles of "mediator" and "bridge between Islam and Christian civilizations" (Özdamar 2014).[5] With its moderate approach, Turkish foreign policy was widely appreciated by Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) governments, the European Union, and the United States. Foreign policy during this period was also generally supported by the domestic public and it was not a divisive issue in domestic politics. This foreign policy approach gradually changed after Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" against targets in Gaza, which started in December 2008 and after which Turkey's relations with several regional actors visibly began to deteriorate (Onis 2011).

When AKP's decision makers started to criticize Israel's Gaza operations in December 2008, they had been in power on their own for more than six years. Within this period, the party adopted a moderate and domestically endorsed foreign policy in order to gain legitimacy as a new party. Internationally, it gained popularity by developing relations with MENA countries, re-vitalizing prospective EU membership and maintaining friendly relations with the US and NATO. On balance, Turkish foreign policy during the AKP period had been globally appreciated as a rather successful example of a middle power being influential on both regional and global levels. Although some analysts argued that the party did not abandon its Islamic roots in foreign and domestic politics, other observers pointed out that the AKP's foreign policy was not ideological during the 2002–2009 period (Özdamar et al. 2014).

In this period, in addition to maintaining its traditional role as a "collaborator" and a "balancer" (Özdamar 2014), the AKP's leadership was interested in developing Turkey's ties with Middle Eastern countries and to adopt a leadership role in the region. However, in contrast to continuing traditional roles with little domestic opposition, some of the AKP's new roles in the MENA region provoked a reaction from institutions

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[4] We use Holsti's (1970) descriptions for foreign policy roles such as "balancer" and "global and regional collaborator" unless otherwise stated. "Balancer" for example refers to states that aim to maintain regional or global balance of power. "Global and regional collaborator" refers to "far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities, or to cross-cutting subsystems…" (Holsti 1970: 266).

[5] In general, "bridge" role refers to "acting as a 'translator' or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different culture" (Holsti 1970: 267). For Turkey as a bridge between different civilizations and faiths see Yanik (2009).

such as the National Security Council, where military officers influence foreign policy decisions and the judicial order. In other words, during the first years of their tenure the AKP leadership wanted to develop closer relations with Muslim-majority states and adopt a leadership role in the Middle East. However its adoption of these roles had been limited until 2009 due to opposition from state institutions such as the military and the foreign ministry bureaucracy. Until 2008, Turkey was quite successful in having close cooperative relations with Israel, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. Considering the regional problems and historical relations and animosities, this was an unprecedented situation and success. Five years later, Turkey, seeking to assert its leadership role and having assumed a controversial position regarding the Arab Spring, cut diplomatic relations with Israel, Syria, and Egypt and it encountered critical problems with Saudi Arabia and Iran. This significant change in Turkish foreign policy was made possible by the gradual disappearance of local resistance towards the AKP's newly adopted roles during the 2002–2009 period which, in turn, empowered decision makers to adopt new roles.

A turning point in Turkish foreign policy occurred with Turkey's harsh criticisms towards Israel's Gaza attacks. The AKP government had previously maintained friendly relations with Israel, which continued until "Operation Cast Lead" started in December 2008. This was after the Israeli President, Shimon Peres, gave a speech in the Turkish parliament the previous month, the first given by an Israeli president in the parliament of a Muslim majority country. Prime Minister Erdoğan also maintained friendly relations with the Jewish community in the United States and in 2005 earned a prestigious prize from the Anti-Defamation League in New York.

As a part of its mediator role, Turkey sought to continue negotiations between Israel and Syria regarding the Golan Heights. Israel's attacks on civilian targets in Gaza were harshly criticized by the AKP government at precisely the peak of the negotiations (and, according to Turkish officials, while they were about to reach a solution on the Golan question). Prime Minister Erdoğan's dispute with the Israeli president about the Gaza attacks became public in front of the international press at World Economic Forum in Davos in 2009 and relations deteriorated further. In May 2010, Turkish-Israeli relations came to the breaking point after an Israeli commando raided the Gaza flotilla organized by international activists whose majority were Turks and which led to the killing of nine

Turkish citizens, leading to an unprecedented decline in Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkish decision makers, in competition in many areas with Israel, sought to adopt a new role and identified Turkey as the "protector of the oppressed" in the region (Özdamar 2014). Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu reemphasized Turkey's mission to protect Palestinians against Israeli attacks and stated that, in addition to protecting Palestinians, Turkey would also protect all oppressed people in the region.

Turkey's escalating disputes with Israel increased Prime Minister Erdoğan's popularity and the Turkish government in the Arab world. Turkey's popularity in the region reached its peak during the 2009–2012 period. For instance, an opinion poll conducted by TESEV in 2012 demonstrates that Turkey was the most popular country in the MENA region garnering 78% positive responses from participants from 16 countries (TESEV 2012). However, simultaneously, the AKP officers, who achieved popularity in the region, lost their good relations with several regional countries after the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2011 and onwards.

Turkey was caught unprepared by the Arab uprisings and Ankara initially maintained a low profile about the events. This initial stance quickly evolved towards a more assertive foreign policy stance. For example, Turkey was initially opposed to NATO's Libya operation (BBC 2011), but then it changed its attitude and adopted an active role in the 2011 NATO operation that aimed at bringing about regime change to Libya. Turkey also supported regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria.

At the outset of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Turkish government sought to use its influence on Syrian President Assad to find a peaceful solution to the uprisings. Once these efforts proved futile and the civil war escalated, the Turkish government supported the rebels in Syria as a part of its ambition to affirm Turkey's "regional leader" role. After autumn 2011, Turkey gave political and diplomatic support to the rebels and openly adopted a position against the Assad regime. Many independent sources have claimed that Turkey also provided economic and military support to some opposition groups (Taşpınar 2012; Ayata 2014). During an interview with the Japanese newspaper *Nikkei*, the then president Abdullah Gül stated that Turkey's course of action in the region was compatible with Turkey's "regional leadership" role (Gül 2011). Regarding Turkey's support of regime change, Turkish officials identified this support as part of expectations derived from the

country's "protector of the oppressed" role, which was also invoked in its relation with Israel. Similarly, another new role, the "leader of Muslim world", required Turkey to take action against persecution of Muslims in Syria (Özdamar 2014). For instance, during his presidential campaign in 2014, Erdoğan repeatedly stated that Turkey had a duty to take sides with the oppressed people of the Middle East, by which he referred to the people of Iraq, Syria, and Gaza (Erdoğan 2014).

When the main opposition party asked whether Turkey had really the mission to protect Syrian people against their government, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu claimed that the question showed a lack of understanding of Turkey's "rule maker" and "central/pivotal country" roles in the region (Özdamar 2014). The claim of being "rule maker" in the region was reemphasized within the context of the Arab uprisings during Davutoğlu's visit to Brussels for the NATO summit in 2012 and his visit to Paris for the meeting of Friends of Syria Group (*24Haber* 2012). Davutoğlu's willingness for Turkey to this role in the region was confirmed by his active efforts to organize the first meeting of Friends of Syria Group in Istanbul.

Similarly, Turkey's critical position vis-à-vis the military coup in Egypt that overthrew President Mohammed Morsi in 2013 can be explained by its newly adopted roles. After the cases of Tunisia and Libya where regime change easily took place, the AKP believed that the Arab uprisings and subsequent regime change could create more friendly governments in the MENA region. Indeed, in several MENA countries political parties like the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, who were ideologically close to the AKP, were the most influential alternative to existing regimes. Even though the AKP located itself in the center right of the political spectrum, the main founders of the party are political Islamists who are ideologically close to the Muslim Brotherhood. The AKP, seeing the Arab uprisings as an opportunity to create friendlier MENA states, operated to bring Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood back to power. Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu harshly criticized the subsequent military coup in Egypt. During the summer 2013 they took action to start large-scale protest movements against the coup and criticized the hypocrisy of the West regarding Egypt. Similar to the Syrian case, the government stated that Turkey's involvement in the events was derived from its "regional leader" role that created a specific responsibility to protect oppressed Muslims and its "central country" role (Özdamar 2014).

Turkey's relations with other neighbors quickly worsened. Its dealings with Iran deteriorated due to Turkey's anti-Assad stance; relations with the central government of Iraq suffered due to Turkey's close cooperation with the Kurdistan regional government in the oil sector; the Turkey-Lebanon interactions worsened due to Turkey's involvement in the Syrian civil war; and its relations with Saudi Arabia deteriorated due to Turkey's major support to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In a nutshell, the only actors with whom Turkey had friendly relations by 2015 were Qatar, Gaza Strip leaders, and the Kurdish regional government. Turkey's relatively successful foreign policy in 2009 was transformed into "precious loneliness" by 2015 (Gardner 2015).

Accordingly, Turkey's policies towards the MENA states in the aftermath of the Arab Spring deviated from neorealism's expectation about a middle power's behavior in the international system. From this perspective, Turkey was supposed to pursue a moderate foreign policy and instead, despite its limited material power, pursued a maximalist policy. The underlying causes of this policy, as explained above, were found in the leaders' role conceptions regarding their country such as the "central country", "regional leader", "leader of Islamic world", and "protector of the oppressed" (Özdamar 2014). With respect to these roles, the leadership in Turkey identified a power-vacuum in the international system and aimed to fill it. Turkey's attitude in the Arab uprisings reflected its self-perception as a country that deemed itself suitable for leadership and ready to fill the gap created by the EU, US, and Russia. This attracted criticism, both domestic and foreign, since it was argued that Turkey sought to perform the tasks that it could not actually accomplish as a middle power (Özdamar 2014). It also demonstrated that countries do not always adopt policies that are compatible with their real position in the international system, especially in the short term. In sum, Turkey's attitude regarding the Arab uprisings was directly related to Turkey's expected leadership roles, which exceeded its material capacity and the political, economic, military constraints that emerge during the realization of these roles.

Domestic Debates About Turkey's MENA Policy

The AKP's relative autonomy in domestic politics brought about both foreign policy freedom and contestation over the policy regarding the Arab uprisings. More precisely, Turkey's deteriorating relations in the

region led to acrimonious debates in the country, since domestic disagreement regarding the country's roles in the region became increasingly pronounced. It would not be wrong to say that foreign policy debates during the Arab uprisings represented one of the greatest debates— perhaps the greatest one—regarding foreign policy in Turkey's history. In the past, especially during the Cold War period, many foreign policy issues in Turkey led, to a great extent, to consistency and consensus in the country. Even the most contentious issues, such as the situation in Cyprus, did not cause such a polarization and escalation at the discursive level. Turkey's foreign policy and related debates regarding its roles in the region became daily political material in the country during the 2011–2015 period. However, all of this domestic contestation failed to constrain or limit the AKP's foreign policy ambitions (Özdamar 2016).

Why did Turkey's foreign policy decision making, which used to be associated with consensus and moderation, experience such a radical change? In order to find the answer to this question, it is crucial to examine domestic political developments in the last decade. The AKP's arrival to power at the end of 2002 was an unprecedented success story for Turkey. The AKP benefited from the weakening of secular parties and economic and political crises that had occurred in 2000–2001 and gained almost two-thirds of the seats in parliament. However, its election success did not immediately allow the AKP to pursue its agenda unrestrained by other political forces. The AKP's first years in power are identified as a conflictual period with Turkey's old order. New elected officials had difficulties while applying their own preferences to foreign policy. From time to time, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) interfered in foreign policy and became influential via the National Security Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to have its pro-Western foreign policy stance guide policy (Özdamar 2016).

The change in the National Security Council's legal status made it easier for the AKP to pursue its independent agenda derived from non-traditional foreign policy roles for Turkey. By the 2000s, Turkey had formally put into effect many EU harmonization packages, including regulations about the TAF's position in the political system (Onis and Yilmaz 2005). In particular, the seventh harmonization package, which came into effect in June 2003, changed the NSC's formation in such a way that the number of civilian members would exceed the number of military members (Tocci 2005; Secretary General of EU Relations 2007). From 2003 to 2007, the effect of the TAF on the political system

decreased due to many reforms. This period also witnessed domestic contention and debate about several issues including secularism and civil-military relations. After 2009, many members of the military were imprisoned on the grounds that they planned a "coup against the government", which had been an untried offence in Turkey. In 2010, the government changed the constitution by winning 58% of the votes in the referendum and, after this date, the judiciary has been increasingly under the influence of the executive power. In the 2011 elections, the AKP won 49.95% of the votes cast, becoming the first party to be in power for three electoral mandates. National and international observers have since claimed that the situation with respect to many democratic standards, including judicial independence, freedom of expression and political rights, has worsened. From the perspective of the AKP, constitutional reforms ensured that two traditional and powerful rivals, the TAF and the judiciary, had come under democratic control as in Western liberal democracies (Özdamar 2016).

During this period, other traditional power centers sided with the AKP. President Abdullah Gül, one of the oldest founders of the AKP, had worked in great harmony with Prime Minister Erdoğan from the time of the party's founding. Gül never objected to any of the government's foreign policy initiatives during his seven-year presidency. In addition, intra-party opposition to the governing leadership of a party has always been weak in post-1980 Turkish political life, with all of the political parties under the control of very powerful party leaders. However, there were always debates within parties regarding critical issues that mostly took place among influential party members behind closed doors. After senior government officials (including Cemil Çiçek, Abdüllatif Şener, and Dengir Fırat) quit the AKP, alternative voices to the top-level leadership's preferences were gone. For this reason, foreign policy had no strong opposition within the AKP itself.

All of these domestic developments demonstrate that while changing its MENA policy, the Turkish government restrained the influence of almost all domestic actors who were previously politically and legally powerful on foreign policy. As of the beginning of 2010, all actors who traditionally had an impact on foreign policy issues had been replaced by the AKP's leadership. Apart from the advisers in the inner circle of the Prime Minister, other actors could not seriously affect foreign policy. The full hegemony of the AKP, which has been achieved in Turkish political life, paved the way for Turkey's foreign policy initiatives in the

MENA region. The AKP has created the necessary conditions to adopt a set of new roles regarding foreign policy in a political environment where none of the traditional agents (including the bureaucracy of the Foreign Ministry, the TAF, the NSC, judiciary, media, business organizations, and universities) were powerful enough to express their concerns.

The greatest opposition to the AKP's foreign policy in this period came from three opposition parties: the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) (Özdamar 2016). However, their influence on foreign policy remained limited and did not have a significant impact. The AKP did not have difficulty in passing the law related to the use of force against Syria from 2013 to 2014, since it held a majority in the parliament.

The three opposition parties criticized Turkey's foreign policy in the MENA region during the 2010–2014 period. Despite their ideological differences, the CHP, MHP and BDP vigorously rejected Turkey's "regional leader" or "central country" roles (Radikal 2014). The leaders of the three opposition parties argued that these assertive roles exceeded Turkey's capacity and put Turkey in a difficult position since they were related with the Syrian civil war and the Arab uprisings. Furthermore, all members of these opposition parties rejected the roles of the "protector of the oppressed" or "leader of Muslim world" and they claimed that the AKP used these roles to support ideologically close Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood, etc. At the elite level, the roles of "central country" and "regional leader" have been most contested among all the roles that were discussed in this period (Özdamar 2016). The consequences of role struggles regarding Turkey's foreign policy in the MENA region were minimal due to the specific domestic conditions mentioned above. In other words, the executive power has been so overwhelming that any tangible impact of opposition parties on the foreign policy was impossible.

Prime Minister Erdoğan and the ruling elite used the foreign policy discourse as an effective domestic policy tool. In other words, the discourse aiming to constitute strong roles in foreign policy was also addressed to the local audience that preferred to have a higher profile and more active foreign policy. According to Onis (2011: 49), "there is no doubt that the new-style foreign policy activism has helped enhance the popularity of the [AKP] in domestic politics". Considering Erdoğan's emphasis on foreign policy issues during the presidential

election campaigns in August 2014, it can be said that the roles of "regional leader" or "central country" helped enhance the his popularity among conservative constituents. The surveys conducted throughout Turkey demonstrate that while the majority of AKP voters confirmed their backing of the AKP's foreign policy, supporters of the three opposition parties, despite their ideological differences, did not deem Turkey's foreign policy as a success.

Foreign actors were the only powerful actors that could have an impact on Turkey's top leadership regarding the Syrian civil war. After the Obama administration decided not to intervene militarily in Syria in 2013 despite its initial consensus with Turkey on overthrowing Assad, the Turkish government was reported to experience a big disappointment. In the summer of 2013 then Prime Minister Erdoğan was in favor of an extensive military operation against the Assad government similar to the Kosovo intervention, rather than a limited operation (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2013). It is likely that strong opposition from Russia and the United States prevented a Turkish military operation against Assad in 2013 and 2014.

The possibility of pursuing a more active policy in the whole Middle Eastern region and of working with ideologically close governments has transformed Turkey's cautious policies, which were observed at the beginning of the Arab uprisings and has led to riskier moves after 2011. In this period, the country's role in the region, which was envisioned by the leadership, reached its peak and, accordingly, foreign policy moves became increasingly more daring and costly. After friendly regimes started to lose power in Egypt and Syria, the Turkish government initially double downed but by mid-2015 it became obvious that the roles Turkey had adopted for itself failed to produce the desired outcomes in the region.

Conclusion

Turkey's foreign policy towards the Arab uprisings cannot be understood without comprehending the revolutionary changes in Turkish domestic politics that occurred since the early 2000s. The AKP, which defeated its traditional rivals in domestic politics, found a suitable environment for pursuing a bold foreign policy and imposing its own preferences. Accordingly, it adopted an overly ambitious foreign policy beyond its material capacity in order to realize the foreign policy roles of a "central

country" and "regional leader". Even though there has been domestic contestation, AKP was able to project its preferences onto the foreign policy realm. Thus, in contrast to neorealism's expectation about the policies of a middle power in the international system, Turkey's policy towards the Arab Spring can be explained with neoclassical realism, which shows the importance of how decision makers perceive their country's position in the international balance of power and to what extent domestic factors can be highly influential in the realization of the roles determined by the country's position.

In this chapter we focused on foreign policy *behaviour*, rather than foreign policy *outcomes*. Neoclassical realism enables us to understand and explain the choices made by Turkish foreign policy makers both on the eve of the Arab uprisings and immediately after these events as it stresses the impact of domestic politics and individual level factors on foreign policy. But neoclassical realists also point out that in the long run, foreign policy outcomes are largely determined by structural factors. In other words, in the short to medium term domestic politics and leaders' beliefs might shape and determine the choices made by foreign policy makers but the outcome of those choices in the long term will be a function of structural factors, particularly the distribution of power. Foreign policy behavior that does not reflect the actual capabilities and distribution of power are unlikely to produce the desired outcomes. States that do not follow structural imperatives are generally punished and forced to bring their policies in line with the realities of distribution of power.

Systemic factors prevailed after the five-year-long autonomous foreign policy period and Turkey inevitably had to return to its earlier middle-power policies. This did not happen because domestic political constraints re-emerged. If anything, since the constitutional referendum in April 2017 that paved the way for a presidential system, the government is even more unencumbered and unconstrained by domestic politics. The perception of key Turkish policymakers regarding Turkey's role in the region did not change significantly either. What has changed is the ability of Turkey to continue a policy that does not align with its power capabilities. Extra-regional great powers re-asserted themselves in the region. After Russia intervened in Syria to defend the Assad regime in September 2015 and the US-Russian cease-fire agreement in 2017, the chances of Turkey benefitting from the US military power and

toppling Assad regime faded away. Failing to gain their support for its policy against the Assad regime and unable to change the power dynamics on the ground, Turkey had to return to a more limited foreign policy abandoning its over-ambitious policy of reshaping the region.

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