

Foreign Policy Vision of the Turkish Religious Right: From National View to Justice and Development Party

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Abstract

This article explores the transformation of the Turkish religious right in its view to the major goals and orientation of Turkish foreign policy from National View parties to the Justice and Development Party. The main argument of the paper is that foreign policy vision of Turkish religious right has shifted from a substantially cultural to a pragmatist and rational one. While the National View parties were opposed to develop relations with the West and were rather in favour of integration with the Muslim countries of the Middle East, the Justice and Development Party is motivated to integrate with the West and the East at the same time in search of achieving advanced political, economic and social institutions at home and in Turkey's neighbourhood. It is a major goal of the Justice and Development Party to ensure Turkey's membership to the EU which was formerly identified by the National View as a union of Christian states. The Justice and Development Party is also in cooperation with the USA in its goal to institute more democratic and peaceful regimes in the Middle East. While trying to promote contemporary political institutions in the Middle East, the Justice and Development Party is also in search of greater cooperation and partnership in economic, diplomatic and cultural terms. Behind this seemingly contradictory attitude lies the belief on the part of the Justice and Development Party deputies that democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance are indisputable ideals of 21st century politics and that they are not in conflict with different cultural values enjoyed by the world community. The Justice and Development Party endeavours to make Turkey a centre country, a regional and global power, an advanced democracy and a respectable member of the international community.

Keywords: National View, Justice and Development Party, Foreign Policy, Middle East, European Union, USA

Abstrak

Artikel ini meneroka transformasi pandangan parti agama berhaluan kanan kepada matlamat dan orientasi dasar luar Negara Turki dari Parti Pandangan Nasional kepada Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan. Hujah utama artikel ini ialah visi dasar luar parti agama berhaluan kanan telah berubah daripada berasaskan budaya kepada pandangan yang pragmatik dan rasional. Manakala parti-parti National View tidak bersetuju untuk membina hubungan dengan Barat, sebaliknya ingin berintegrasi dengan Negara-negara Timur Tengah, Parti Keadilan dan

Pembangunan pula bermotivasi untuk bersatu dengan Barat dan Timur, pada masa sama mencapai institusi politik, ekonomi dan sosial di negara sendiri dan juga Negara jiran. Adalah suatu matlamat penting Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan untuk menjamin keanggotaan Turki di dalam EU yang pernah dikenal pasti oleh Parti Pandangan Nasional sebagai sebuah kesatuan Negara-negara Kristian. Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan adalah juga bekerjasama dengan Amerika Syarikat dalam usahanya untuk menggalakkan rejim yang lebih demokratik dan aman di Timur Tengah. Sambil berusaha untuk mempromosi politik semasa di Timur Tengah, Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan juga berusaha mencari kerjasama yang lebih luas dan rakan dalam ekonomi, diplomatik dan budaya. Di belakang sikap yang nampaknya bercanggah terletak kepercayaan pada anggota Parlimen Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan bahawa demokrasi, hak asasi manusia, pemerintahan berasaskan undang-undang, tadbir urus yang baik adalah ideal politik abad ke 21 yang tidak boleh dinafikan dan ia tidak bercanggah dengan nilai budaya yang berbeza yang dinikmati oleh masyarakat dunia. Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan berusaha untuk menjadikan Turki sebuah negara pertengahan, sebuah kuasa serantau dan dunia, sebuah demokrasi yang maju dan sebuah anggota antarabangsa yang dihormati.

Kata kunci: Pandangan Nasional, Parti Keadilan dan Pembangunan, Dasar Luar, Timur Tengah, Kesatuan Eropah, Amerika Syarikat.

1. Introduction

This article is assigned to the exploration of the change in party program and policies of Turkish religious right concerning foreign policy from the National View parties to the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi: AKP). National View parties of 1970s, 80s and 90s display a strong similarity in their adoption of a substantially cultural foreign policy view that foresaw the unity and integrity of Muslim nations, on one hand, and minimization of relations with the west on the other. The National View movement had a negative view of the West with a conception that it was heavily infused with elements of Judeo-Christian traditions adversarial to Islam and the Muslims. While it was necessary to maintain links with the west for the import of elements of material culture such as science and technology, Turkey had to turn its face to the Muslim Middle East for diplomatic, political, economic and social integration and cooperation.

The foreign policy line of the Justice and Development Party, however, is not based on a dichotomy of East-West described in cultural terms. The party deems all types of integration and links with the west as a precondition for Turkey's development and progress. It has the goal to further improve Turkey's ties with the West with its campaign to establish deeper and firmer links let it be the UN, EU, NATO, or individual states. Yet the party pledges to further develop Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries as well for service to Turkey's national interests and for regional and global peace, but also as a part of our membership to a common historical and cultural legacy with the Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's social and cultural ties with the East are not considered as an impediment to its relations with the West. The party assumes an assertively multipartite, multidimensional and pragmatic foreign policy vision aiming to minimize problems with neighbour states and believing in the significance of democracy, rule of law, human rights and other basic principles of universal rights and values as the parameters of its foreign policy orientation.¹

2. The National View Movement

The main goal of the National View movement in foreign policy was explained by Necmettin Erbakan as promotion of peace and justice among nations and strengthening our relations with our current links with a regional and global perspective. The National View movement vowed to institute a stable, permanent, national, independent and honourable foreign policy. In Turkey's relations with neighbouring countries, development of relations with the Middle Eastern countries was given particular importance with a view that such a policy would be in best service to the interests of the country and also that this was a part of our common cultural and historical heritage with other Muslim nations. We were the parties of a historical Islamic

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (tr. Strategic Analysis), 2009, p. 501; "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı (tr. Turkey Must Be A Centre Country)," *Radikal*, February 26, 2004.

civilization that could not have been denied in shaping our foreign policy nor our domestic politics.²

It was a necessity of our sovereignty to institute a domestic and foreign policy independent from the concerns of other actors in our country. Turkey's economic ties with western international organizations such as IMF and the World Bank were not in the interests of the country. They were rather damaging our sovereignty. Turkey could not have been a tool for the interests of other countries.³

The notion of justice among nations mentioned in the beginning was developed to combat remnants of colonialism and imperialism something which countries with cultural and historical bonds to Turkey were still struggling against. Turkish Muslim nations of the Soviet Union were imposed to live under such a rule. And Israel was similarly a Western agent in the Middle East targeting our holy Islamic lands and the motherland of brother Palestinian Arabs. The movement would defend the rights of these nations in international platforms in line with provisions of national and international protocols on human rights and freedoms.⁴

Fight against injustice and oppression among nations was an honourable character of our glorious history long before the popularization of such international discourses incorporated by the United Nations most commonly. The Ottoman Empire, for instance, had united many nations under its sovereignty but it had never resembled its contemporary examples of western imperialism which were characterized with colonialism and exploitation in opposition to teachings of our Islamic heritage. As a continuity of this tradition, the National View movement would not support contemporary examples of the imperialist practice. The imperialist states and their proxies in the Middle East were determined to prevent Turkey from becoming a powerful state and its mission of justice and peace in the Middle East.⁵

The view of the movement on Cyprus issue was a reflection of this thinking. The peace operation executed after the approval of the Turkish Grand National Assembly with unanimity of votes was praised as a military victory achieved by Turkish Armed Forces. The operation was necessary to stop the bloodshed, massacres and oppressions that the neglected Turkish community suffered in the Island for decades. It was an honour on the party of the National Salvation Party to lead the Cyprus War in coalition with Bülent Ecevit's Republican People's Party. The party was devoted to defend the rights of the Turkish people in the Island and it would never forsake the victory gained on the battleground by the bloods of the martyrs. The diplomatic cause would be pursued in international political chambers accordingly. The party considered the support of Arab countries to Turkey's Cyprus cause in

² Necmettin Erbakan, *Milli Görüş* (tr. National View), 1975, pp. 229-30; *Party Program of the National Order Party*, Articles 98, 100; *Party Program of the National Salvation Party*, Articles 41, 42, 43; *Party Program of the Welfare Party*, Article 28.

³ Ahmet Tekdal, "Opening Speech," *First Grand Congress of the Welfare Party*, June 30, 1985.

⁴ Necmettin Erbakan, 1975, pp. 229-30; *Party Program of the National Order Party*, Articles 98, 99, 100; *Party Program of the National Salvation Party*, Articles 41, 42, 43; *Party Program of the Welfare Party*, Article 28.

⁵ Ahmet Tekdal, June 30, 1985.

the UN as a diplomatic victory assured by the policies of National Salvation Party to develop relations with Middle Eastern countries.⁶

The view of the movement on Turkey's bidding for entrance to Customs Union as a part of the European Economic Community was very much negative. It was because the European Economic Community was a Christian club and a contemporary version of western imperialism. Membership to the EU would be a denial of our glorious history and culture which was built as a result of centuries of old struggles against the west and the things it defends. The idea of Customs Union was introduced in Roman Catholic Congress before the negotiation of the Treaty of Rome by three leading catholic prime ministers of the time De Gasperi, Schuman, and Adenauer. By uniting centuries of warring Christian states, the Community would terminate bloodshed among Christians, provide them with a scheme for greater economic development, and in our case it would weaken our domestic economy and render us politically and economically dependent on the West. The agreement for Customs Union would kill Turkey's infant industry before it was able to match with its European rivals. The major source of the motivation of the Community was their membership to Judeo-Christian-Greek tradition characterized with enmity against the Orient and demolition of the Islamic civilization.⁷ Western international organizations were a set of concerted tools for the right of the might, for the exploitation of developing and poor countries. They were thus against Turkey's mission of civilization to institute justice and observe the right of the nations.⁸

Parties and groups defending Turkey's membership to the EEC were never considering social and cultural consequences of such an action. They had understood modernization as westernization in cultural terms rather than importation of science and technology developed by the West. The religious motivation of the Community was not a source of trouble for them because they were interpreting secularism as enmity against religion. European Economic Community was not just an economic organization. It had the membership of six catholic countries with overarching political, social, cultural and ideological goals based on Christianity. Customs Union would damage our sovereignty over the lands that we had gained through the bloods of our martyrs.⁹

There were some other pitfalls of the Community too. It had three main organs including a council, a commission and a court of Justice. With increasing membership of other Christian European countries, Turkey's membership in this organization would make it subject to the decisions of those other countries as Turkey would be in the minority. Particularly in Turkey's Cyprus Peace Operation, the EEC would compel Turkey to backslide in violation of the rights of the Turks living in the Island. The European Economic Community was envisaging permanent membership from all countries with an intention to melt all member countries in a single pot of European civilization that contradicts Turkey's

⁶ Necmettin Erbakan, 1975, pp. 233-4.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 235-50, 254-264; Necmettin Erbakan, *Adil Ekonomik Düzen* (tr. Just Economic Order), 1991, p. 90.

⁸ Necmettin Erbakan, 1991, p. 93.

⁹ Necmettin Erbakan, 1975, pp. 255-7.

historical, cultural and social structure. The movement would not let Turkey melt in Christianity.¹⁰

According to another scenario, the European Economic Community was an invention of Jewish bourgeoisie who wanted to reintegrate Germany into world economy to become an instrument for the development of Jewish capital. In addition to that, Jewish community and capital had suffered a lot from interstate rivalry and particularly the Second World War. According to the Jewish intellectuals, the way to progress was lying behind unity of European states with fluidity in borders and peace and stability among Christian states so that they would easily be able to transfer funds and commodity over the borders and protect their population from potential threats while also preparing the political and economic ground for the establishment of the Great Israel. For the National View, even the circulation of Jewish capital on itself was apprehensible because its major principle of revenue was interest and exploitation.¹¹

The origins of this Jewish conspiracy were going back to a famous Zionist Theodor Herzl who had lived in Wien a hundred years ago known as the intellectual father of Israel. Theodor Herzl had drawn borders of a Great Israel state that would be established in the future on the lands stretching between inland Egypt and Turkey as they claimed that they were promised in the distorted Old Testament. This state would be headquartering a Jewish dominion that would cover the entire world. His statute being put in today's Israeli parliament, Theodor Herzl was preparing political, economic and diplomatic bases of this future dream. The Jewish intellectuals were always around the Pope trying to persuade him to unite Christian states in form of such a confederation.¹²

The Zionists wanted Turkey to become a member of the Community because they knew that Turkish society and culture would melt in a union of Christian states. In addition, Turkey would be exploited economically as it was the Jews that held the main portions of capital in Europe. The Europe would serve them as civil servants while the Turks were needed for cheap labour. And lastly, the Customs Union agreement was making it possible for citizens of member states to buy real estate in other member countries. The Jews would be facilitated to buy the lands that they were planning to incorporate in their lands in the future.¹³

Turkey had to establish a Customs Union with Muslim states rather. Establishment of such a Union with Muslim nations with whom we shared a common historical and cultural legacy would serve to Turkey's economic interests in the future and would be safer. We were not western. We were not European. Our history was written over a centuries-old struggle between Islam and Europe. Turkey's bidding for EU would not destroy this heritage.¹⁴

The generality of Muslim nations in the Middle East were oil producing rich countries with lack of industrial development for production of manufacturing goods. If we were able to

¹⁰ Necmettin Erbakan, 1975, pp. 235-50, 254-264.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 250-4.

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Necmettin Erbakan, *Türkiye'nin Temel Meseleleri* (tr. Turkey's Major Issues), p. 35.

direct the earnings that they gained through the sale of oil, that would contribute to our economy substantially to be used in the development of an export-oriented domestic industry.¹⁵

The view of the movement on entrance to the EU and active membership to the NATO was a little bit altered with the establishment of the Welfare Party. NATO membership was in the interests of Turkey as a part of Turkey's wider security concerns against the Soviet threat and communism, and therefore it was necessary to keep the ties with the NATO alliance. It was also possible to become a member of the EU as long as it would remain as an economic entity ensuring equal rights and benefits to member states. But the party was opposed to EU if it was to damage our sovereignty by making Turkey a province of a single European state which was planned for the future.¹⁶

To recap the foreign policy orientation of the National View movement, it is observed that since its entrance into Turkish political life with National Order Party in 1969, it has based its party program on a dichotomy of East-West. The western civilization was deemed as intrinsically rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition as an adversary of Islamic civilization in retrospect and it was characterized with materialism, oppression and imperialism. The materialism that came by western civilization was related with the denial of religion and morality in contemporary life. The oppression and imperialism that the west defended was related with colonialism, expansionism, exploitation and underdevelopment subjected to non-western nations. In contrast to the western civilization, Islamic civilization was presenting an ideal international, political, social and economic system to its members. The National View has therefore been opposed to integration with the west in political, economic, social and cultural terms contrary to the decades old general orientation of the Turkish foreign policy. It sought to divert this orientation to the Islamic world instead to promote greater cooperation and solidarity among Muslim nations and establish alternative international organizations to those of western political and economic international organizations.

More specifically, the National View objected to Turkey's bidding for membership to European Economic Community and Customs Union as well as its membership to NATO and UN. Accordingly, Turkey's integration with the west would damage its sovereignty, cultural identity and economic development. They therefore advocated the institution of their alternatives in the Islamic world such as an Islamic Common Market, Islamic NATO, Islamic UN, Islamic UNESCO and Islamic currency.

The National View has stably defended an anti-Israeli foreign policy. Israel was observed as a foot of the west in the Islamic world with its expansionist and oppressive policies directed to the Palestinians particularly but with future goals expanding over Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. It had to be opposed, encountered and defeated. The tone of Turkey's relations with Israel was used as leverage by the west for economic, diplomatic, political and military assistance from the west. They were all to be deemed as one and Turkey must not have been tricked with imperialist games.

¹⁵ Necmettin Erbakan, 1975, pp. 265-70; *Party Program of the National Order Party*, Article 100.

¹⁶ Ahmet Tekdal, June 30, 1985.,

3. JD Party's Foreign Policy

It is observed that foreign policy orientation of Turkish religious right has changed substantially from National View parties to Justice and Development Party. The oppositional posture against cooperation and integration with western political, economic and cultural institutions and search for their alternatives in the Islamic world has been totally abandoned. Turkey's cultural and historical ties with the Muslim world are respected, but the content of relations with the Middle East is augmented with a group of other political and economic concerns. While trying to carry out the mission of the earlier parties to develop political and economic relations with the Middle East, the AKP also serves as a representative of the west to campaign for the necessity to institute political and social reforms for the prevalence of democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance in the region. Though the National View parties were not against such standards, they were more concerned with attaining some Islamic ideals. Contrary to the denial of the National View to integrate with the west with a perception that the west was trying to undermine our existence, the AKP has developed a vision of world community with which Turkey has to establish rooted links in political, economic and diplomatic terms let it be the UN, EU, NATO or individual states.

This paradigmatic change in the foreign policy orientation of Turkish religious right is attributed to the role of Ahmet Davutoğlu in the foreign policy team of the AKP first as a chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and then to Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül and his later appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2009. Davutoğlu has introduced a number of goals and policy concerns to be adapted by the AKP Government in Turkey's relations with regional and global actors. Accordingly, Turkey must firstly minimize its problems with neighbouring countries and global political powers to zero. Secondly, Turkey must assume a multidimensional and multipartite foreign policy view by considering all political, diplomatic, economic, social and legal consequences of particular policies. In doing this, Turkey has to promote and make use of the collective action of the international community in the entities of regional and global international organizations as well as individual actors. Thirdly, the commonly used metaphorical expression about Turkey as the bridge between the East and the West must be abandoned in favour of a Turkey as a centre country with the employment of its geopolitical, diplomatic and political assets. Fourthly, Turkish foreign policy must take into greater consideration such political and social issues as promoting democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedoms in addition to traditional foreign policy goals. Turkey stands as a model country for the Middle East for the institution of universal principles and values. Finally, Turkey must adopt a rhythmic and dynamic foreign policy in its fragile environment to match up with the challenges of the EU integration process, Turkish-US relations, Turkish-Israeli relations.¹⁷

The AKP accepts contemporary legal and political paradigms like human rights, democratization and rule of law as universal values. Turkey's prospective membership to EU

¹⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu, 2009, p. 501; "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı (Turkey Must Be A Centre Country)," February 26, 2004.

is considered as a great opportunity for domestic political, economic and social transformation. It was for this reason that the head of the AKP Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had speedily set out for visits to political leaders of EU members soon after the announcement of AKP's electoral victory in November 2002. In his meeting with European leaders, Erdoğan delivered the importance his party attributes to EU membership and the willingness of his party to institute necessary reforms alongside the criterion indicated in Copenhagen (1993) and Helsinki (1999) summits which urge respect for and promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law, minority rights and a functioning market economy to match up with the competitive European economy. This conditionality was repeated in December 2002 Copenhagen Summit after the establishment of the AKP government. After the formation of the government, the AKP passed one by one the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th harmonization packages in the assembly in two years of a time until July 2004. Some of the reforms introduced by harmonization packages include improvement of the powers of civilian bureaucracy vis-à-vis the state elites, abolition of the death penalty, abolition of State Security Courts, greater freedom of expression and rights for organization.¹⁸ The harmonization packages were deliberated by an EU commission in October 2004 and Turkey is declared as a candidate to start the process of negotiations for full membership.

AKP Government's bidding for EU membership has brought some new controversies and developments in Cyprus issue. The EU accepted the Southern Cyprus Greek community into the union alongside 15 other new members as the representative of the entire Cyprus Island. A member of the Customs Union, Turkey was urged by the EU Additional Protocol adapted on June 13th 2005 to incorporate Southern Cyprus Greek Community in the Customs Union to indirectly make Turkey accept the Greek Community as the representative of the whole island. Turkey signed the Additional Protocol but added that the signing of the protocol does not mean the recognition of the Southern Cyprus as the representative of the entire Cyprus. The EU in return indicated that it recognizes only one state in the Island and that the protocol is a part of the Accession Partnership Document and Negotiating Framework ruled in October 2005 in Luxemburg. This view of the EU was repeated in November 2005 Progress Report too.¹⁹

On January 2006, AKP Government declared its Cyprus plan according to which the additional protocol would be accepted only if the international isolation over Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic was abandoned. It is indicated in the plan that an agreement will be reached thereto only if the following four criteria are accepted which include the opening of Turkish harbours to Greek ships, opening of Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic harbours to international trade, supply of economic support to Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic by the EU and execution of the entire process in the body of the UN.²⁰

¹⁸ Ali Resul Usul, "Helsinki'de Müzakerelere Türkiye-AB İlişkileri (tr. Turkish-EU Relations from Helsinki to Accession Negotiations)," in Zeynep Dağı, *Ak Partili Yıllar* (tr. Years with AKP), 2006, pp. 205-6; Burhanettin Duran, "The Justice and Development Party's New Politics," in Umit Cizre, *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, 2008, p. 87.

¹⁹ Ali Resul Usul, 2006, pp. 212-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-12.

The Annan plan represents a very critical point in negotiations. In case of the approval of the plan by both communities, a federal state of Cyprus would be established with a negotiation similar to 1960 London and Zurich Agreements. The Annan plan foresaw the establishment of a Presidential Council of six members, two Turkish and four Greek distributed according to population. Three other non-voting members would be assigned according to population again. Secondly, the president and the vice-president would be selected by the Presidential Council one from each community to alternate in a period of five years. Thirdly, a bicameral legislature would be formed consisting of a Senate and a Chamber of Deputies. The Senate would have 48 members, 24 from each community and the Chamber of Deputies would have 48 members elected according to the population. Fourthly, a Supreme Court would be established with equal number of members from each community with an additional three foreign judges appointed by the Presidential Council.²¹

The plan was fully supported by the AKP. The plan is presented to the public on April 24th 2004 in a referendum by both communities with the result of 65% of yes votes by the Turkish community and 75% of no votes by the Greek community. In return for Northern Cyprus Turkish Republic's approval of the plan and willingness for negotiation, the EU admitted the Regulations for Economic Assistance and Direct Trade for Northern Cyprus. But the economic assistance is not provided due to the opposition of the Greek community. The EU has then offered Northern Cyprus to give Maras to the Greeks, stop the sale of Greek properties in the North, and agree to the common usage of the Magusa harbour by both communities for the application of the Regulation, but the offer is rejected by the Northern Cyprus. The issue of economic assistance has been approved lastly by the EU Commission with a decision taken in June 2006.²² AKP government's determination for EU membership, its willingness to sit around the negotiation table for the Cyprus for this matter, and its conciliatory attitude represents a very significant change in the course of Turkish religious right.

The Middle East policy of the AKP similarly bears a good deal of changes from the foreign policy discourse of the Welfare Party. The Welfare Party defended the unity of Muslim countries in the Middle East on the base of cultural and historical legacy that the countries shared. The Muslim world would be united again under Turkish leadership like during the time of the Ottoman Empire to become a source of political and economic power. The Middle East discourse of the Welfare Party was very much propaganda without much of elaboration over the political, social and economic content of the unity. The locus of unity was a sense of reaction to the West and search for unity in Islam.

The AKP, however, is bidding for becoming a regional and global power integrated with the East and the West at the same time. The party declares the importance of our common historical and cultural ties with the Middle East but it is oriented to the East like an envoy of the West with an advocacy of universal values and principles such as democracy,

²¹ Retrieved 6 September 2010, from
http://unannanplan.agrino.org/Annan_Plan_MARCH_30_2004.pdf

²² Ali Resul Usul, 2006, pp. 211-2.

human rights and rule of law. The AKP attempts to display a harmony of the tradition and culture with modernity and universal values.

As a part of its advocacy of Turkey's cultural and historical heritage rooted in Islamic civilization, the AKP took the mission of erasing the signs of Islamophobia in the west which has been particularly powerful after 9/11 events. Islamophobia is deemed as closely associated with reactions and attacks directed to the Muslims in the world in last ten years. For this reason, the party started a campaign and organized 2007 International Islamophobia Conference in Istanbul which was joined by very leading scholars and policymakers from all around the world. And similarly, the party has been strongly opposed to Samuel Huntington's idea of Clash of Civilizations as a potential source of enmity and hatred among different religions. To this end, Turkey undertook the co-presidency of a UN Commission titled as Alliance of Civilizations in 2005 together with Spain to promote friendship, dialogue and cooperation among nations belonging to different religions, cultures and civilizations.²³

An important change in the foreign policy orientation of the Turkish religious right is the active participation of Turkey to the Greater Middle East Initiative started by the USA. The initiative is actively supported by the EU as well. The Greater Middle East Project has developed for the reformation of present socio-political and economic landscape of the Middle East. The project aims to settle the standards of democracy, rule of law, human rights, woman rights, economic and social development to be carried out in coordination with regional states. It is expected that the project will help to eliminate Middle East-originating terrorism, religious fundamentalism, illegal immigration etc. and will integrate the Middle East to the developed world politically and economically. Thus the USA invites the world community to participate in this initiative.²⁴

With its established secular democratic system and its active membership in regional and global international organizations, Turkey is expected to be a mediator between the west and the East in the application of this project as well as a model country for the Middle East. Turkey is praised with its ability to harmonize Islam and universal values developed in the West. The goals of the Greater Middle East Project display a great deal of similarity with the foreign policy goals of the AKP. Turkey thus supports the project fully for a more democratic, freer and a more peaceful Middle East. It is believed that democratic and economic development of the Middle East will make Turkey a global power. Turkey's EU process is also in support of the Greater Middle East Initiative. The EU similarly promotes democracy, economic and social development in the region on which there is a transatlantic cooperation between Europe and the USA. In OIC Tehran Summit 2003, Abdullah Gül expressed concerns of Turkey about the democratic deficit in the region and urged member countries to take necessary measures thereupon. Accordingly, the Middle East was urgently in need of political reforms.²⁵

²³ Hüseyin Bağcı and Bayram Sinkaya, "Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi ve Türkiye (tr. Greater Middle East Project and Turkey)," in Zeynep Dağı, *Ak Partili Yıllar* (tr. Years with AKP), 2006, p. 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-111.

Turkey has benefitted from this meditative approach in various economic and political ways. In return for the initial support of the AKP Government for the US war in Iraq, Turkey is provided with economic assistance by the USA in form of \$6 billion grant and another \$25-30 billion dollars of loan. In addition, the USA has been a keen supporter of Turkey's membership to the EU with also breaking the insistence of the EU on the solution of the Cyprus issue prior to the start of negotiations for membership. And in its neighbourhood, Turkey helped Syria against a potential international isolation and possibility of a US assault.

If we are to investigate Turkey's relations with individual states in the Middle East, Iran, Syria, Israel and Palestine deserve particular attention as Turkey has become more and more involved with them over a variety issues and events. To start with, dynamics of Turkish-Iranian contemporary relations have been shaped under the influence of a number of important events which include the Iran Revolution, Iran-Iraq War, alleged Iranian support to PKK and Turkish support to anti-Khomeini oppositional organization of Mujahedeen al-Halk. As a secular state with a Muslim population, Turkey was deeply concerned with the possibility of the spread of Iranian revolution to its own territories. This concern was, however, recovered with the emergence of Iran-Iraq War in 1980 one year after the breakup of the revolution to embroil Iran for the next eight years without letting it nurture a revolutionary agenda vis-à-vis its neighbours. In this period, Turkey was concerned with keeping away from the prospects of warfare by also securing economic gains through the sale of necessary staff to the warring states. During the 1990s after the end of the war, the relations were frequently in tension due to the claims that Iran was permitting PKK to use its own territory as headquarter and camps for their attacks to Turkey. And similarly, Turkey was accused of providing sanctuary to Mujahedeen al-Halk, an anti-regime organization aiming to overthrow the Khomeini regime in Iran. The relations were hottest when Turkey bombed some PKK targets in Iranian border villages in 1999 during which the two countries had come to the brink of war. But the tension was soon recovered with the signing of a mutual security treaty.²⁶

With the inauguration of the AKP government in 2002, Turkish-Iranian relations have acquired a multidimensional and multipartite character involving security matters as well as economic and diplomatic issues. The most important issue in the agenda of Turkish-Iranian relations was Iran's ambitions for establishing a nuclear energy installation and uranium enrichment program. Turkey has been opposed to Iran's nuclear ambitions together with the USA and the EU for a more peaceful and nuclear-free Middle East. For this matter, Turkey tried to be a mediator between Iran and Western countries to dissuade Iran from its nuclear program. While being opposed to a nuclear Iran, the AKP government has never been suspicious of a potential attack from Iran but rather believed in the value of historical friendship and neighbourhood between two countries. Turkey made pledges not to support any attack against Iran that may originate from the west.²⁷

In 2008, Iranian Prime Minister Ahmadinajat made an official visit to Turkey to meet with Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Under the shadow of Israel's Gaza War and

²⁶ William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey, The Case of the AKP*, 2009, pp. 139-41.

²⁷ Id.

succeeding similar events, it was observed that Turkey's opposition to a nuclear Iran was softened and that Turkey was not against Iran's production of nuclear energy for civilian purposes. During the visit, Ahmedinajad reiterated that Iran has no motivations for acquiring nuclear weapons.²⁸

In May 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a visit to Iran together with the President of Brazil Lula Da Silva for an agreement on the import of enriched Uranium to Turkey. Erdoğan expressed in a speech that Iran does not have any nuclear weapons and that it is rather surprising why the international community is so much anxious about such prospects while Israel possesses a stock of nuclear weapons. For global and regional peace, countries must be subject to equal treatment.²⁹

Another important issue between the two countries is Turkish import of natural gas from Iran. Turkey is diverted to Iran for the purpose of diversifying its energy import sources and for meeting increasing domestic demand. The volume of trade between two countries has increased from \$1 billion in 2000 to over \$10 billion in 2009. Most of Turkey's imports from Iran consist of oil, natural gas and similar products. The volume of trade is expected to rise over \$20 billion in the near future with increasing economic ties. Turkey has won a tender for the construction of a trans-border natural gas pipeline to transit the South Pars natural gas reserves of Iran to Europe through Turkey. In 2001, the natural gas pipeline between the countries amounted to 17% of Turkey's gas import. In 2007, the AKP government negotiated with Iran for the construction of a second natural gas pipeline to transfer 30 billion cubic meters of gas in a year to carry Iranian and Turkmen gas at the same time.³⁰

Turkish-Syrian relations, secondly, were strained until the end of 1990s because of a number of reasons that include Syria's claims over Hatay, Turkey's South-eastern Anatolian Project and Syria's support for the PKK. Hatay was under French mandate after the First World War to gain its independence in 1938. In a referendum held in 1939, Hatay decided to join Turkey which was opposed by Syria until recently. Turkey's South-eastern Anatolian Project was a source of trouble in relations because of the Syrian claims that Turkey was reducing the flow of water to lower basins of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. An finally, Turkey was condemning Syria for its overt support to PKK and its provision of sanctuary to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in Damascus. For these reasons, two countries came to the brink of warfare in 1998, but the tension was recovered with the dismissal of Abdullah Öcalan from Syria and his capture in Kenya to represent a turning point in bilateral relations. In 1999, Turkey and Syria signed the Adana Agreement that involved the cooperation of two countries in security and military matters.³¹

In 2000, first time in the history of bilateral relations, Turkish President Necdet Sezer organized an official visit to Syria to join in the funeral of Syrian President Hafiz Assad to be followed by a number of other high level of visits by both sides. Turkey's decision about not

²⁸ *BBC News*, "Iran Nuclear Programme – Solely Civilian," 16 March 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8570842.stm

²⁹ *Press TY*, "World Should Focus on Israel's Nukes," 19 May 2010, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/126944.html>

³⁰ William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, 2009, p. 141.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

supporting the US War in Iraq in 2003 was another important point in relations. The decision was highly appreciated by Syria which was also threatened by the USA due to its alleged support to international terrorism.³²

In 2004, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Hafız Assad in Damascus to sign a free trade agreement reminiscent of Turgut Özal's policies for the development of bilateral trade relations between the countries. Relations continued with increasing political, diplomatic and military ties in ensuing years. Two countries agreed in 2009 on the conduct of three joint military manoeuvre to further develop ties of friendship, cooperation and confidence and also to improve the ability of border troops to work in coordination. During the conduct of the manoeuvre, defence ministers of the two countries visited the 9th International Defence Industry Fair held in Istanbul and signed a letter of intent as a sign of cooperation in defence industry. In May 2009, President Abdullah Gül went for another visit to Damascus with a delegate of Turkish ministers that included Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu after the invitation of Syrian President Assad in return for Assad's visit in 2007 to keep the bilateral relations at a pace.³³

Turkish-Israeli relations also showed rapid development since 1990s to the day to make Turkey a mediator for the start of peace talks between Israel, Syria, Palestine and the USA. This was particularly the result of Turkey's new diplomatic style promoting peace and security in the region and developing relations with regional countries in a multidimensional and multipartite way. In January 1994, Turkey signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement with Israel to be followed by the signing of a Security and Intelligence Agreement in March 1994. In January 1995, another agreement was signed involving the training of Turkish special police forces and intelligence agents by Israel with their weapons and technical devices to be provided by Israel. These agreements were reached with the initiative of the Turkish Military Command rather than the politicians and thus must not surprise the beholder as they were signed during the Erbakan-Çiller Government. The protocols signed in these years constituted the major framework of military and strategic relations between two countries that involved Israeli supply of weapons and modernization of Turkish jets and tanks.³⁴

Economic relations between two countries have been developing rapidly with or without any political motivations. A free trade agreement was reached between two countries in 2000. The volume of foreign trade between two countries is over \$2.5 billion currently. And there were future plans for huge pipeline project for supply of water, electricity, natural gas and oil to Israel.

The AKP Government is most willing to become an agent of peace in the region between Israel, Syria, Palestine and the USA. The AKP Government has been very determined to bring an end to decades-old Israeli-Arab conflict since the beginning. The party pledged to improve relations with both sides of the conflict for its political and economic

³² Id.

³³ *Today's Zaman*, "Turkey, Syria to Forge Defence Industry Cooperation," 27 April 2009; *Today's Zaman*, "Turkey, Israel Conduct Military Drill, Israel Disturbed," 28 April 2009.

³⁴ Hakan Köni, "Turkish-Israeli Military Relations: Has Israel Blundered?," *Newzfirst*, 26 August 2010.

interests. Turkey is leading the development of a joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial park for prospective cooperation for peace between the parties. Before the holding of the Middle East Peace Conference in 2007 in Annapolis, Turkey invited leaders of Israel and Palestine Shimon Peres and Mahmud Abbas to address in the Turkish parliament for the resolution of the conflict. Turkey's good offices were appreciated by all parties and it was invited to Annapolis as a party for the resolution of the conflict.

During the visit of Shimon Peres to Turkey, a set of other regional problems are discussed including the Iranian nuclear enrichment program, captive Israeli soldiers held by Palestinians, and the Syrian-Israeli conflict over Golan Heights. Peres expressed their concerns with Iran's motivation to produce nuclear weapons and for the return of their soldiers and Abdullah Gül delivered the message for the start of negotiations between Israel and Syria. After Israel's declaration to Syria that Israel is intended to return Golan Heights to Syria, official talks started between two countries with the mediation of Turkey to be met in Istanbul.³⁵

Despite the developing tone of strategic and economic relations between two countries, it cannot be said that the AKP declared its relations with Israel perfect. Major source of diplomatic and political problem between two countries remains Israeli violations of human rights and international law in Palestine and in its neighbourhood. Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Golan Heights, and the atrocities the Palestinians are subjected have brought bilateral diplomatic relations to a minimum in times. For this matter, Turkey supported the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 calling Israel to withdraw from the lands that it occupied in 1967. Turkey condemned the assassination of Sheikh Ahmet Yassin by Israeli forces in 2004 as an act of state terrorism. In 2006, Turkish President Abdullah Gül met an exiled Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal, in Ankara during which he reiterated Turkey's support to UN Security Council decisions for the rights of Palestinians. The meeting was expectedly not welcomed by Israel and the western media due to accusations of terrorist activities attributed to Hamas.

Israel's Gaza campaign in 2009 was similarly harshly condemned by Turkey during which the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan demanded Israel to stop the bloodshed immediately. And similarly, in World Economic Forum in 2009 held in Davos, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his anger to Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Perez for their killings of the Palestinians in Gaza after which he abandoned the meeting saloon. As Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was not given enough time to speak, he interrupted to say that Mr. Peres spoke too loudly to cover his guilt. They know it very well how to kill. Turkish Prime Minister then stated that he will never come to Davos again.

And Israel's Flotilla attacks represented the most recent diplomatic and political trouble between two countries unprecedented in the history of bilateral relations. Israel stormed a humanitarian aid fleet organized by Turkish aid volunteers to break Israel's military blockade over Gaza for the delivery of relief items. The Israeli attacks resulted with the killing of eight Turkish citizens and a Turkish-originated US citizen. Turkey immediately called its Israeli

³⁵ *Al-Jazeera*, "Syria-Israel Talks One Year Old," 22 May 2008,
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/05/200861503620843768.html>

ambassador to Turkey and closed the embassy in Tel Aviv. Turkish President, Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed their deep concerns and revulsion against the Israeli practice violating the Law of Sea and their attacks to aid volunteers. Israel's actions were widely condemned by the UN, EU and other global and regional actors. Soon after, Turkey declared that earlier military agreements for Israel's use of Turkish air space and for the conduct of joint military exercise are cancelled.³⁶

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to elucidate the major changes in the policies and goals of the Turkish religious right in the area of foreign policy from the National View parties of National Order Party, National Salvation Party, Welfare Party, Virtue Party and Felicity Party to the Justice and Development Party. The major change in the foreign policy orientation of the party is explored in the shift from a predominantly cultural to a pragmatist and rational attitude. The National View parties had a vision of dichotomy between the East and the West. The East was belonging to the Islamic civilization and the west was shaped by Judeo-Christian traditions for centuries and the history of the world was written over an adversarial competition between these two poles. The west was driven by the will to exploit and weaken its adversary. The east, on the other hand, had a mission of civilization rooted in its Islamic heritage and exemplified in the history of Islamic states that did not foresee the annihilation of the non-Islamic nor did it exploit them economically. It was a necessity of reason for Turkey to minimize its political links with western international organizations and actors such as the UN, EU, IMF, World Bank, USA and Israel and turn its face to the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Turkey had to lead the formation of alternative international organizations and entities in the Middle East as a source of power and development.

The foreign policy vision of the Justice and Development Party is formed on substantially different premises than these of the National View movement. The notion of East-West dichotomy is abandoned in favour of a Turkey which has strong ties with the East and the West at the same time. The foreign policy decision making team of the AKP sees Turkey's interests in integration with the West and East. The role of the religion is minimized in shaping Turkey's relations with its neighbours and global actors. The party deems democracy, human rights, and rule of law as universal values of the humanity with their origins in the west and therefore it is strongly in favour of Turkey's membership to the EU, active role in the UN and close relations with the USA and other global actors. The agenda of AKP Government's foreign policy is occupied with all security, political, diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, social and cultural concerns that lead Turkey to pursue a multidimensional, multipartite, peaceful and dynamic policy in world politics. AKP Government's relations with the Middle East is indeed even more developed than the one desired by the Welfare Party. Turkey's powerful economy, stable political system, and secular democracy have been instrumental in its portrayal as a model country in the Middle East by the USA and the EU. With its pacific and conciliatory attitude and its close relations with Iran,

³⁶ Hakan Köni, "Turkish-Israeli Relations in the Aftermath of Flotilla Attacks," *Newzfirst*, July 20, 2010.

Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Israel, the AKP Government is also an oft-searched office of mediation for peace talks and negotiations in the Middle East.

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