Retrospective Review of Turkey's Middle East Policy

Bezen Balamir Coskun

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The Turkey Institute is a London-based centre for research, analysis and discussion on Turkey. It aims to offer high-quality analysis of the Turkish state and society with special emphasis on domestic and foreign policy and the economy. It also aims to provide objective updates and to organise high-level discussions on current issues, especially in relation to democratic governance, human rights, the rule of law and constitutional reform. Its work is intended to benefit policy-makers, the media and other relevant stakeholders to enable a more nuanced and thorough understanding of a country whose politics is very convoluted and difficult to unravel but, at the same time, whose successes and failures have wider implications for the region and the wider world in a number of areas, including the political, economic, cultural and the religious.

About the Author

Bezen Balamir Coskun, Research Fellow at the Turkey Institute, is an associate professor in international relations at Zirve University, Gaziantep. She received her Masters degree from Aalborg University, Denmark, on Development and International Relations, and her Ph.D. degree from Loughborough University, UK, on international relations. Bezen Coskun is an expert in international security and foreign policy, with particular focus on the Middle East region. Turkey's Middle East policy, the EU's neighbourhood policies towards the MENA region and Middle Eastern complex regional security are among her research interests.

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Foreword

I am delighted to present the Turkey Institute's second publication, written by Bezen Balamir Coskun and focused on Turkey's foreign policy orientation to the Middle East. The Turkey Institute offers high-quality analysis of the Turkish society and the state, with special emphasis on domestic and foreign policy and the economy. It provides objective updates, and organises high-level discussions on current issues, especially in relation to democratic governance, human rights, the rule of law and constitutional reform. As a part of that mission, the Turkey Institute will produce analytical papers to inform readers on pertinent issues in Turkey.

This present report provides an account of Turkey's policy orientation to its Middle Eastern neighbours. In the first part of the report, the author summarises Turkey's traditional foreign policy towards the Middle East, calling it 'non-alignment.' In the second part, the author covers the period from 2003 to 2011, referring to it as 're-engagement, proactive approach.' In the final part, the author analyses the role of Turkey in the Middle East post 2011 and the Arab uprising. In the conclusion, the author appraises Turkey's Syria policy in the context of Western concerns regarding the emergence of ISIS.

In the following pages, the author shares her insights regarding Turkey's border security and its effect on Europe's security. Syria is the country with which Turkey shares its longest border. The number of those European citizens joining the ranks of ISIS have been growing with every passing day. Turkey has been used as the main transit country for human trafficking by those who are fleeing and travelling to the region in order to join the ranks of radical jihadist groups. For the West, because of this combatting ISIS requires close cooperation with Turkey. However, increasing internal authoritarian tendencies, and a drift away from Western values and rhetorical rapprochement with the 'Eastern blog,' have been raising concerns in the West in regard to Turkey's position and its role as an ally.

It is in this context that we offer this report to readers, hoping that it contributes to well-grounded and well-reasoned discussion on Turkey. I thank Dr Coskun, the author of the publication, and those colleagues who have contributed to it through their valuable feedback and comments.

Dr Mustafa Demir
Co-Director

Executive Summary

With the eruption of the Arab Spring, Turkey was side-lined from regional affairs. In the region, its ambitions to be a regional power and the depth of its strategic discourse were seen as being neo-Ottoman claims. Particularly during the Arab Spring, Turkey's narrative of being a model state for Tunisia, Egypt and others was not well received by the new regimes in the region. The instability that prevailed in countries who experienced an 'Arab Spring' struck at Turkey's trade relations, as well as at their diplomatic relations with them. Turkey, as a power between countries in a volatile neighbourhood, Turkey found the sustainability of policies, such as zero problems with its neighbours and value-based approaches, was really difficult to attain. This was also problematic for the West as, for them, Turkey was a regional success story. While Turkey has been losing touch in the Middle East, internally the government has begun to show authoritarian tendencies, which gradually estranged Turkey from the West.

Now, surrounded by fragile if not failed, states, Ankara has been facing challenges in dealing with refugee flows and border controls. The rise of radical militant groups on her borders, isolation -or 'precious loneliness', in Turkish officials' words, is not sustainable for Turkey. As a transit country for both refugees, irregular migrants and terrorists, Turkey's border security has become one of the main concerns for Europeans states, primarily for the UK and France.

The growing numbers of European citizens joining ISIL by passing through Turkish lands has caused a stirring amongst European governments. In this regard, Turkish border security practices, as well as Ankara's position in regional conflicts, have direct effects on the West and Britain. The EU, in general, and particularly the UK's close collaboration with Turkey is important. From intelligence sharing to providing know how and technology for border controls, such collaboration is crucial to prevent security threats. The Charlie Hebdo attacks and the case of three British teenagers who joined ISIL in March, 2015, are among the cases that have raised concerns about Turkey's Middle Eastern policy. In most of the cases, like the Charlie Hebdo one, Turkey appears to be the transit country for militants moving to/from Europe. In conclusion, Turkey's Middle Eastern policy is the key to the security of both British and other European citizens.

Introduction

Turkey has been dragged into Middle Eastern affairs, even though it did not conceive of itself as part of the region. For a long time, Turkish governments adopted a cautious policy in their attitudes to the crises in the Middle East. However, the development of Turkey as a regional power, both militarily and economically, has weakened its ability to stay away from the Middle East, whose complex security has become more interwoven with that of Turkey.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the primacy of the 'West' in Turkish foreign policy had been underlined by Turkish foreign policy makers. However, it was impossible for Turkey not to be involved in regional affairs, given its 1673 kilometre border with Iran, Iraq and Syria, a 90 percent Muslim population, ongoing conflict with Kurdish separatist groups, and certain historical and cultural ties with regional states and societies. As a consequence, Turkey has been dragged into Middle Eastern affairs, even though it did not conceive of itself as part of the region. For a long time, Turkish governments adopted a cautious policy in their attitudes to the crises in the Middle East. However, the development of Turkey as a regional power, both militarily and economically, has weakened its ability to stay away from the Middle East, whose complex security has become more interwoven with that of Turkey.

As the most recent developments in the region show, whatever happens in the Middle East has had repercussions for Turkey, both internally and externally. Political developments in the region and internal clashes among different ethnic and religious elements have, in particular, become the most important issues in Turkish foreign and security policy. Moreover, Turkey has always become one of the key actors in the Middle East. Despite being a 'middle power', its geopolitical position between

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The political instability that has prevailed in the region, the civil war in Syria and the growing ISIL threat in the region, have all highlighted the significance of Turkey for extra-regional actors' interests in the Middle East. In this regard, this briefing aims to give a retrospective review of Turkish Middle Eastern policy since the very beginning of its Republican history. It is believed that such a retrospective view will be extremely beneficial for foreign observers and for policy makers in order that they may understand the roots of Turkey's strategic culture and foreign policy imperatives vis-à-vis the Middle East. This briefing has 3 parts: the first reviews the period from the establishment of the Turkish Republic until the end of the Cold War. Part Two covers the period 2003 - 2011, the JDP governments' proactive foreign policy period, and the last part relates to the most recent period of the isolation of the Turkish presence in the Middle East.

Non-Alignment Policy (1930s-1990s)

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Republic's founder and its first president, followed two foreign policy goals: to create a strong state which could defend its territorial integrity and political independence, and; to make Turkey a full and equal member of the European community of Western nations.

During the years in which the Republic of Turkey was formed (1920s-1930s), Turkey followed a nonalignment policy in the international arena, since it was a war-torn country desperate for an internal reconstruction. As a result, peaceful neighbourly relations were a necessity. In this context, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Republic's founder and its first president, followed two foreign policy goals: to create a strong state which could defend its territorial integrity and political independence, and; to make Turkey a full and equal member of the European community of Western nations.

For the young republic, avoiding any interference in Middle Eastern affairs was the main principle. Although bilateral relations with regional states were

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established, the main idea was to leave the Arabs alone. The 1937 Sadabad Pact, which was concluded with Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, is a good example of the way that Kemalist foreign policy distanced itself from the Middle East. As was seen in the case of the Sadabad Pact, the roots of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East were laid down in an era when Turkish foreign policymakers tended to avoid involvement in Middle Eastern affairs.

From the 1940s onwards, the objectives of the Turkish foreign policy in relation to the Middle East were based firstly on ensuring national security; secondly, on attaining economic benefits, and, thirdly, on expanding her influence in the area (Karpat et al. 1975:115). In this sense, the Turkish policy on the Middle East became an extension of Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy. None of these objectives were adopted for the sake of strengthening relations with regional states, but rather they were adopted as a result of Turkish attempts to prove herself to the West as a co-operative partner in regional affairs. In regard to the concerns over the Middle East, on the other hand, Turkey was linked to the Middle East 'through sub-systems, but not by an overarching foreign policy emphasis which is reserved for the West' (Stone 1993:1). Until the 1960s, Turkey's core foreign policy objectives remained the same.

Throughout the 1960s, Turkey established a rapprochement with the Middle East, again, not for her own sake, but in order to strengthen her position vis-à-vis the West. This was expected to correct previous mistakes that were blamed for the deterioration of relations with the Middle East, and which had left Turkey isolated in the region, and alienated within the UN, in the Cyprus case. The most prominent feature of the so-called 'New Turkish Foreign Policy' of the 1960s and 1970s was the emphasis on multi-faceted policy making. Applied to the Middle East context, this policy required less co-operation with the United States, and a more balanced attitude towards

the Arab-Israeli dispute. Consequently, Turkey pursued balanced policies during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. During this period, Ankara did not allow the use of military bases in Turkey to help Israel. Following this line of thinking, in 1972, Turkey voted in favour of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) so as to obtain observer status at the United Nations. However, this did not indicate a complete reversal in Turkish Middle Eastern policy.

Until the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy makers were guided by the following principles in the Middle East:

1) non-interference in the domestic affairs of Middle Eastern countries;

2) the maintenance of diplomatic relations with Israel, on one side, and the giving of political support to the Arab cause;

3) the preservation of her close ties with the West in regard to their impact on Turkey's relations with the Middle East;

4) the development of bilateral relations in the region.

During the Gulf Crisis, however, Turkish foreign policy deviated from its traditional Middle East policy, which focused on non-involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts. According to Philip Robins, in a changing, post-Cold War world there had to be modifying pressures on states' basic foreign policy principles. For Turkey, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait provided a new challenge to the decades old principles of Turkish policy on the Middle East (Robins 1999). The Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991 brought a degree of change to Turkish foreign policy and Turkey had to involve itself in an inter-Arab dispute, something that had been avoided since the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

After the end of the Cold War, international and local developments particularly overlapped those that were related to the Middle East. The revival of the 'Greater Middle East' idea in the international arena posed a challenge. According to Dietrich Jung and Wolfango Piccoli, the idea of a 'Greater Middle East' caused a revival of the neglected Ottoman heritage

> *The idea of a 'Greater Middle East' caused a revival of the neglected Ottoman heritage and confronted the Kemalist state élite with challenges and opportunities*

and confronted the Kemalist state élite with challenges and opportunities (Jung and Piccoli 2000:106). Kurdish nationalism, Islamic internationalism and pan-Turkish revivalism have become a matter of bilateral relations and have confronted the Kemalist élite. (Jung and Piccoli 2000:106). During the 1990s the disagreement between Syria and Turkey on the distribution of water overlapped with the Kurdish problem and developed into a dangerous conflict that brought the two neighbours to the brink of war. In response to Operation Provide Comfort, which handed over to the Kurds a Kurdish sanctuary in Northern Iraq, Turkish officials declared their determination to protect the integrity of the Iraqi state and their objections to the creation of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. The period was marked by Turkish Military Forces' making regular interventions into Northern Iraq.

Between the 1950s and 1990s, Turkey was dragged into Middle East politics, even though it does not conceive of itself as part of the region. Turkish governments adopted a cautious policy in their attitudes towards the Middle Eastern crises as a result of pragmatic choices. The development of Turkey as a regional power, both militarily and economically, weakened its ability to stay away from the Middle East, whose complex security become more interwoven with that of Turkey. The guiding principles of recent decades, such as non-interference in internal affairs and a preference for limited bilateral relations with Middle Eastern states, has thus become less sustainable. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Turkish state élite found themselves at a crossroads as a result of the new regional and international environment.

(Re)Engagement: a Proactive Approach, Zero Problems and Strategic Depth (2003 - 2011)

The transformation in Turkish foreign policy following the end of the Cold War was also reflected in its Middle East policy. Previously, Turkey's relations with the Arab states, particularly with Syria, were hurt by its relatively good relations and military alliance with Israel. During the late 1990s, the Turkish government attempted to balance its relations with both the Arab states and with Israel.

The 2003 Gulf War was a turning point. After the November, 2002, parliamentary elections, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) emerged

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as the largest single party in the 550-member Turkish Grand National Assembly. Turkey that has been ruled by coalition governments for many decades. Even though the JDP is one of the successor parties to an Islamic party (Virtue Party –Fazilet Partisi in Turkish) which had been closed down because of its openly Islamist character, JDP leaders signalled that Turkey's foreign policy orientation to Europe and the West, the perennial priorities of the country's Kemalist elite, would not change under their leadership.

The re-emergence of conflict between Iraq and the USA was a watershed for the new government. The uneasiness among the public and the political élite was exacerbated by deep economic problems in the country, and the scenario of renewed Kurdish refugee flows into Turkey in the case of a war in Iraq. It was widely assumed that Turkey would join a US-led 'coalition of the willing', even though public opinion was overwhelmingly against the war. Turkey's need for continuing external aid and the strategic urging of the country's military élite that Turkey be part of the 'coalition of the willing' clashed with public opinion. On the other hand, messages given by the EU throughout the Iraqi crisis hurt Turkish national dignity. The ghosts of the early 1920s thus began to awaken. Considering the sensitivity of the Turkish public regarding the revival of the Sèvres Syndrome, a Turkish preoccupation with renewed attempts by the great powers to reshape the Middle East to Turkey's disadvantage, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began to speak about the need for Turkey to consider different policy options in relation to its Middle Eastern neighbours. Consequently, in January, 2003, the JDP initiated a new opening to the Middle East. It was an attempt by the JDP to manage the Iraq issue and to find a sustainable regional policy. Within this context, and considering the economic and humanitarian crisis that Iraq's neighbours faced during and after the Gulf War, Turkey launched a neighbourhood initiative prior to US-led military intervention in Iraq. Through the 'Neighbours Forum', Turkey attempted to promote consultations between

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Iraq and neighbouring countries. Moreover, a Special Envoy was appointed to co-ordinate Turkey's national and international endeavours vis-à-vis Iraq. Turkey also designated a high level Special Co-ordinator for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in order to mobilise Turkey's assistance to Iraq.

As Robins has stated: 'having won a popular mandate just three months before, [JDP] was reluctant to go against a public opinion so obviously against war, and a support base that would frown upon it' (Robins 2003:564). In March, 2003, an absolute majority of the Turkish Grand National Assembly voted in favour of the motion, 264 to 251, but it was lost on a technical point. This was a shock for the international community, particularly for the USA, who had been expecting unconditional support from the Turkish government. In the three months between December, 2002, and March, 2003, Turkey had undergone an extraordinary reversal in its foreign policy. Turkey's privileged relationship with the USA was undermined and relations with the Middle East were prioritised.

As a reflection of this transformation, Turkey developed a 'proactive peace policy' towards Iraq, which aims to develop relations with different segments of Iraqi society, regardless of ethnic and sectarian differences. Within this context, before the elections, major Sunni opposition figures and envoys

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from the United States were invited to Ankara to ensure Sunni participation in the Iraqi national elections. As stated in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Synopsis of the Turkish Foreign Policy, through proactive commu-nication with different Iraqi groups, Turkey aimed to prevent conflicts in Iraq.

Ankara extended its proactive approach to the broader neighbourhood and became involved in conflictual issues between Iran and the West, Syria and Israel and Israel and Palestine. The 'zero problems' policy of Turkish foreign affairs was not just meant to relate to 'zero problems' with its neighbours, but also to 'zero problems' throughout the region.

In general, the recent Turkish Middle East policy has been developed vis-à-vis the EU's and its individual member states' contradictory claims and the increasing demands from Turkey. Furthermore, increasing 'Islamophobia' in Europe, the cartoon crisis, the initiation of discriminatory measures against Muslims in several European countries, and Israeli armed forces' indiscriminate attacks on Lebanon and Gaza, have caused resentment against the West among the Turkish public.

In order to ease domestic tensions, the JDP government developed a new foreign policy rhetoric: Turkey as a bridge between the East and the West, between the Middle East and Europe, and between civilisations. Both the government and the Turkish state èlite have underlined Turkey's role as 'bridge' between two worlds, representing the interests of the Middle East on Western platforms and sharing the Western perspective with its Middle Eastern partners. In this period, Ahmet Davutoglu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has kept Ankara's relations with the West to 'business as usual', but he has reoriented Turkey's foreign policy towards the former Ottoman geography, primarily the Middle East and the Western Balkans. The new Turkish foreign policy narrative of 'zero problems with neighbours', and the new geographical orientation of Turkey have been informed by Davutoglu's iconic book, *Strategic Depth* (2001). According to this strategic depth doctrine, Turkey should aspire to play a leading role in several regions. The strategic depth doctrine was a call to Turkey's active engagement with all regional systems in its neighbourhood, particularly in the Middle East.

'Precious Loneliness' in the Middle East (2011 - 2014)

in the post Arab Spring period, Turkey's relations with all of its Middle Eastern partners have turned sour. Turkey has thus found itself in total isolation in regional affairs. By defining Turkey's isolation in the region as 'precious loneliness' Ibrahim Kalin, Prime Minister Erdogan's Foreign Policy Advisor, justified Turkey's loneliness by attributing it to a compendium of values and morality.

By the end of 2013, following a brief prelude to its regional power ambitions, Turkey had lost its leverage in the region. Even though, among its Middle Eastern neighbours, only Syria had been severely affected by the 'Arab Spring', in the post Arab Spring period, Turkey's relations with all of its Middle Eastern partners have turned sour. Turkey has thus found itself in total isolation in regional affairs. By defining Turkey's isolation in the region as 'precious loneliness' Ibrahim Kalin, Prime Minister Erdogan's Foreign Policy Advisor, justified Turkey's loneliness by attributing it to a compendium of values and morality.

During this period, the tensions with Iran were escalated due to Turkey's policy of regime change in Syria, while relations with Baghdad were eroded after Turkey's intervention on the side of the Sunnis against the Shiite Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, in Iraq. Relations with Iraq turned sour after Ankara offered refuge to the Sunni Iraqi Vice President, Tariq al-Hashemi, who was on the Iraqi government's wanted list. After escaping from Iraq, Tariq al-Hashemi was welcomed by Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who stated

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that the Vice President could stay in Turkey for as long as he wanted (Dunya, 2012, p.1). The Turkish government's insistence on protecting the Sunni leader caused tensions between Ankara and Baghdad that peaked in November, 2013,

when the Baghdad government objected to the bilateral energy agreement that was signed between Turkey and the KRG.

The accusations that the JDP government is supporting international jihadists fighting the Syrian regime has also paved the way for Turkey's further isolation in the region. Besides the JDP government's Syrian policy, their policy towards regime change in Egypt also caused deterioration to Turkey's relations in the region. The JDP government's taking sides with Ikhwan (the Muslim Brotherhood), caused Ankara's ties with the new administration in Cairo to suffer. This pro-Ikhwan attitude also caused a deterioration in Ankara's relations with the Gulf countries.

During the period following the unrest in Syria, Ankara focused its energy on Syria. In general, the **Arab** Spring was a substantial crisis for the role that Turkey had assumed in the Middle East as a regional soft power, in particular, the Syrian question was a 'litmus case' for Davutoglu's 'zero problems with neighbours' policy. Due to the failure of the backdoor diplomacy that it pursued with Assad, together with its mediation efforts during the crisis, Turkey began to actively focus on two specific roles, opening her doors to those people who have escaped from the disputes in Syria, and supporting the opponents to the Assad regime in Syria. Turkey's open opposition to the Assad regime on the grounds of human rights violations caused deterioration in Ankara's zero problem discourse. Since then, Turkey has allowed Syrian opposition groups to meet on its territory. Turkey has gradually become the outstanding opponent of the Assad regime in the international arena.

In line with Turkey's foreign policy understanding, which has been defined as 'humanitarian diplomacy' by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, Ankara began to be actively concerned with the humanitarian dimension of foreign policy and became involved in countries in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia by feeling itself to be responsible for the humanitarian tragedies in Muslim countries. Ankara tried to achieve its goals in these countries through soft power instruments and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Minister

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Davutoglu underlined that Turkey is a 'benevolent and capable' country, and he began to define the main features of Turkish foreign policy through the means of 'humanitarian diplomacy' (Davutoglu 2013).

The Arab Spring, and particularly the civil war in Syria, have presented significant threats to Turkey, both in terms of national and regional security and of challenges to Turkish foreign policy. The Arab Spring has rendered Turkish foreign policy, which was based on zero problems with neighbours and strategic depth, impotent. The Arab Spring has also threatened Turkey's standing with other key regional powers. Besides endangering the guiding principles of Turkish foreign policy, the drastic changes in the regional dynamics following the Arab Spring have posed new security threats to Turkey, including border security, terror attacks and the spilling over of regional instability. Among all of the security threats, regional instability was underlined as being an existential threat to Turkey's possibilities for political action in the region. Throughout the period between 2011 and the end of 2013, both Minister Davutoglu and Prime Minister Erdogan have tried hard to convince Turkish public opinion of the necessity for the 'resecuritisation' of Middle East policies by underlining the extent of the events that threaten Turkey's leadership in the region, but not as an existential threat to Turkey's national security. By reflecting the threat perception beyond the Turkish borders, this has actually given the Turkish government the time to reconsider national security threats that are pouring over the borders with Syria and Iraq.

Concluding Remarks: Turkey's Middle East Policy and its Repercussions for the West

After the end of Cold War, Turkey, like many other states, was confronted with uncertainties that were related to the new world order, and the question about where to find an adequate place in this emerging new order. Since the 1990s, Turkey has undergone an internal reform process that has changed the framework of its foreign policy. This development has created more room for manoeuvring, particularly in its Middle East policy. Throughout the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium, Turkey's ruling élite showed their self-confidence that they could play a constructive role in the Middle East. The first JDP majority government coincided with the Iraqi crisis, and this coincidence posed a watershed for Turkish foreign policy in general and the Middle East policy in particular. Inspired by Ahmet Davutoglu's Strategic Depth doctrine, Turkish foreign policy makers had underlined Turkey's role as a bridge between the West and the Middle East. During this phase Turkey enjoyed the West's appreciation. The USA was supporting Turkey's efforts of mediation in the region, its proactive strategy in Iraq and with other problematic neighbours in the Middle East, and it supported Turkey's bid for EU membership. Similarly, the EU and its member states were satisfied with Ankara's choice of soft power with which to engage in the Middle East. For both the USA and the EU, Turkey was the model that they could promote in the Middle East: a Muslim democratic

The social uprisings that erupted in the region were a game changer for Ankara. Both the reluctance of Europeans against Turkey's integration into the EU, and the unpredictability of Middle Eastern politics and regional instability hindered the position that Turkey claimed, as a regional leader who could provide a bridge between the region and the West.

state. Turkey's eagerness to engage in the region, its active participation in humanitarian aid and its mediation efforts were well received by the EU member states that were struggling with economic stagnation and the euro crisis. During this period both the Europeans and the Americans were dealing with internal crises, hence they all supported Ankara's deeds. In this regard, the UK and the USA have become particularly

enthusiastic supporters of Turkey's membership in the EU.

In spite of good intentions to play the role of bridging two geographies and cultures, this path was evidently not smooth. The success of this transformation (from bordering Europe to becoming a bridge between Europe and the Middle East) has become debatable, particularly after the Arab Spring. The social uprisings that erupted in the region were a game changer for Ankara. Both the reluctance of Europeans against Turkey's integration into the EU, and the unpredictability of Middle Eastern politics and regional instability hindered the position that Turkey claimed, as a regional leader who could provide a bridge between the region and the West.

With the eruption of the Arab Spring, Turkey was side-lined from regional affairs. In the region, ambitions to be a regional power and for there to be strategic depth discourse were understood as being neo-Ottoman claims. Particularly during the Arab Spring, the narrative of Turkey as a state that could offer a model for Tunisia, Egypt and others, was not well received by the new regimes in the region. The prevailing instability in countries that experienced the Arab Spring struck at Turkey's trade relations, as well as at its diplomatic relations with them. As a middle power, like Turkey, in a volatile neighbourhood, the sustainability of policies such as 'zero problems with neighbours' and value-based approaches, were really difficult to attain. This was also problematic for the West as, for them, Turkey was a success story in the region. While Turkey has been losing touch in the Middle East, the government has begun to show authoritarian tendencies internally, which have gradually estranged Turkey from the West.

Now surrounded by fragile if not failed, states, Ankara has been facing challenges in dealing with refugee flows and border controls. The rise of radical militant groups on her borders, Turkey's isolation -or 'precious loneliness' in a Turkish official's word, is not sustainable for Turkey. As a transit country for refugees, irregular migrants and terrorists Turkey's border security has become one of the main concerns of the Europeans states, primarily of the UK and France. The

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growing numbers of European citizens joining ISIL after passing through Turkish territory has caused stirrings among European governments. In this regard, Turkish border security practices, as well as Ankara's position in regional conflicts, have direct effects on the West and Britain. Close collaboration with Turkey is important for the EU in general and for the UK in particular..From intelligence sharing to providing know how and technology for border controls these facets are crucial in preventing security threats. The Charlie Hebdo attacks and the case of the three British teenagers who joined ISIL in March, 2015, are among the few cases that have raised concerns about Turkey's Middle East policy. In most of cases, like Charlie Hebdo, Turkey appears to be the transit country for militants to/from Europe. In conclusion, Turkey's Middle East policy is the key to the security of both British and other European citizens.

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Bezen Balamir Coskun, Research Fellow at the Turkey Institute and associate professor in international relations at Zirve University in Turkey, focuses on Turkey's foreign policy approach to the Middle East in this report. The Turkey Institute offers high-quality analysis of the Turkish society and the state, with special emphasis on domestic and foreign policy and the economy. It provides objective updates, and organises high-level discussions on current issues, especially in relation to democratic governance, human rights, the rule of law and constitutional reform. As a part of that mission, the Turkey Institute produces analytical papers to inform readers on pertinent issues in Turkey.

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