

# A Neoclassical Realist Approach to Turkey under JDP Rule



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# INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Cold War, Turkey's grand strategic behaviour gradually shifted from a cautious and calculated pacifism and reluctance to activism. This book focuses on the period from 2002 (the JDP's first election victory) up to 2019. The book explores the motivations behind Turkey's grand strategic activism and why the JDP era witnessed its zenith.

In the Cold War era, Turkey's international profile was largely shaped by the rigid bipolar power structure of the international system, which forced Turkey to adopt a policy line that is mostly in line with the policy preferences of the US-led bloc in order to be able to defy potential Soviet aggression. Given the Soviet demands in 1945—which included ceding the cities of Kars and Ardahan to the Soviet Union and the construction of Soviet bases in the Straits for joint control of the waterway—in return for renewing its 1925 Treaty of Friendship with Turkey, this concern does not seem unfounded.<sup>1</sup> Turkey also avoided any actions that may have triggered inter-bloc tensions. As a member of NATO, Turkey kept some 24 Soviet divisions occupied and provided “important bases and facilities for the forward deployment of nuclear weapons and the monitoring of Soviet compliance with arms control agreements”.<sup>2</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, “the well-known parameters of Turkish foreign policy”<sup>3</sup> changed, and Turkey saw the emergence of new windows of opportunity. It strove eagerly to become more deeply engaged with its environs in order to raise its own regional and global profile by making the most of fluctuations in its relative power position. However, Turkey's

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<sup>1</sup> These demands were characterised as “inappropriate and incorrect statements” by the Soviet President Podgorny in 1965. See Meliha Benli Altunışık & Özlem Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change* (Oxon: Routledge Curzon, 2005), p. 102-103. Also see William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* (3rd. edition) (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee & Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Altunışık & Tür, p. 113.

journey from what Kirişçi called “post-Cold War warrior”,<sup>4</sup> fostering disagreements with almost all of its neighbours in the immediate post-Cold War years, to a more engagement-minded approach was not an easy one in any respect. The shift in Turkey’s grand strategy that I analyse in this book was first attempted by Turgut Özal, who, according to Cengiz Çandar, was “the man who carried Turkey from the twentieth century into the twenty-first century”; during a period that coincided with the late Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War eras (1983–1993). This policy line was to some extent followed by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ismail Cem between 1997 and 2002.<sup>5</sup> He strove to settle Turkey’s problems with its neighbours and achieve greater engagement with these regions with a win-win approach, allowing the JDP to use this policy line as a launching pad for further activism and a deeper engagement with Turkey’s surroundings.<sup>6</sup>

Park refers to this emerging grand strategic attitude under the JDP rule as a departure from the “somewhat cautious, regionally aloof, occasionally ‘hard’, and one-dimensionally West-inclined foreign policy attributed to the Turkish Republic’s Kemalist past.”<sup>7</sup> The era under JDP rule is regarded as the zenith of the decades-old effort to pursue this activist grand strategic attitude, and marked a time in which Turkey’s new grand strategic policy line reflected increasing “self-confidence” and the “rediscovery” of its surroundings in both political and economic terms.<sup>8</sup> The former PM Ahmet Davutoğlu<sup>9</sup> defined this new grand strategic approach as “...zero problems with neighbours, a multidimensional foreign policy, a pro-active regional

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<sup>4</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey’s ‘Demonstrative Effect’ and the Transformation of the Middle East”, *Insight Turkey* 13:2 (2011), pp. 33–55, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Pinar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç, “Turkey’s ‘New’ Foreign Policy toward Eurasia”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 52:2 (2011), pp. 173–195, p. 192.

<sup>6</sup> Özlem Tür, personal communication, 28/4/2016.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Park, “Turkey’s ‘New’ Foreign Policy: Newly Influential or Just Over-active?”, *Mediterranean Politics*, 19:2 (2014), pp. 161–164, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Svante E. Cornell, “What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Quarterly* 19:1 (2012), pp. 13–24.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of International Relations, served as the Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister since 2002, then as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2009 and 2014. Between August 2014 and May 2016, he served as the Prime Minister of Turkey and over his disagreements with the JDP, in 2019, he founded his own political party, namely the Future Party/*Gelecek Partisi*.



foreign policy, an altogether new diplomatic style and rhythmic diplomacy".<sup>10</sup>

Several key developments and processes underline Turkey's activist grand strategy. The number of mediation efforts Turkey made in the Middle East has increased, from early efforts between Syria and Israel to its efforts to mediate between the West and Iran regarding Iran's nuclear programme.<sup>11</sup> Turkey's ambition to act as an energy corridor, transferring Caspian oil and gas to the West via cross-country pipelines, has been greater than ever.<sup>12</sup> Turkey has also developed working relationships with other powerful actors in neighbouring regions, including Russia and Iran, although *realpolitik* limits to these relationships have been set by clashing views over the future of Syria following the start of the Syrian Civil War. Levels of diplomatic representation (as measured by the booming number of new diplomatic missions) and economic activity (as measured by unprecedented levels of trade in both the Caribbean and Africa) have also dramatically increased.<sup>13</sup> In these regions, Turkey had no previous record of interaction, negligible diplomatic representation and little economic presence.

Davutoğlu, widely believed to be one of the key masterminds behind Turkey's activism during the JDP era, formulated this activist theme as the doctrine of "strategic depth".<sup>14</sup> His activist policy line brought some important achievements, but Turkey gradually came to realise—especially

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Zero problems in a New Era", *Foreign Policy Magazine* (USA), March 21, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See İlker Aytürk, "The Coming of an Ice Age? Turkish-Israeli Relations since 2002", *Turkish Studies* 12:4 (2011); and Aylin Gürzel, "Turkey's Role in Defusing the Iranian Nuclear Issue", *The Washington Quarterly*, 35:3 (2012), pp. 141–152.

<sup>12</sup> See Ali Tekin and Paul Andrew Williams, *Geo-politics of the Euro-Asia Energy Nexus—The European Union, Russia and Turkey* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke: 2011; Katinka Barysch, "Turkey's Role in European Energy Security", *Centre for European Reform Essays* (2007); Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey's Eurasian Agenda", *The Washington Quarterly*, 34:1 (2011), pp. 103–120; Gareth Winrow, "Turkish National Interests" in Yelena Kalyuzhnova, Amy Myers Jaffe, Dov Lynch, Robin C. Sickles (eds.), *Energy in the Caspian Region: Present and Future*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 234–250; Gökhan Bacık, "Turkey and the Pipeline Politics", *Turkish Studies*, 7:2 (2006), pp. 293–306

<sup>13</sup> See Foreign Ministry's briefs, "Turkey's relations with the Latin American and the Caribbean Countries" at <[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i\\_turkey\\_s-relations-with-the-latin-american-and-the-caribbean-countries.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i_turkey_s-relations-with-the-latin-american-and-the-caribbean-countries.en.mfa)> and "Turkey-Africa Relations" at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>, (accessed 30/06/2014.)

<sup>14</sup> The policy was named after his eponymous book *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], İstanbul: Küre Yayınları.

with the internationalisation of the Syrian civil war—that the “zero problems policy with neighbours” aspect of this doctrine seemed destined to fail in a region where almost all actors experience tension, crises or conflict with other important players. The result was a mixed factsheet at the end of the day, requiring a revision of it in general and readjustment of some key bilateral relationships in particular.

## **Making Sense of the Motivations behind Turkey’s New Grand Strategic Behaviour and Theoretical Debate**

In an era of gradually increasing activism on Turkey’s part with mixed results, the key question is how to make sense of this shift in terms of its motivations and factors behind it. Such an analysis would not only offer a better grasp of Turkish foreign and domestic policy in this era, but also provide some insights about other rising powers, too, at a time, regional powerhouses could enjoy more manoeuvrability once they succeed in challenging the hegemon to a certain extent.

In that light, the book primarily aims at addressing theoretical debates on the motivations behind Turkey’s changing grand strategic attitude over time.

The overarching argument of the book is that fluctuations in Turkey’s relative power position in response to the changes at the international level stand out as the key factor in making sense of this shift, while domestic transformations enabled the country to pursue an activist grand strategy more effectively. Therefore, it positions itself against a primordialist approach to the question—which attribute this shift to ideological and ethno-religious motivations in the form of “Islamism” or “Neo-Ottomanism”. At the same time, it also rejects strict “third image” theoretical approaches, primarily Waltzian realism, and puts emphasis on the domestic level, too. Therefore, with an approach that can be put under the broader and somehow ambiguous umbrella of Neoclassical Realism from an International Relations theory perspective, international and domestic levels are investigated in terms of their effects on the configuration and implementation of Turkey’s new grand strategy.

## Rival Explanations and Important Concepts

### *The Concept of Grand Strategy and Understanding the Shifts in Grand Strategic Designs*

In order to analyse grand strategy and alterations to it, it is firstly necessary to define and engage with the concept of “grand strategy”. There are basically two approaches. The first is a militarist approach which limits the concept to a wartime context and defines it only in terms of wartime goals. The second is a more holistic approach which sees the concept as a broader long-term political strategy that may or may not include wartime scenarios. According to this latter approach, the goal of raising a state’s profile can be achieved by utilising all possible international and domestic shifts and developments. As an important defender of the term’s militaristic definition, Sir Michael Howard refers to grand strategy only as a strategic endeavour directed towards wartime achievements within a limited time frame:

Grand Strategy... consisted basically in the mobilisation and deployment of national resources of wealth, manpower and industrial capacity, together with those of allied and where feasible, of neutral powers, for the purpose of achieving the goals of policy in wartime.<sup>15</sup>

I consider this militarist definition to be too narrow in scope, and will instead embrace a more comprehensive version of the concept of grand strategy in this book. Morgenthau’s denouncement of war as an irrational foreign policy instrument in contemporary world affairs<sup>16</sup> supports the idea that any grand strategy needs to be re-evaluated in the light of the relationship between political ends and military means, and should move beyond war-oriented calculations. As such, limiting the scope of grand strategy to wartime seems outmoded and simplistic in terms of analysing the components of a state’s power and the scope of its strategies.

In line with such an approach, Captain Liddle Hart states that grand strategy is a concept that refers to the long-term use of any tool a state possesses in

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<sup>15</sup> Sir Michael Howard, “Grand Strategy in the Twentieth Century”, *Defence Studies* 1:1 (Spring 2001), pp. 1–10, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Brown, “The Twilight of International Morality”? Hans J. Morgenthau and Carl Schmitt on the end of *Jus Publicum Europeum*” in Michael C. Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 42–62, at p. 52; Hans Morgenthau, “Power Politics”, in Freda Kirchway, ed., *The Atomic Era – Can it Bring Peace and Abundance?*, New York: Medill McBride, 1950, p. 37.

order to advance its interests.<sup>17</sup> Mark Brawley shares this assumption, and argues that the concept refers to the use of all possible means in order to advance state interests at home and abroad during peacetime as well as wartime.<sup>18</sup>

In this book, the concept of grand strategy is defined as an overall effort to use all assets—including day-to-day or long-term foreign policy choices, economic devices and extraction and mobilisation capacities—at the disposal of any state, with the ultimate goal of power-maximisation. This definition includes not only keeping regimes and structures in place with a survival-centred focus, but also projecting state power abroad in order to pursue more ambitious goals.

Analysing a shift or shifts in the attitude of people, communities or states requires an investigation of the factors, motivations, and actors that shape and re-shape such shifts. As such, grand strategic shifts undergone by a state over time require a thorough analysis in order to identify the most influential factors, and to make sense of the resulting changes and their knock-on effects. There are usually several conflicting lines of argument presented with respect to any particular case, which means that identifying these conflicting approaches and evaluating their explanatory power is an important component of the effort to make sense of changing attitudes. The grand strategic shifts any state experience and an analysis of these shifts, offer insights not only into that state's changing external and internal settings which have engendered the grand strategic shift, but also into comparable shifts experienced in similar cases.

Drawing from the holistic and inclusive approach to grand strategy and the external and internal factors that engender and reshape it, the question the book will focus on is whether changes in Turkey's grand strategy have come about as a result of religious revivalism (as simplistic culturalist and/or ideology-driven accounts argue) or (as realists would argue) a by-product of changing power- and interest-driven calculations.

Primordialist accounts regard grand strategic shifts as a result of the changes in ideological and value-driven preferences that shape alliances and rivalries. If the ruling elite are replaced by another group of elites with

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation", *Review of International Studies*, 36:1 (2010), pp. 117–143, p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> Mark R. Brawley, *Political Economy and Grand Strategy: A Neoclassical Realist View* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 3.

different ideological preferences, then grand strategic choices as well as particular foreign policy moves will undergo significant changes in line with the ideological preferences of this new elite. In the Turkish case, such an analysis implies that the replacement of the Kemalist and aggressive secular elite by the JDP—comprising a new group of policy-makers, mostly with Islamist backgrounds—has resulted in tectonic foreign policy changes, altering the country's grand strategic positioning. On the other hand, realists would argue that such a change can only occur due to changing power-driven calculations in response to fluctuations in relative power, either as an irresistible feature of humankind, or as a result of anarchy in the international system. Therefore, the shift Turkey experienced (and is still experiencing) needs to be primarily interpreted in terms of its changing systemic power position in response to changes in its surroundings and in the broader international and global system, causing fluctuations in its relative power.

I argue that rather than a value-driven shift, Turkey's activism reflects a far more realist one. In line with this position, this research positions itself against the primordialist approach and embraces a realist reading of the process in terms of the way it engenders and drives Turkey's activism. Morgenthau argued that "The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power."<sup>19</sup>

In Ancient Greece, "the real cause of the Peloponnesian War was the growth of the power of Athens".<sup>20</sup> Increasing relative power is mostly followed by an activist grand strategy and a stronger desire to extend power and influence abroad. This law held true in ancient Greece. The Athenians rightly ascribed it to human nature, and as such, it has maintained its centrality over the ensuing millennia.<sup>21</sup> Operating under anarchy, primary actors—mostly states, as purposive and unitary actors—pursue their interests rationally.<sup>22</sup> Power-maximisation is the key to a successful pursuit of national interest, and the scope of national interests will expand and evolve in line with the changes in relative power. With the end of the Cold

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<sup>19</sup> Morgenthau, 1954, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: PenguinBooks, 1986) book 1 chapter 23; Rose, 1998, pp. 153–154 and Jonathan Monten, "Thucydides and Modern Realism", *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006), pp. 3–25, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, book 5 chapter 105 and Monten, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Monten, 2006, p. 8.

War, Turkey found itself in an era defined by greater manoeuvrability and the sudden absence of previously rigid bipolar settings. In line with fluctuations in its own and its regional rivals' power, and to take advantage of these fluctuations to raise its profile, Turkey's grand strategic approach became a great deal more actively oriented.

The study embraces neoclassical realism (NCR), incorporating both international and domestic factors in its analysis. It accepts that the primary drivers of changes will be at the international level, and their impact on the relative power position of a particular state will be the main cause of changes in state behaviour. However, it also accepts that domestic factors can also affect the state's ability to pursue its desired goals. In line with this assumption, investigating changes at both international and domestic levels would provide a more comprehensive understanding of why Turkey pursued an activist grand strategy in the post-Cold war era, and why the country experienced the zenith of this activism abroad under the JDP rule.

With its detailed analysis of Turkey's changing grand strategic attitude and the motivations behind these shifts, especially in the period under the JDP rule, the book would attract a broad audience. This audience would consist not only of scholars and policy-makers dealing with Turkey's foreign policy attitudes and grand strategy, but also of scholars whose primary focus is IR theory. The research also addresses an audience focusing on the analyses of how lesser powers acted in the post-Cold War era in general, even if they are not studying the particular case of Turkey. This book would inspire research on the concept of grand strategy, theoretical approaches to it and the explanatory power of NCR within the context of rising powers and Turkish foreign policy. In theoretical terms, the book not only offers a comprehensive approach to NCR itself (which is currently an amalgam of several different approaches) but also extends NCR's empirical reach and offers a middle ground between realist analysis and culturalist readings of Turkey and its grand strategy.

### **Primordialist Explanations, Neoclassical Realism, and Making Sense of Turkey's Grand Strategic Behaviour**

Primordialism refers to religion, culture, tradition, ethnicity and history in general as the key independent variables affecting policy outcomes.<sup>23</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup> Eva Bellin, "Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics", *World Politics* 60:2 (2008), pp. 315–347. See also Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations", *The Journal of*

core primordialist assumption is that differences and similarities in the religious and ethnic values of actors determine their choice of allies and enemies, acting as the main independent variable in policy-making processes.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most popular defenders of this line of argument is Samuel Huntington, who, in his *Clash of Civilizations*, argued that in the post-Cold War era, the lines of conflict and cooperation would be drawn along religious boundaries.<sup>25</sup> Huntington argued that “in the modern world, religion is central, perhaps *the* central, force that motivates and mobilizes people.”<sup>26</sup> He goes on to draw imaginary boundaries along “civilizational” lines between Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Sub-Saharan Africa and so on,<sup>27</sup> showing the way he frames ethnicity and more importantly religion at the top of his interpretation of the “new world” in the post-Cold War era. Since only one of Huntington’s groupings, namely the Sub-Saharan African civilisation, does not follow an explicit religious affiliation, it can be concluded that religion also triumphs over ethnicity in his definition of the ultimate motivation for social groups—up to and including states.

Several key international developments have reinforced this primordialist reading of the world. For instance, the proclamation of the State of Israel and ensuing decades of conflict between the Arab states and Israel have highlighted religion’s continuing influence in international politics. To primordialists, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 signalled nothing less than the “return of religion” or the “global resurgence of religion”,<sup>28</sup> while

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*Modern History* 73:4 (2001), pp. 862–896 and Patricia Springborg, “Politics, Primordialism, and Orientalism: Marx, Aristotle, and the Myth of the Gemeinschaft”, *The American Political Science Review* 80: 1 (1986), pp. 185–211.

<sup>24</sup> Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, “Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29:3 (2000), pp. 641–674, p. 641–643.

<sup>25</sup> Sabina A Stein, “Competing Political Science Perspectives on the Role of Religion in Conflict”, *Politorbis* 52:2 (2011), pp. 21–26 and Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000, p. 643.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3 (1993), pp. 22–49, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, “Religion and International Relations after ‘9/11’”, *Democratization* 12:3 (2005), pp. 398–413, p. 398 and Bassam Tibi, “Post-Bipolar Order in Crisis:

religiously intensified conflicts in the former Yugoslavia offered further empirical ammunition to the primordialist approach. Such events drove sociologist Peter Berger to revise his stance from his 1968 opinion that religions would lose their importance in time to his confession in 1999 that he was wrong and the world is as “furiously religious as it ever was”.<sup>29</sup> The terror attacks of 9/11, which were defined as being religiously-motivated, provided the most important empirical ammunition to the primordialist approach, sparking a post-9/11 growth in debates about the role of religion in international relations.

However, it is also a widely held argument that world politics seriously challenges the validity of primordialism. One of the primordialists’ most popular case studies is Iran, with its clear official religious orientation and the numerous statements made by its leaders. However, many studies have concluded that Iran—from the famous “Contra-Iran affair”, referring to Iran’s covert cooperation with the “Great Satan” and the “lesser Satan” (the United States and Israel respectively), to its high levels of trade with the Christian West—is in fact an important demonstration of the limitations of such an approach. The country’s cooperation with Armenia against predominantly Muslim (and Shi’a) Azerbaijan and its pro-Russian policy regarding the Chechnya question is seen as some other examples of these limitations.<sup>30</sup> In *The Limits of Culture*, a major study on how primordialism frequently fails to explain state behaviour, Shaffer and Ansari show how Iranian policy is in fact far from being primordialist. There are further cases showing the limits of primordialist explanations, even in respect of the cases primordialism is widely used to make sense of. Cornell, for example, shows how Pakistani politics, despite being run under the banner of religion, maintains a clear realpolitik line. Suny offers a detailed analysis of the post-Soviet Turkic states which construct their identities via their preferred policy choices and their allies and enemies, rather than by following

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The Challenge of Politicised Islam”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29:3 (2000), pp. 843–859.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: An Overview”, in Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington DC: Eerdmans/Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ruhi Ramazani, “Iran’s Foreign Policy: Contending Orientations”, *Middle East Journal* 43:2 (1989), pp. 202–217, p. 213; Ruhi Ramazani, “Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Journal* 58: 4 (2004), pp. 549–559, pp. 556–559; Tibi, 2000; Brenda Shaffer, “The Islamic Republic of Iran: Is It Really?” in Brenda Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 219–240, p. 221–229.



“ancient” ethnic or religious codes by analysing their interactions with other states.<sup>31</sup>

However, from rationalizing the Global War on Terror to dealing with the immigrant question in Europe, and from making sense of apparently endless Middle Eastern conflicts to analysing individual countries such as Turkey, the primordialist approach has gained a certain amount of credence—especially outside academia, but also to some extent within academic circles.<sup>32</sup> In their explanations of the phenomenon of the “New Turkey”, primordialist accounts argue that ideology and values act as the ultimate motivation behind the shift.

### **Turkey and Primordialist Explanations: A Value-Driven Ethno-Religious Shift?**

The overarching argument of the primordialist approach to Turkey’s grand strategic shift attributes it to Islamism and ummah<sup>33</sup>-oriented policy-making, or a sense of neo-Ottomanism with the ultimate goal of reviving Turkey’s Ottoman past. These two concepts are frequently used interchangeably or at least in conjunction with each other as they both follow a similar value-driven mindset.<sup>34</sup>

Primordialist accounts have their own explanations for the dramatic shifts in Turkey’s particular bilateral relationships. The three selected cases stand out as being particularly illustrative within this context. Turkey, during the

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<sup>31</sup> See Brenda Shaffer, “The Islamic Republic of Iran: Is It Really?”, pp. 219–240; Ali M. Ansari, “Civilizational Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Iran”, pp. 241–262; Svante E. Cornell, “Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: Islamic or Pragmatic?”, pp. 291–324; and Ronald Grigor Suny, “History and Foreign Policy: From Constructed Identities to ‘Ancient Hatreds’ East of the Caspian”, in Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture*, pp. 83–110, respectively.

<sup>32</sup> Haynes, 2005 and Stein, 2011, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> The term “ummah” refers to the “nation of believers/Muslims”, a key Islamic concept.

<sup>34</sup> Ziya Öniş, “Multiple Faces of the New Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique,” *Insight Turkey* 13:1 (2011), pp. 47–65, pp. 47–48. On the debates surrounding the ‘shift of axis’, also see Meliha B. Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, “Making Sense of Turkish foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP”, *Turkish Studies* 12:4 (2011), 569–587, p. 572; Bülent Aras, “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *SETA Policy Brief* 32, (May 2009), p. 8; Zeyno Baran, *Torn Country Turkey: Between Secularism and Islamism*, (California: Hoover Institute Press, 2010), p. 106–117.

JDP rule, has been politically ruled by conservative democrats, of whom almost the entire senior cadre has an political background in Islamist political parties.<sup>35</sup> As one would expect from such an identity- and ideology-centred political outlook, Turkey has significantly improved its relations with Iran as another dominantly Muslim-populated country, whilst its relations with Israel have deteriorated. Turkey has at best a stagnant relationship with the EU, towards which previous Islamist movements had serious ideology- and identity-driven objections. These new dynamics have reinforced ideology-driven efforts to explain “New Turkey” and encouraged studies, op-eds, articles and books to adopt such a theoretical viewpoint.<sup>36</sup>

### ***a. The JDP and Islamism***

According to primordialist or naïve culturalist approaches, the JDP—with its leading figures’ Islamist backgrounds—has worked to “Islamise” Turkish grand strategy. The JDP was founded by a leading trio of politicians—Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç—who led the reformist movement within the Erbakanist tradition. Therefore, the JDP’s leading figures, with their Islamist political backgrounds within an Islamist political movement which had been led for decades by Necmettin

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<sup>35</sup> As the leading Islamist political figure in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan was the key figure in Turkey’s Islamist political movement from the 1970s. His political parties were banned one after another—the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party, the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party and the Felicity Party (which is still active on Turkey’s political scene)—until his death in 2011. However, the JDP evolved from Erbakan’s political philosophies and was founded in 2001 by the “reformist” wing of the Virtue Party. With respect to the differences between Erbakan-led Islamist political parties and the JDP as a conservative democrat party, see Hale and Özbudun, 2010, p. 20–33. On the emergence of the JDP, see also Stein, 2014, p. 1–11.

<sup>36</sup> For some examples of such an approach, see Ömer Taşpınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”, *Carnegie Papers* 10, (September 2008), p. 1–15. On this concept, see also Bulent Aras, “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *SETA Policy Brief* 32, (May 2009), p. 6; Cengiz Çandar, “Turkey’s Soft Power Strategy: A New Vision for a Multipolar World” in *SETA Brief*, No.38 (2009), p. 4; Ahmet Sözen, “A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges”, *Turkish Studies* 11: 1 (2010), pp.103–123, pp. 108 and 119; Zeyno Baran, *Torn Country Turkey: Between Secularism and Islamism*, p. 116–117; Soner Çağaptay, “When Islamist foreign policies hurt Muslims”, *LA Times*, 7/12/2009 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/07/opinion/la-oe-cagaptay7-2009dec07>>, accessed 06/07/2013; Soner Çağaptay, “Turkey mends fences with Israel”, *Jane’s Islamic Affairs Analyst*, 16/04/2013.

Erbakan, were expected to pursue a similar Islamist approach despite their constant reiteration that their new political party had nothing to do with Erbakanist policy line and rather, referred to it as a conservative democrat political party. As an important example of assessments drawn from this approach, Cornell argued that:

Erdogan and Davutoglu set out as pan-Islamists, which is truly the root of Davutoglu's ideology, a naïve belief that Muslims have the same interests, should be united, and all splits among Muslims are the result of nasty imperialists and/or Jews. ...it is to me beyond any doubt that this [Turkey's new grand strategy] has been an ideologically motivated policy...2008-11 was the period of Pan-Islamism, which ended with the Arab uprisings, which led to a period of Sunni sectarian policies lasting to the present, though in a more and more reactive way as Turkey's ability to manoeuvre has been cut down in Egypt, Iraq and Syria.<sup>37</sup>

Even though there has always been a tendency to reject Erbakanist roots and religion in general as a founding political principle of the JDP, speeches and statements to the contrary have been far from absent, enriching the empirical ammunition of primordialist approaches.

To mention some examples, former PM Davutoğlu once stated: “Since the end of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims have gotten the short end of the stick, and the JDP is here to correct all that”.<sup>38</sup> This statement appears to stand as a strong reference to the tension between the Muslim civilisation and the external “other”, in which Turkey positions itself within the camp labelled as the Muslim world. Furthermore, according to Davutoğlu's statement, Turkey appears eager to act as *the* representative for the Muslim world in order to improve the situation of the Muslims in the international system. Drawing from this statement, Islam stands out not only as Turkey's defining characteristic, but also an important source of motivation in Turkish policy-making. The JDP's rhetoric about the Palestinian cause led Hamas leader Mashal to name Erdoğan as a “leader of the Islamic world”. Rashid Al-Ghannouchi, leader of Tunisia's Ennahda Movement, considered the JDP era in Turkey as a “return to the heart of the ummah”<sup>39</sup> and the JDP rule as

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<sup>37</sup> Svante Cornell, personal communication, 17/2/2016.

<sup>38</sup> Sally Mcnamara, Ariel Cohen, James Philips, “Countering Turkey's Strategic Drift”, *Backgrounders*, No. 2442, July 26, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and its Limitations”, *Insight Turkey* 15:1 (2013), pp. 91–109, p. 94.

a “successful modern Muslim administration,”<sup>40</sup> empirically reinforcing Turkey’s Islamist credentials. The JDP occasionally uses religiously-oriented rhetoric, and this rhetoric is warmly embraced by religiously-oriented political groupings both in Turkey and abroad.

Embracing other actors within the Muslim world in both political and economic terms has been an important facet of leading JDP figures’ public speeches. Erdoğan’s address at Cairo University echoed his famous public address on the balcony of the JDP’s headquarters after the party’s election victory in 2011. In that address, he stated that Gaza, Ramallah, Damascus, Mecca, Medina, Istanbul, and Diyarbakır were all “brothers”, and his references to the atrocities happening in these cities stressed the strong tone of Islamic fraternity that underlays his thinking.<sup>41</sup> His call for “raising a religious generation”<sup>42</sup>, his defence of Sudanese leader Bashir in 2009 when he said that “a Muslim cannot commit suicide”<sup>43</sup> and similar statements further strengthened the empirical basis of a value and ideology-based assessment of the “new Turkey”.

### ***b. Value-Driven Neo-Ottoman Discourse***

“Neo-Ottomanism” is a concept that is mentioned in many studies, and mainly refers to a grand strategic approach with direct links to Turkey’s Ottoman past. The concept of “Neo-Ottomanism”, when first coined during the early 1990s, referred mainly to Turgut Özal’s foreign policy approach.<sup>44</sup> However, it is argued that the concept has been further developed by the

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<sup>40</sup> Stein, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> Duran, 2013, p. 94-95.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Cornell, 2012, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Turgut Özal (1927-1993) was Turkey’s eighth President. He graduated from Istanbul Technical University, then studied economics in the United States. He served as the head of the State Planning Organization (SPO) for two terms, worked at the World Bank and at the Sabancı Holding Company. In 1983, he formed the Motherland Party, which won the first free multi-party elections after the coup in 1980. The party was the leading political party between 1983 and 1993, with significant levels of public support in several elections of around 30 to 45 percent. The party, with its centre-right stance and emphasis on economic improvement, can be regarded as the predecessor of the JDP. Similarly its leader, Turgut Özal, who served as Prime Minister between 1983 and 1989 and as President between 1989 and 1993, can be broadly regarded as the predecessor to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, due to not only to their ideological similarities but also to their focus on economic improvement and domestic reformation as well as increasing involvement in neighbouring regions.

JDP, which has put a great deal of effort into its pursuit of this concept.<sup>45</sup> Fuller defines the term as “a renewed interest in the former territories and people of the Empire, which includes Muslims who were part of the Empire”.<sup>46</sup> This conceptualisation argues that Turkey’s pursuit of Western identity and closer integration with the West has been replaced by nostalgic sense of Islamism and the pursuit of the country’s Ottoman past as a result of a major “shift of axis”.<sup>47</sup> Taheri argues that Erdoğan is pursuing neo-Ottomanism as a way of fulfilling Turkey’s “historical responsibility” to the former Ottoman Empire<sup>48</sup> by disguising it as Islamist endeavour.<sup>49</sup>

There are numerous examples of statements that empirically reinforce primordialist explanations in the JDP era. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2009 and 2014 and as Prime Minister from late 2014 to mid-2016, referred to the last century as a “parenthesis” setting Turkey apart from its Ottoman past, a separation to which Turkey is determined to put an end.<sup>50</sup> Davutoğlu refers to the Republican People’s Party era’s policy of distancing the country from the former Ottoman space as regretful, and emphasises his desire to revive this link based on the historical borders of the Ottoman Empire. As a key figure since 2002 as a politician considered one of the masterminds behind the ruling party’s early foreign policy choices and later, formed his splitter political party (i.e. Future Party) in 2019, Davutoğlu used the term “restoration” when referring

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<sup>45</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”, *Carnegie Papers* 10, (September 2008), p. 1–15. On this concept, see also Bülent Aras, 2009, p. 6; Cengiz Çandar, “Turkey’s Soft Power Strategy: A New Vision for a Multipolar World” in *SETA Brief*, No.38 (2009), p. 4; Ahmet Sözen, 2010, p. 108 and 119; Zeyno Baran, 2010, p. 116–117; Nora Fisher Onar, “Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy”, *EDAM Discussion Paper Series* 3, (2009). Also see Nur Bilge Criss, “Parameters of Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Governments”, UNISCI Discussion Papers 23 (2010), pp. 9–22.

<sup>46</sup> Graham Fuller, *Turkey Faces East: New orientations toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, “A New Ottoman Empire?”, *Forbes*, 06/02/2009, <<http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/02/ahmet-davutoglu-turkey-obama-opinions-contributors-ottoman-empire.html>>, accessed 18/08/2013.

<sup>48</sup> Tarık Oğuzlu, “Middle Easternization of Turkey’s Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?”, *Turkish Studies* 9:1 (2008), pp. 3–20, p.13.

<sup>49</sup> Amir Taheri, “Turkey and the Neo-Ottoman Dream”, *Al Arabiya*, 06/08/2011, <<http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/08/06/161026.html>>, accessed 12/07/2012.

<sup>50</sup> Tulin Daloğlu, “Davutoglu Invokes Ottomanism as New Mideast Order”, *Al Monitor*, 10/03/2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/turkey-davutoglu-ottoman-new-order-mideast.html#>>, accessed 01/02/2014.

to the JDP's mission to revisit Turkey's relationship with the former Ottoman space, a word that carries with it the nostalgic sense of reinventing something better that existed in the past—in this case, the Ottoman era.<sup>51</sup>

In a similar vein, Davutoğlu also stated that “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”.<sup>52</sup> Here, references to the people beyond Turkey's population—as well as the use of the term “debt” regarding Turks living outside the country and to those who are “related to our land”—clearly highlight another direct reference to the Ottoman past. He further stated that: “We are a society with historical depth, and everything produced in historical depth, even if it is eclipsed at a certain conjuncture of time, may manifest itself again later”. The reference to this “historical depth” again underlines Davutoğlu's allusions to the Ottoman connection. He mentions Turkey's “historical responsibility” with respect to developments in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East—areas which share the experience of centuries-long Ottoman rule.<sup>53</sup>

At a conference in Sarajevo, Davutoğlu stated that “... the Ottoman Balkans were a successful part of history and now should be reborn...” in a speech referring to the Ottoman era in the Balkans as an era of economic interdependence, collaboration, and political harmony.<sup>54</sup> In the same speech he also noted that:

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<sup>51</sup> Çınar Kiperapr, “Sultan Erdogan: Turkey's Rebranding Into the New, Old Ottoman Empire”,

<<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/04/sultan-erdogan-turkeys-rebranding-into-the-new-old-ottoman-empire/274724/>>, accessed 12/03/2014.

<sup>52</sup> Srđja Trifkovic, “Neo-Ottomanism in Action: Turkey as a Regional Power”, *Balkan Studies*, 07/02/2012, <<http://www.balkanstudies.org/articles/neo-ottomanism-action-turkey-regional-power>>, accessed 03/03/2014.

<sup>53</sup> “The “Strategic Depth” that Turkey Needs”, Interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, *The Turkish Daily News*, 15/12/2001.

<sup>54</sup> Nicolas Panayiotides, “Turkey between Introversion and Regional Hegemony from Ozal to Davutoglu”, *The Cyprus Journal of Sciences* 8 (2010), pp. 23–38, p. 28. On Turkey's activism in the Balkans, which is used as an empirical starting point for the ethno-religious assessment of Neo-Ottomanism, see Zarko Petrovic and Dusan Reljic, “Turkish Interests and Involvement in the Western Balkans: A Score-Card,” *Insight Turkey* 13:3 (2011), pp. 159–172; Erhan Türbedar, “Turkey's New Activism in the Western Balkans: Ambitions and Obstacles”, *Insight Turkey* 13:3 (2011), pp. 139–158; Dimitar Bechev, “Turkey in the Balkans: Taking a Broader View”, *Insight Turkey* 14:1 (2012), pp. 131–146.

One western diplomat asked “why are you suddenly parachuting this issue? Why are you involved in Bosnia like parachutes?” I told our ambassador who brought this news to me: “Tell them we didn’t go to Bosnia with parachutes, we went by horse and stayed there with the Bosnians sharing the same destiny!”<sup>55</sup>

Here, “going to Bosnia by horse and staying there” is another direct reference to the Ottoman past, and Davutoğlu’s emphasis on the success of the Ottoman era underlines his appraisal of it. In 2006 another important figure, Turkish State Minister Kürşad Tüzmen, stated that “...the AKP government wished to cultivate a relationship with peoples that once lived in the Ottoman geography based on cooperation and respect. This conveyed a soft-power approach to neo-Ottomanism.”<sup>56</sup> The statement highlighted the JDP’s desire to establish closer links with the former Ottoman space whilst at the same time carefully referring to “cooperation and respect” in an effort to downgrade any possible sense of “imperial tone”.

In spite of all these and many similar statements from Turkey’s leading figures, the question of whether primordialism still enjoys a major explanatory position with respect to Turkey is quite difficult to be replied with a positive answer indeed.

### **Weaknesses of Primordialism in Analysing the Shifts in Turkey’s Grand Strategy**

The main argument of this book is that primordialist approaches suffer from serious weaknesses and cannot provide a comprehensive explanatory framework for the shifts in Turkey’s grand strategy.

Shaffer argues that “If Islam is the defining force in a Muslim-populated state, then...these states should be willing to make significant material sacrifices and take security risks to promote their religious beliefs”.<sup>57</sup> Shifts in Turkey’s grand strategic position are in fact a long way from Shaffer’s definition of religiously motivated grand strategic moves. Instead, they

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<sup>55</sup> Gökhan Saz, “The Political Implications of the European Integration of Turkey: Political Scenarios and Major Stumbling Blocks”, *European Journal of Social Science* 20:1 (2011), pp. 47–80, p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> Criss, 2010, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Brenda Shaffer, “Is There a Muslim Foreign Policy?”, *Current History*, November 2002,

<<http://belfercenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/currenthistory%20article%2011.02.pdf>>, accessed 12/12/2013.

seem to be more pragmatic and opportunistic, adopting policies that best serve Turkey's goal of power-maximisation across multiple regions. Turkey did not just seek to improve its relations with predominantly Muslim-populated neighbouring countries, but eagerly strove towards acquiring a higher profile in every theatre in which it perceived an opportunity to engage itself, whilst simultaneously trying to utilise each emerging window of opportunity in its surroundings.

According to Simpson, "As the Erdogan years in Turkey have attempted to turn Turkey from a once secular country into a de facto Islamist country, the West and Turkey seem to be on a collision course..."<sup>58</sup> The argument that the JDP has been eager to improve Turkey's relations with its Muslim neighbours<sup>59</sup> is a common theme in similar studies—although the argument seems prejudicial, based on questionable empirical data. For instance, as an important example of Turkey's much closer relationship with particular non-Muslim actors in this era, the dramatic increase in the Turkish-Russian economic activity has been accompanied by a much closer political relationship. This lasted until the two nations faced a crisis over Turkey's downing of a Russian jet in 2015 due to the aircraft's alleged repeated transgression of Turkish airspace, although the atmosphere began to relax in August 2016 with Erdoğan's visit to Moscow<sup>60</sup> followed by an era of even closer relations over Syria and also with respect to Turkey's purchase of S-400 defence systems. The increasing number of Turkish diplomatic representations to Caribbean and African countries,<sup>61</sup> as well as early efforts

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<sup>58</sup> Simpson, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Efraim Inbar, "Israeli-Turkish Tensions and Beyond", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 8:3 (2009), pp. 27–35.

<sup>60</sup> Göktuğ Sönmez, *Energy dependency and a Route Map Within the Context of the Recent Turkey-Russia Crisis*, ORSAM Review of Regional Affairs, No. 36, December 2015 and "Putin mends broken relations with Turkey's Erdogan", 9/8/2016, *BBC*, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37018562>>, accessed 11/8/2016; "Russia's Putin and Turkey's Erdogan meet after damaging rift", 9/8/2016, *CNN*, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/09/world/russia-putin-turkey-erdogan-meeting/>>, accessed 10/8/2016; "Erdoğan and Putin discuss closer ties in first meeting since jet downing", 9/8/2016, *The Guardian*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/09/erdogan-meets-putin-leaders-seek-mend-ties-jet-downing-russia-turkey>>, accessed 10/8/2016; "Russia and Turkey Vow to Repair Ties as West Watches Nervously", 9/8/2016, *New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/10/world/europe/putin-erdogan-russia-turkey.html>>, accessed 11/8/2016.

<sup>61</sup> See "Turkey-Russia Eye Increased Trade, Joint Auto Production", <<http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/infocenter/news/Pages/261113-turkey-russia->



to improve relations with Armenia and Greece,<sup>62</sup> are other significant examples acting as contradictions to primordialist theory.

Even the most faithful supporters of the idea of Turkey's pursuit of an "Islamic grand strategy" cannot fail to recognise the empirical weaknesses of this theoretical framework. For example, Soner Çağaptay, an ardent defender of such a position, argues that:

Russian violence in Chechnya continues, yet the JDP seems not to be bothered by the Chechen Muslims' suffering. Despite Russia's northern Caucasus policies, the rapport between Russian leader Vladimir Putin and

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joint-auto-production.aspx>, 26/11/2013, accessed 8/12/2014 and Foreign Ministry's statistics on "Turkey's Commercial and Economic Relations With Russian Federation", <[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa)>, accessed 6/12/2014. According to these, trade with Russia increased from around \$4 billion in 2002 to \$35 billion in 2012. See also Foreign Ministry's briefs, "Turkey's relations with the Latin American and the Caribbean Countries" at <[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i\\_turkey\\_s-relations-with-the-latin-american-and-the-caribbean-countries.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/i_turkey_s-relations-with-the-latin-american-and-the-caribbean-countries.en.mfa)> and "Turkey-Africa Relations" at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>, accessed 30/06/2014. In line with these, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statistics, trade with Africa increased from almost \$3 billion in 2002 to almost \$20 billion in 2012, and in the same era, trade with the Caribbean increased 9-fold and reached around \$8 billion. In the same period, in both regions, the number of Turkey's diplomatic representations, including embassies and consulates, almost doubled and now Turkey has representations in almost all Caribbean countries. See *Sorumluluk ve Vizyon: 2014 Yılına Girerken Türk Dış Politikası* [Responsibility and Vision: Turkish Foreign Policy towards 2014], Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <<http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/sorumlulukvevizyon-2014.pdf>> accessed 20/1/2015.

<sup>62</sup> See "Turkey-Armenia Relations", European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies (October, 2013); Fulya Memişoğlu, "Easing Mental Barriers in Turkey-Armenia Relations: The Role of Civil Society", TESEV Foreign Policy Programme (2012); Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 52:2 (2010) pp. 157–180; Bahar Rumelili, "Transforming Conflicts on EU Borders: the Case of Greek-Turkish Relations", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45:1 (2007), pp. 105–126; Ziya Öniş and Şuhsnaz Yılmaz, "Greek-Turkish Rapprochement: Rhetoric or Reality?", *Political Science Quarterly* 123:1 (2008), pp. 123–149; Emiliano Alessandri, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy and the Future of Turkey-EU Relations", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 45:3 (2010), pp. 85–100.

Erdogan and commercial ties have cemented Turkish-Russian ties. Russia has become Turkey's No. 1 trading partner, replacing Germany.<sup>63</sup>

From controversies over the positioning of the Ballistic Missile Defence System (BMDS) in Turkey to Turkey's interest-driven engagement during the Arab Spring; from its continuing commitment to EU reforms and its maintenance of economic ties with Israel (even during the height of political tension), there is nothing to indicate a dramatic ideology or a religion-driven shift of axis.

Shortcomings to the primordialist neo-Ottoman viewpoint are just as numerous. The term "neo-Ottoman" was popularised in the Özal era, with Özal seen as the architect of an activist grand strategy designed to end Turkey's isolation from the Middle East. Özal "was a man for economic liberalization and Turkey's strategic place in the Middle East".<sup>64</sup> He also aimed to engage with the former Soviet Union with the goal of making Turkey a more influential player in the post-Cold War era by utilising Turkey's cultural and historical assets.<sup>65</sup> Thus, even the earliest mentions of the "neo-Ottoman" label actually indicate an attitude that was strictly interest-driven.

Later mentions of the same "neo-Ottoman" stance were broadly attributed to Ahmet Davutoğlu, and referred to his effort to replicate the "glorious achievement [of] the Muslim Turks".<sup>66</sup> The label is also used with reference to the threats it occasionally poses to Turkey's material achievements. The argument suggests that if such an ethno-religious endeavour, based on

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<sup>63</sup> Soner Cağaptay, "When Islamist foreign policies hurt Muslims", *LA Times*, 7/12/2009 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/07/opinion/la-oe-cagaptay-7-2009-dec07>>, accessed 06/07/2013.

<sup>64</sup> Norman Stone, *Turkey: A Short History* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2010), 162.

<sup>65</sup> Cengiz Çandar, "Turgut Özal: The Ottoman of the 21st Century", *Sabah*, 28/4/1992; Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:6 (2006), pp. 945–964, p. 946–947; Lerna Yanık, "Constructing Turkish "Exceptionalism": Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy", *Political Geography* 30 (2011), pp. 80–89, p. 84; Cengiz Çandar, "Turgut Özal Twenty Years After: The Man and the Politician", *Insight Turkey* 15:2 (2013), pp. 27–36.

<sup>66</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 7:12 (1998), pp. 19–41, p. 23; Yanık, 2011, p. 84–85.

“Ottoman legacy and Islamic tradition”,<sup>67</sup> were to triumph over Turkey’s efforts towards power-maximisation, it would do the country more harm than good.

Onar argues that Turkey pursued a Neo-Ottomanist grand strategy to match its cultural assets, not to advance its influence abroad. However, the problem with this argument—as she admits herself—is that this reading of Turkey’s grand strategy emerged in the 1990s at a time when Turkey was beginning to pursue its own interest-driven policy choices in response to a significant systemic external shift—the end of the Cold War, a timing which seems far from coincidental. Having the same values and cultural assets, this particular timing itself says a great deal about the underlying motivations behind such a transformation. A new era was beginning in the former Soviet space and in the Middle East, and this timing weakens Onar’s culturalist account, which was based on the claim that the shift centred on changing identity perceptions and the increasing importance of religious and cultural motivations in policy-making. A further problem is that while Onar ascribes such a change to factors of culture and identity, she also alludes to closer ties with Russia and increasing trade with Georgia as a way of advancing Neo-Ottomanism. However, neither of these moves accord with Onar’s choice of cultural assets (referring to a high commitment to Ottoman values and historical experience), on which she based her argument of Turkey’s Neo-Ottomanist grand strategy.<sup>68</sup>

Criticising such over-simplified culturalist approaches, this book embraces its own version of neoclassical realism, which has strong parallels to the way in which Zakaria understands the theoretical framework.

## Neoclassical Realism within the Broader Realist School

Realists do not deny that domestic politics influences foreign policy, but they contend that the pressures of [international] competition weigh more heavily than ideological preferences or internal political pressures.

—Kenneth Waltz<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Sinan Ülgen, “A Place in the Sun or Fifteen Minutes of Fame?: Understanding Turkey’s New Foreign Policy”, *Carnegie Papers* 1 (December 2010), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> See Nora Fisher Onar, “Neo Ottomanism, Historical Legacies and Turkish Foreign Policy”, *EDAM Discussion Paper Series* 3, (2009).

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Waltz, “A Response to My Critics” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 329 as mentioned in Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics”, *International Security* 17 (1992), pp. 177–198, p. 180.

Starting particularly from the end of the Cold War, critiques of Waltzian realism paved the way for theoretical endeavours investigating both international and domestic influences and the ways in which they help explain state behaviour.<sup>70</sup> Robert Jervis notes that the popularity of Neorealism has been in free fall since the end of bi-polarity.<sup>71</sup> Neorealism's neglect of domestic factors—as opposed to these factors' places in the Classical Realist school—further reinforced criticisms about its deterministic “billiard balls” analogy,<sup>72</sup> pushing for a revision which would examine the domestic level more closely. Thucydides, as the shared ancestor of the realist school, argued that domestic cultural and political differences among city-states affected the way the Peloponnesian War started and was fought.<sup>73</sup> Waltz himself admits the weaknesses of a strict “third image” foreign policy analysis that focuses only on the international level, and notes that the understanding of the forces that determine particular foreign policies will be incomplete without examining the “first and second images”, referring to individual and state levels.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, even though the billiard balls analogy contains significant truths in its reference to the impact of the contours of the broader billiard table and the interactions between the movement of each ball, its deterministic nature needs re-evaluation. The reason behind such a need is that “the spin, speed and bounce of the balls” also depend on the material the balls are made of, a reference to each country's individual domestic dynamics.<sup>75</sup>

As an important consequence of criticisms on Neorealism, Neoclassical Realism (NCR) emerged as a theoretical effort to revisit Neorealist determinism within the boundaries of the realist school. NCR offers a modification of Neorealist determinism by taking a renewed interest in

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<sup>70</sup> Michael C. Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Jervis, “Realism in the Study of World Politics”, *International Organization* 52:4, (Autumn 1998), pp. 971–991, at p.980.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 96–97.

<sup>73</sup> See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986) and Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, “The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations”, *International Organization* 48:1 (1994), pp. 131–153, at p. 132–136.

<sup>74</sup> Rose, 1998, p. 165–166.

<sup>75</sup> See Zakaria, 1998, p. 9.

Classical Realism's emphasis on other factors, ranging from domestic circumstances to the role of ideas and values.

The term "Neoclassical Realism" implies that the concept relates to "Classical Realism" but entails new ideations of that philosophy. NCR shares a classical realist emphasis on power-seeking and the selfish nature of individuals and communities, without ignoring Neorealism's emphasis on systemic and structural influences. It thus follows that in order to respond to problems arising from international anarchy, states would behave as Thucydides, Morgenthau and Carr expected them to—by expanding their influence to seek more power in order to achieve their interests. Morgenthau's imperfect political animal<sup>76</sup> is always selfish and its actions are motivated by self-interest; there is no prospect of correcting these flaws now or in the future, and we will inevitably compete for scarce resources driven by an *animus dominandi*<sup>77</sup> (a desire for power).<sup>78</sup> According to Kenneth Thompson, "human nature has not changed since the days of classical antiquity". This reflects Niebuhr's, Treitschke's and Morgenthau's pessimistic view of human nature as being driven by an uncontrollable desire for power, which will translate into a desire for even more power and influence in line with the Athenian thesis in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.<sup>79</sup>

NCR shares such common realist assumptions about power, interest and state behaviour, and argues that "states conduct their foreign policy for strategic reasons, as a consequence of international pulls and pushes."<sup>80</sup> It

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<sup>76</sup> William E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 2 and p.10; Anthony F. Lang, Jr., "Morgenthau, Agency, and Aristotle", in Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, pp. 18–42 at p.27. Also see Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003), p. 592. For Niebuhr's and Treitschke's views on this see Donnelly, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Lang, Jr., "Morgenthau, Agency, and Aristotle" in Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, p. 28; Scheuerman, 2009, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism" in John A. Vasquez & Colin Elman, *Realism and the Balance of Power: A New Debate* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>79</sup> See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), book 5 chapter 105; Donnelly, 2000, p. 57 and Monten, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> Zakaria, 1992, p. 179.

also re-introduces domestic and immaterial elements which were emphasised in Classical Realism in the past but were ignored during the “Waltzian reign”. As such, NCR offers a promising framework in terms of acting as a middle ground between realism and value-based accounts, since it makes room for values that have found their way to policy-making circles as secondary factors after state’s demands for power. It offers room for the examination of ideas and values and their impact on domestic factors and actors, in the same way as its classical realist ancestors did. This ability to act as a middle ground is even more important for countries such as Turkey, where policy moves are frequently ascribed to ideology and values.

In the next section, in order to link the research’s theoretical stance with the conceptualisation of the term “grand strategy”, I will show the parallels between the concept of grand strategy and NCR’s two-dimensional approach before moving on to explore NCR’s potential to explain the changes and continuities in Turkey’s grand strategy by looking at the changes at both of these levels.

## **The Concept of Grand strategy and Neoclassical Realist Scholarship**

The concept of *grand strategy*, with its focus on both international and domestic levels and the ultimate goal of power-maximisation, has strong parallels with the neoclassical realist approach. NCR emphasises a two-dimensional theoretical reading of state behaviour, with references to the shifts at both domestic and international level.

From as far back as Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the role of a state’s relative power as an enabling or constraining factor in the making of its grand strategic preferences has been fundamentally influential.<sup>81</sup> Once a political actor perceives that it can advance its influence by using a comparatively advantageous power position, an activist policy line is pursued.<sup>82</sup> From a historical viewpoint, changes at the international level in the form of shifting balances of power, shifts in relative power positions due to the elimination or demise of rivals or systemic structural shifts have all played roles in the rise and fall of the Great Britain,

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<sup>81</sup> Athanassios Platias and Constantinos Koliopoulos, 2002, p. 380-381.

<sup>82</sup> See Monten, 2006, p. 11.