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### Foreign Policy Orientation of Turkey's Pro-Islamist Parties: A Comparative Study of the AKP and Refah

Hasret Dikici Bilgin<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabanc University, Turkey

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# Foreign Policy Orientation of Turkey's Pro-Islamist Parties: A Comparative Study of the AKP and Refah

HASRET DİKİCİ BİLGİN\*

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, Turkey

**ABSTRACT** *This study aims to discuss the foreign policies of the pro-Islamist parties in Turkey by comparing the party programs and policies of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) and the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi). By focusing on programs and policies separately, it is argued that pro-Islamist elements in the establishment and program of the parties do not necessarily translate to actual policies, particularly in foreign affairs. Moreover, pro-Islamist political parties are not monolithic in terms of member composition; the parties also differ from each other. Finally, the parties might have different policies in the domestic context while employing a more pragmatic and traditionalist perspective in terms of foreign policy.*

Islamization both at the societal and state level has been a central topic in political debates, especially since September 11. Many countries, once secular although not necessarily democratic, today emphasize religious identity. Iran might be the most famous example; however, Islamization in Turkey provides a distinctive case for the country's specific historical experience with religion. Turkey has had a secular orientation—part of the Kemalist ideology—since the establishment of the Republic in 1923; nevertheless, increasing support for Islamist movements around the world influenced Turkey as well. In this context, not only domestic but also foreign policy implications are matters of concern, given that the incumbent Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) has emerged out of the country's historically most prominent religious movement, Milli Görüş (National Outlook).

This essay aims to discuss the foreign policies of the pro-Islamist parties that have come to power in Turkey so as to determine, first, whether there have been deviations from the traditional Republican foreign policy,<sup>1</sup> and second, whether there have been Islamist motivations behind the foreign-policy measures during these periods. The degree to which Islamic elements pervade foreign policy constitutes the essential research question of this study. As Islamic movements

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\*Correspondence Address: Hasret Dikici Bilgin, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, Orhanlı Tuzla, İstanbul 34956, Turkey. Email: hasretdb@su.sabanciuniv.edu.

vary across and within the countries, what really constitutes an Islamist foreign policy depends on context. This essay relies on the conceptualization of Zachary Karabell. His analysis accepts the defining characteristics of Islamist elements in foreign policy to be: an emphasis on the unity of the *umma* (community of believers in Islam) surpassing the national borders; questioning the sovereignty of secular states within the *umma*; struggle and distrust against Western influence on the Muslim world; and a common indisposition towards Zionism as the local manifestation of Western hegemony.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, these elements will be explored among the programs and policies of the pro-Islamist parties that came to power.

Although the history of political Islam in Turkey in terms of party politics can be traced back as early as the beginning of the multiparty period, this study is limited to the periods of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP), which held power between 1996 and 1997, and the AKP in its first period in power, between 2002 and 2007. The RP's period in 1996–1997 was chosen, as that party's ascendance to power constitutes a turning point in terms of increased Islamization in politics.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it was the first pro-Islamist party to win a plurality of the votes. For its part, the AKP won the November 2002 elections with a landslide victory, repeated its success with an even larger percentage of the vote (almost 48 percent) in 2007, and is serving its second term as a one-party government. This in itself is quite an achievement in Turkish politics, which have been historically characterized by minority and coalition governments with a few exceptions.

The essay begins with the main elements of the RP's foreign-policy approach in its party program, underlining major events and corresponding policies of the Refahyol (abbreviation of the Refah-True Path Party, DYP, coalition) government under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. This section ends with an evaluative discussion of Islamist elements in the foreign policies during the Refahyol period. The subsequent section focuses on the party program, foreign affairs developments, and the response of the AKP, paying specific attention to whether there are Islamist elements in the foreign policy measures taken by the party. The third section compares the RP and the AKP periods in terms of foreign policy formulation in party programs and policies. The study concludes with an exploration of continuities and discontinuities with the traditional foreign policy, the role of Islamist elements in this process, and the dynamics behind limitations and changes of these periods. As both parties share a pro-Islamic orientation and are rooted in the National Outlook Movement, they are easily regarded as similar; nevertheless, this study's contribution is the awareness that even subtle differences between parties from similar ideological backgrounds might result in substantially different foreign-policy formations. Moreover, the study argues that there is no unique Islam in Turkey in political terms; rather, there are multiple Islams, as the comparison of the policies of the AKP and the RP indicate. Finally, the domestic pro-Islamist rhetoric of political parties might not necessarily transform into policies. Once in power, they are subject to rationalist cost-benefit calculations and moderation.

### The Foreign Policy Program of the Welfare Party: Islam as a Foreign Policy Principle

The election manifesto of the RP prioritizes foreign policy as one of six primary policy areas, summarizing the main aim of the party to be the creation of an independent foreign policy, distinctive in personality, which foresees a leading role for Turkey. The manifesto depicted friendship, peace, and justice as the core values in foreign policy. In this context, improved relations with all countries was declared to be the main aim; however, in order to position Turkey as the leading country, Turkey's place was identified within the World Union of Muslim Countries. The pro-Islamist overview of the party was revealed through the argument that the European Union is a "Christian Club" formed according to the recommendations of Pope Pius XII.<sup>4</sup> In terms of Turkey's relations with the European Union, national policy was designed to follow the five-decade-old principles of the National Outlook Movement, according to which economic rather than political relations are improved with the European countries within the context of an export-oriented foreign policy. Despite the proposition to develop economic relations, the program declared the Customs Union Agreement signed on March 6, 1995, as illegitimate. Thus, the Islamist stance was subtly articulated throughout the discourse of foreign policy. Solutions to problems in foreign policy were delineated as removing US Operation Provide Comfort,<sup>5</sup> sarcastically titled the Poised Hammer (*Çekiç Güç*) in the Turkish media; preventing the intervention of other countries in Turkey's struggle against terror; and lifting the embargo on Iraq. The National Outlook nationalism underlying the manifesto blended religiosity with anti-Westernization.<sup>6</sup>

The manifesto was divided into two columns that sharply differentiated between the National Outlook and the "imitators" (*taklitçiler*), who copy the West in contradiction with national values and norms, in domestic and foreign policies. The manifesto also proposed the program of the Just Order (*Adil Düzen*). Moreover, an Islamic Union was proposed as a future solution on the ground, not only for foreign-policy problems but also for domestic problems, including terror. In the Just Order, which could be said to represent the party program in outlining basic principles and policies of the RP, the IMF, EU, and other international organizations were severely criticized on the basis of belonging to a capitalist system based on interest. Instead, an Islamic Common Market was proposed.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, Islamist versions of NATO, the United Nations, and UNICEF were suggested. In terms of the economic dimension of foreign policies, moral values and Islamic principles were again central in proposing a self-sufficient and independent economy that could rely on Turkish migrant workers abroad and financial assistance from Muslim countries.<sup>8</sup> In foreign-policy formulation, Westernization was again specified as the main source of problems, with particular emphasis on anti-Semitism and pro-Islamism.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Major Events and Policies during the Refah Period*

Although the RP emerged as the winner of the 1995 elections, it did not become a member of the government until June 1996, when the party formed a coalition with

the DYP. The Refahiyol government served only for a year, with its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, resigning in June 1997 during the February 28 process,<sup>10</sup> a move undertaken by the military.

One of the most important developments of the Refahiyol period was the establishment of the D-8 (Developing 8), composed of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Pakistan as an alternative to the G-7,<sup>11</sup> in line with the policies stated in the Election Manifesto on the Islamic Union. Furthermore, Erbakan conducted two main foreign visits: the first one to Asia (Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia) and the second one to Africa (Egypt, Libya, and Nigeria). The tours were justified on the basis of a multidimensional approach to foreign policy. The Iran visit stands out because of its economic content, during the course of which Turkey signed a natural gas agreement with Iran. Furthermore, the Libya visit was important for its political reflections on the domestic sphere, as Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi called for an independent Kurdish state and criticized the treatment of the Kurdish minority in Turkey during the visit. Moreover, Erbakan signed a communiqué accusing the United States of engaging in state terrorism.<sup>12</sup>

In this brief one-year period, the RP's foreign policies could be characterized by compromise, strategic retreat, and reversal. The coalition government's program, for example, stated that the government aimed to strengthen relations between Turkey and the EU, in contrast to the general tone of the RP's election manifesto. However, at the same time, the government program made this support conditional, emphasizing that costs and benefits would be taken into consideration on the basis of sovereignty, integrity, and national interests, a point that was interpreted as the RP's compromise and moderation towards the EU.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of its relations with the United States, the RP's critical approach also eased after coming to power, probably due to internal pressures and the moderating effect of being in power.<sup>14</sup> Although the election manifesto of 1995 proposed the removal of Operation Provide Comfort, Erbakan had to change his position under pressure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Erbakan's declaration of the United States as a terrorist state caused some reaction during this period; however, he ameliorated this harsh position later. The RP leadership renegotiated a natural gas pipeline agreement with Iran at a time when the Clinton administration was signing the Iran–Libya Act to prevent foreign investment. However, as Turkey's agreement with Iran did not involve any actual investment, it did not cause any considerable crisis in relations with the United States.

Turkey's policies towards Israel shared similar strategic reversals. Erbakan claimed he would revoke the partnership agreement previously signed by the Turkish military with Israel in August 1996; nevertheless, after coming to power he signed the agreement and, furthermore, he approved the free trade agreement.<sup>15</sup> When in power, at first Erbakan ignored Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's congratulations and request for a meeting. He also delayed the visit of Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs David Levy and criticized new settlements in the occupied territories, yet ultimately, he did not reject Levy's visit.

As far as the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus were concerned, Erbakan employed a religio-nationalist rhetoric; however, he did not make any visits to those regions despite the intention he had expressed earlier to increase relations through the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Given the party's diplomatic visits and policies towards the Middle East and the lack of any actual measure in other regions, it is possible to argue that the Islamic perspective dominated the National Outlook Movement's nationalism.

Finally, there were no major events concerning Turkish–Greek relations in this period, despite Erbakan's traditionally critical approach towards Greece, which might partly be explained by the party's short period in power and the persistence of other priority areas.

### *Islamist Elements in the Foreign Policies of the RP*

It is possible to identify pro-Islamist elements in the foreign-policy approach of the RP both in terms of policy formulation and applied policies. However, the presence of an underlying pro-Islamist worldview does not mean that the RP pursued purely Islamist policies in the foreign sphere. On the contrary, many scholars and commentators claim that the RP did moderate its original stance after coming to power and reversed policy in many policy areas. Many scholars point to various examples of moderation and compromises, such as Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür on Israel policy,<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Özdalga on the EU and NATO,<sup>17</sup> Sabri Sayarı on the United States<sup>18</sup> and the Customs Union,<sup>19</sup> and Frank Tachau on the general policy framework of the party.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as Sayarı notes, the RP was not a monolithic entity.<sup>21</sup> On some occasions, policy reversals were not only due to external pressures from the secularist establishment (particularly the military) but also from internal recommendations. Abdullah Gül's objections to the Libya visit and the successful attempt in excluding Sudan from the Africa tour might be considered in this context.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, Islamic moral values proposed as a solution to the main problems in both the domestic and foreign context by the RP existed both in the election manifesto and in the Just Order, which is practically the basic text of the political tradition on which the RP is based. The emphases on religion and orientation towards Islamic countries in the foreign policy of the Erbakan period were accompanied by a negative stance towards the West and Westernization, contemplating the influence of West within the framework of degeneration and cultural contamination.<sup>22</sup>

Benli Altunışık and Tür argue that the foreign-policy orientation towards the Muslim Middle East was one of the basic elements of the RP's "counter ideology."<sup>23</sup> In contrast to previous governments, there was no official visit to the West during the RP's reign; Erbakan even refused to attend dinner at the EU summit meeting in Dublin in December 1996. Furthermore, the first country to be visited was Iran. Erbakan's proposal to make Arabic a compulsory language for Turkish diplomats might be considered as a further example of the degree of Eastern orientation in

foreign policy during this period. Some authors also associate Erbakan's poor interest in Cyprus to the Turkish Cypriots' secularized society structure.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to ignoring the West and orienting to the East, Erbakan not only visited Islamist regimes such as Iran but also held meetings with Islamist opposition groups in Middle Eastern countries. The RP, in many respects, seemed to comply with the characteristics of Islamic foreign policy proposed by Karabell, in that calls for economic and political integration with the wider Islamic world through an Islamic Union and an Islamic Common Market are reminiscent of the unity of the umma, accompanied by a salient distrust towards the West and particularly towards Zionism. Nevertheless, all these policies were subject to immediate reversals.

Overall, it could be argued that policy reversals were largely due to internal pressures from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military rather than due to a change in ideological terms. The RP's policy on the agreement with Israel provides a good example, in that the signing of the agreement<sup>25</sup> was delayed until the resignation of the Erbakan government in order to intimate the party's reluctance. It could also be argued that actual pro-Islamist tendencies either did not fully transform into foreign policy formulation or remained under the surface due to severe domestic opposition.

### **The Foreign Policy Program of the Justice and Development Party**

The structure of the foreign-policy chapter in the AKP party program and election manifesto represents an understanding of globalization and post-Cold War international conjuncture. In the party program, foreign policy was formulated to be based on multiple axes and reciprocal interests so as to establish flexible relations with power centers.<sup>26</sup> With this goal in mind, increased participation of parliament and society in foreign policymaking was emphasized. The importance of relations with the EU was underlined, and improving relations with the United States, Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus was mentioned to be among the foreign-policy targets. A noticeable approach in the party program in terms of foreign policy is the repeated emphasis on the leadership role for Turkey in conflict and crisis resolution, as well as regional initiatives. Specifically speaking, solving problems in Turkey's relations with Greece, particularly on Cyprus; taking an active role in peace-building in the Middle East; and increasing efforts to improve Turkey's position in the European Security and Defense Concept (ESDC) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in the Black Sea region, Central Asia, and the Caucasus were identified as key foreign-policy aims. Protection of Turkish citizens abroad and increased relations with all countries were also mentioned. On the relations with international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, the program stated that relations should be maintained in accordance with national interests. Realist and national interest-based foreign policy formulation was mentioned as the main understanding underlying the AKP's foreign-policy approach.<sup>27</sup>

*Major Events and Policies during the AKP Period: Caution and Pragmatism*

The first period of the AKP started in 2002, and the party formed a second single-party government after the 2007 elections. The 2003 Iraq War, developments in Turkey–EU relations, and the Cyprus issue were among the initial political developments in the AKP's first period. To begin with, integration with the EU was a clear foreign-policy consideration during the AKP period. The AKP's pro-EU stance in fact preceded its coming to power, and the constitutional amendments that were critical for accession negotiations during the Ecevit period were made with the AKP's support.<sup>28</sup> During the initial years, reform packages on the rule of law, human rights, and the market economy were approved by parliament so as to satisfy the Copenhagen Criteria. Between 2002 and 2004, 17 legal reform packages were passed.<sup>29</sup>

In line with the EU approach, the AKP formulated a new approach to the Cyprus issue by supporting the Annan Plan, which proposed a united Cyprus and pressured President Rauf Denktaş for a referendum; Turkish Cypriots showed their support for the plan in the referendum by a 65 percent majority vote.<sup>30</sup> Although the Annan Plan was not recognized due to Greek Cypriot opposition, the change in policy towards Cyprus led to US efforts in removing the isolation of the Turkish part of the island. The AKP also proposed to open a port and an airport to the Greek Cypriots as part of the Customs Union Agreement and as an attempt to keep up the pace of Turkish-EU relations. Nevertheless, initial enthusiasm on behalf of the AKP towards the EU diminished due to the EU's reluctance to treat Turkey on equal terms with other candidate countries and the poor response to the AKP's port proposal. The unsupportive decision of the European Court of Human Rights on the headscarf ban in public places in Turkey and the lack of Islamic liberties in the progression reports might also have caused disappointment on behalf of the AKP. Critical developments in Iraq on the verge of civil war, especially after Saddam Hussein's execution, also forced the government to change priorities. Moreover, internal developments, especially regarding the discussion of presidential elections, might have caused domestic concerns to have primacy over foreign-policy concerns.

Regarding relations with the United States, the Iraq War and the Parliamentary Bill Crisis<sup>31</sup> (*Tezkere Krizi*) constituted the main problems. One-third of the rejection votes came out of the AKP, and this affected the course of Turkish–American relations, which went as far as raiding a building belonging to the Turkish military in Suleymaniyya, in northern Iraq. Violence in Fallujah was condemned as “genocide,” the leader of Hamas's military wing, Khalad Mashaal, was invited to Turkey, and anti-Americanism increased dramatically during the AKP period.<sup>32</sup> Erdoğan criticized US policies towards the PKK issue severely during this first period of the AKP between 2002 and 2007.<sup>33</sup> Erdoğan's visit to Sudan and participation in the Arab League Summit caused further uneasiness in the United States. Turkey's increased dependence on Russia for natural gas and alleged cross-border operations of the Turkish army in Iraq created further concerns for the United States.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, since the 2003 Iraq War, relations with the United States



have improved considerably, and the United States has become more sensitive to Turkey's concerns about the PKK.

Among other foreign-policy issues, Turkish–Greek relations did not show any major deterioration despite minor military conflicts in the Aegean Sea. It was, in general, a rapprochement period between the two countries, despite occasional difficulties and incidents. Finally, Turkey pursued an activist and mediating role in the Middle East. The number of visits to the region increased dramatically.

### *Islamist Elements in the Foreign Policies of the AKP*

In the party program and election manifesto, foreign-policy understanding was shaped by a Western-oriented and multidimensional approach, with an emphasis on the requirements of the post-Cold War period and globalization. Political abuse of religion was condemned in the party program, and pressures on beliefs and religious freedom were criticized within the general framework of human rights and democracy. However, Islamic identity was still important for the AKP, at least culturally, and the party program concluded with a religious phrase.<sup>35</sup> The AKP insisted that it was not an Islamist party but rather a conservative democratic political entity.

It is difficult to assess pro-Islamist elements in the applied foreign policy measures of the AKP. First of all, the AKP, like the RP, is not monolithic. In addition to different segments of Islamist and conservative groups, the AKP has more center-right members. Even after the election in 2002, some politicians previously affiliated with the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP), the DYP, and the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) have become members of the AKP. Secondly, there were differences in approach during the initial period and later statements in foreign-policy areas. Initial interpretations of the foreign policies of the AKP were in support of the AKP's liberal and Western-oriented measures, acknowledging the break from the National Outlook line.<sup>36</sup> Later years were more characterized by more fluctuations; however, foreign relations were usually kept at a working level.

Regarding the EU, the extent of Islamist motives is debatable. A pro-EU approach both in terms of program and policies, particularly reforms and efforts towards accession, was quite different from the traditional stances of pro-Islamist parties. Nevertheless, whether this is a strategic move in order to diminish the role of the military in politics, to prevent party closures and increase religious freedoms in the domestic sphere, or to represent a genuine pro-EU approach is difficult to answer. Furthermore, for the period beginning on February 28, 1997, it might be claimed that the EU has become an anchor for those desiring change.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the initial enthusiasm towards the EU lost pace in the later period. It is also difficult to evaluate this policy change, although it is not a reversal. It might be a strategy with national motives on the basis of reluctance of the EU towards Turkey as well as an acquiescence that the EU might not support further expansion of religious freedoms. Participation in the Arab League Summit, the visit to Sudan, the previous crisis spurred by the invitation of the leader of the military wing of Hamas, and a blurred

attitude towards the EU, the United States, and Israel are debated issues in terms of Islamist motives in these policies. Nevertheless, one should note that the party has never taken a consistently negative attitude towards Western countries, and when the party leadership criticized these countries, there were no religious connotations in the criticism.

### **Comparison of the RP and the AKP in Terms of Foreign Policy**

#### *Party Programs<sup>38</sup> in Comparison*

Comparison of the party programs of the RP and the AKP requires acknowledgement that the programs were and should have been different, as the AKP was established by a reformist group within the RP who tried to distance themselves from the National Outlook background.<sup>39</sup> However, there are commonalities in the programs. First of all, both programs aimed to give a leading role to Turkey in the international arena. While the leadership role was more general in the RP's election manifesto, Turkey's responsibility was more specifically stated in the AKP program in terms of crisis and conflict resolution and mediation, as well as activism in regional initiatives. Emphasis on Islamic identity is also a shared point. Nevertheless, the RP placed Islam as a policy tool in terms of forming an Islamic front against the West and establishing Islamist Unions in the areas of international economy and politics. The AKP, on the other hand, constrained religious identity to the individual and cultural levels.

On the EU, the RP claimed that the EU is a "Christian club" and proposed a Muslim alternative. The AKP, on the other hand, was quite positive, going so far as to grant full cooperation for undertaking immediate legal reform required by the Copenhagen criteria. Although the RP party program argued that good relations with the West were part of the foreign-policy agenda, the RP proposed a National Outlook approach, which required termination of Operation Provide Comfort and the Customs Union Agreement. The AKP emphasized the requirements of the new international conjuncture after the end of Cold War, and although it was stated that the policies would be in line with national interests, there was no reservation for any Western or non-Muslim country. Yet the AKP program devoted special importance to Muslim countries both in terms of bilateral relations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (İslam Konferansı Örgütü).

#### *Major Events and Responses: Similarities and Differences*

The AKP may have been formed by a group within the RP, but as mentioned above, the party, both in statements and programs, has emphasized differences deliberately. This insight might be considered to be the outcome of a learning process since February 28, an intention to avoid conflict with secularists (particularly the military), the loss of popular support for the National Outlook/Just Order line, and a more realist and pragmatic approach of the young reformists in the party. The

approach to the EU by the two parties is a good example in this respect. Another reason might be the lack of concrete support from the Muslim countries for Erbakan's policies, which forced the AKP to turn towards the West. However, differences are not limited to the EU, and there are many other foreign-policy areas in which Erbakan's leadership and Erdoğan's leadership are different. The Cyprus policy, their positions on international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and relations with Greece can be considered within this context. While the RP's attitude on these issues might be defined, at best, as reluctant, the AKP acted flexibly and enthusiastically, especially during the initial period of its rule. On Israel, the RP's attitude was very clear, going as far as to aim to cancel the agreement.<sup>40</sup> The AKP's attitude is more mixed. On the one hand, National Outlook supporters in particular accused the party of supporting Israel's policies,<sup>41</sup> and the Ministry of Energy agreed on a multi-purpose pipeline that is expected to improve relations.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the invitation of Hamas's Mashaal, Erdoğan's accusing Israel of state terrorism, and allegations that Israeli soldiers are training Kurdish militias in northern Iraq<sup>43</sup> increased tensions between two countries.

Comparison of US policy during the RP and AKP periods has a similar course. The RP's attitude is in line with its general reaction against the Western world. However, the RP did tone down in time, and US–Turkey relations did not go through a major crisis.<sup>44</sup> There had been critical statements made by the AKP against the United States, initially particularly on military bases.<sup>45</sup> However, this attitude later changed as well. Increased interest in the Arab-Islamic world and the AKP's accusing the United States of not being decisive in the fight against terrorism created occasional problems.<sup>46</sup> However, policies towards the United States are not hostile but rather specific to developments and likely to be tactical, as the rapprochement with reciprocal diplomatic and military visits since early 2007 illustrates.

Both parties, relying on the party programs, gave special importance to relations with Muslim countries, as mentioned above. Erbakan's attitude is again clearer, as compared with that of Erdoğan, as the former did not undertake any visits to West, and the bulk of official visits were made to Asia and Africa. Erdoğan initially was more Western-oriented; the selection of Greece for the first official visit was quite radical and positive in terms of foreign policy. However, visits to Muslim countries, including to Iran, increased,<sup>47</sup> and the first official visit of 2007 was to Lebanon.<sup>48</sup>

A common aspect in the foreign policy of these two periods was the dominant role of the party leaders in decisionmaking and limiting critical decisions to a small group of advisors such as İlnur Çevik for Erbakan<sup>49</sup> and Ahmet Davutoğlu, Cüneyt Zapsu, Ömer Çelik, Mücahit Aslan, and Egemen Bağış for Erdoğan.<sup>50</sup> Erbakan's visit to Libya, despite Abdullah Gül's warnings<sup>51</sup> and the exclusion of diplomats from the Syrian and Iranian visits,<sup>52</sup> might be interpreted as policies that were not formulated by the party but rather by Erbakan and a small group. It has also been claimed that Erdoğan excluded Gül in foreign policymaking when Gül served as the minister of foreign affairs.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

This essay tries to assess the influence of pro-Islamist governments on Turkish foreign policy. In this context, whether these governments deviated from the traditional foreign-policy framework specifically on the basis of Islamist motivations is critical.

Both parties expressed their intention to position Turkey as a leader country in their programs. The AKP's program specifically mentioned taking initiative, even in conflict resolution.<sup>54</sup> The Asia and Africa tours illustrate the RP's addresses to an Islamic Union for achieving a leadership role. On the other hand, Erdoğan's statements were in line with the party program, and the AKP leader's statements were enthusiastic regarding a mediatory role in crisis, the latest example being Lebanon.<sup>55</sup> These policies might be considered as posing a challenge to the traditional non-intervention principle in Turkish foreign policy; however, such policies are not specific to the RP and the AKP. Rather, they are part of the general framework of activism that began during the Özal period.<sup>56</sup> It is possible to argue, at least for the case of the AKP, that the government's activism is cautious and tries to stay out of conflict.<sup>57</sup> The traditional pro-Western element of foreign policy might have been challenged during the RP period, as there was not even a visit to the West; however, no major crises took place between Turkey and Western countries in this period. The AKP's enthusiasm about the EU, whatever the underlying motivations might have been, indicates that it was not anti-Western, neither in policies nor in program. The RP had at least attempted to change traditional foreign policy;<sup>58</sup> the AKP, on the other hand, stated explicitly that it would not challenge foreign policy right after coming to power.<sup>59</sup> The AKP, unlike the RP, did not emphasize Islam and insisted that it was a political, not a religious, party.<sup>60</sup> The party program goes as far as condemning those abusing religion for political purposes.<sup>61</sup> Menderes Çınar argues that while the RP tried to take the control of the state by pious cadres, the AKP tried to put forward that religious people can also be successful in politics.<sup>62</sup> Erhan Doğan goes so far as to argue that the AKP is a "byproduct and agent" of the secular modernization project.<sup>63</sup>

Despite modification of Turkish foreign policy in general in the post-Cold War period, it is still possible to speak about challenges and changes during the two governments. The RP's orientation towards the Arab-Islamic world and its Asia and Africa tours might be considered to be deviations from the traditional foreign policy. However, the anti-Western approach in foreign policy was challenged by the secular establishment, policies were reversed even when the RP was still in power, and anti-Westernism faded after the RP period.

As far as the AKP is concerned, the major change was in Turkey's Cyprus policy and support of the Annan Plan. However, this policy change did not involve any pro-Islamist motivations. Despite the latest slowing-down, EU-Turkey relations improved and acquired pace during the AKP rule, and its pro-Western, and specifically pro-European, emphasis in foreign policy is common to the rest of Republican history. Deterioration of relations with the United States might be

considered to be a deviation from traditional foreign policy; however, the occasional problems in relations with the United States do not embody any pro-Islamist rhetoric either. The improvement of relations in the beginning of the AKP's second term vindicates the lack of ideological position towards the United States.

The foreign policies of the AKP and the RP were made within certain constraints; therefore, assessing whether these two parties would be more willing to change traditional foreign policy in the absence of limitations would be at best speculation. One of the most important limitations is the compositions of members and the electorate. Neither the AKP nor the RP is monolithic. This point is important in terms of both understanding the mixed approaches within these parties in foreign-policy matters and in putting pressure on these parties to apply intended programs and policy formulations.

Furthermore, both parties faced—and the AKP still faces—skepticism from the secular Kemalist establishment; therefore, both the RP and the AKP have tried to avoid conflict in foreign policy and security issues, which are traditionally under the control of the secular line. When Erbakan tried to challenge, he was forced to retreat. The AKP, on the other hand, formulated its policies in greater tension due to the contradictory pressures from its Islamist base and the multiple nature of the electorate with different demands, in addition to skepticism on behalf of the military and other segments of the Kemalist establishment.<sup>64</sup> The February 28 process is critical from this perspective, as it enabled the military to make modifications in the socio-political system. After February 28, not only the AKP but also the traditionalist line from the RP softened Islamist rhetoric. The secular establishment is very strong in Turkey, and the intention to keep religious influences on politics and society under control is very powerful.

In considering the role of Islamist elements in the arguable changes in foreign policy during the RP and AKP periods, there are contradictory comments. Gareth Winrow argues that the religious lobby was influential on Turkish foreign policy during the RP period.<sup>65</sup> Mustafa Aydın, on the other hand, claims that Islam's role in Turkish foreign policy is limited to justification and covers other motivations and that Islamist motivations constitute a minor part of orientation towards the Middle East.<sup>66</sup> Ideologically, there might be Islamist considerations, but once in power, political interests apparently supersede religious values, even in the case of Erbakan.

The RP's foreign-policy measures and its attempt to challenge traditional foreign policy included pro-Islamist motivations; however, strong reaction from the secular establishment and the February 28 process prevented any possible change in Turkish foreign policy. As far as the AKP is concerned, that party is very cautious and pragmatist in foreign policy matters, and the party has differentiated between its approaches in the domestic and foreign realms. In this respect, the party leadership has consistently refrained from religious rhetoric in its criticism towards other countries, even during the heated debates regarding religion within the country.

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## Notes

1. Turkey's traditional foreign policy here refers to a Western-oriented, pro-status quo, and non-interventionist (neutral) approach to foreign affairs as employed largely during the Atatürk and İnönü periods. See Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), pp.138–9; and Baskın Oran, "Türkiye Kabuk Değiştirirken AKP'nin Dış Politikası" [AKP's Foreign Policy while Turkey Goes under Transformation], *Birikim* [Accumulation], Nos.184–5 (August/September 2004), p.55.
2. Zachary Karabell, "Fundamental Misconceptions: Islamic Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, Vol.105 (Winter 1996–1997), p.86.
3. Sabri Sayarı, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.3, No.3 (September 1996), p.2, <http://www.meforum.org/article/314>.
4. "Refah Partisi 24 Aralık 1995 Seçimleri Seçim Beyannamesi" [Welfare Party's April 24 1995 Election Manifesto], (Ankara: n.d, 1995), p.29.
5. Operation Provide Comfort was a military operation led by the United States and its allies. It was initiated to protect the Kurds fleeing the Iraqi regime after the first Gulf War. A no-fly zone was established at the north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel for this purpose. Some groups in Turkey had accused Operation Provide Comfort of protecting the PKK guerrillas, and they argued that the no-fly zone laid the grounds for an independent Kurdish state. The Islamists' unease with the operation stemmed from the fact that it was an extension of a war on a Muslim country.
6. Ahmet Yıldız, "Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook," *The Muslim World*, Vol.93 (April 2003), p.201.
7. Necmettin Erbakan, "Adil Düzen" [Just Order] under the subheading "V. 'Adil Düzen' Temeline Dayanan İslam Ortak Pazarının Kurulmasıyla Kalkınma Çok Daha Büyük Olur Hızlı Olur" [V. Development Will Be Bigger and Rapid with the Establishment of Islamic Common Market on the Basis of "Just Order"], <http://www.necmettinerbakan.org/kitap3.asp?id2=4&id=26>.
8. Necmettin Erbakan, "21 Soru 21 Cevap" [21 Questions 21 Answers], Question 10, <http://www.necmettinerbakan.org/?go=home>.
9. Sayarı, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," p.5.
10. For a detailed account of the February 28 process see Yavuz Donat, *Öncesi ve Sonrasıyla 28 Şubat* [February 28 Before and After] (İstanbul: Bilgi, 1999).
11. Kemal Kirişçi, "The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East," in Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi (eds.), *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power* (London and Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p.103.
12. Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, pp.157–9.
13. Erhan Doğan, "The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.6, No.3 (September 2005), p.426.
14. Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkish Policy toward Israel," in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayarı (eds.), *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), p.70.
15. Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür (eds.), *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change* (New York and Oxon: Routledge Curzon, 2005), p.58.
16. Ibid.
17. Elizabeth Özdalga, "Necmettin Erbakan: Democracy for the Sake of Power," in Metin Heper and Sabri Sayarı (eds.), *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*. (New York: Lexington Books, 2002), p.136.

18. Sabri Sayarı, "Turkey and the United States: Changing Dynamics of an Enduring Alliance," in Tareq Y. Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (eds.), *Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), p.35.
19. Sabri Sayarı, "Turkey and the Middle East in 1990s," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.26, No.3 (Spring 1997), p.51.
20. Frank Tachau, "Turkish Political Parties and Elections: Half a Century of Multiparty Democracy," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.1, No.1 (Spring 2000), p.141.
21. Sayarı, "Turkey's Islamist Challenge," p.3.
22. Menderes Çınar, "Turkey's Transformation under the AKP Rule," *The Muslim World*, Vol.96 (July 2006), p.476.
23. Benli Altunışık and Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change*, p.90.
24. Clement H. Dodd, "Turkey and the Cyprus Question," in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayarı (eds.), *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), p.162.
25. Military Training and Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Israel signed in 1996. It was interpreted then as an act on behalf of the Turkish military to emphasize to the pro-Islamist Refah that the basis of Turkish foreign policy is not Islam.
26. "AK Parti Programı" [AKP's Party Program], August 14, 2001, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/>, p.40.
27. "Herşey Türkiye İçin: AK Parti Seçim Beyannamesi" [All for Turkey: AKP's Election Manifesto], <http://www.akparti.org.tr/>, p.81.
28. Doğan, "The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance," p.422.
29. Soner Çağaptay, "Turkey at a Crossroads: Preserving Ankara's Orientation," *Policy Focus No. 48*. (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 2005), p.5, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/CagaptayBookWeb.pdf>.
30. Doğan, "The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance," p.430.
31. Parliamentary Bill dated March 1, 2003, which would permit deployment of American troops on Turkish territory, was rejected by the parliament. Rejection of the bill caused a political crisis between Turkey and the United States.
32. Soner Çağaptay, "Islamists in Charge," *Wall Street Journal Europe*, August 18, 2006.
33. "Erdoğan ABD'ye Havada Vurdu" [Erdoğan Attacks the US on Air], *Yeni Şafak*, January 4, 2007.
34. Glenn Kessler, "Rice Warns against Russian Gas Monopoly: Bid for Stake in Greek-Turkish Pipeline Raises Concern over Supply in Europe," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2006.
35. "Allah milletimizin yar ve yardımcısı olsun" [May God be friend/lover and supporter of our nation], AK Parti Programı [AKP's Party Program], p.44.
36. Soner Çağaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.6, No.4 (December 2002), p.42; Bora Kanra, "Democracy, Islam, Dialogue: The Case of Turkey," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (September 2005), p. 529.
37. Ümit Cizre and Menderes Çınar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003), p.317.
38. Here, election manifestos will be relied on, as the party program of the RP could not be accessed, and election manifestos represent the party programs in general.
39. In the February 28 process, members of the RP were divided into two groups, as traditionalists (represented by the Felicity Party today) and reformists (now in the AKP). Yeşilada, "The Virtue Party," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.3, No.1 (Spring 2002), pp.68–9.
40. Kirişçi, "The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East," p.105.
41. "AKP'ye Akıllı Selim Çağrısı" [Call for AKP for Common Sense], September 1, 2006, <http://www.sp.org.tr/haber.asp?list=1&haber=1076>.
42. Murat Yetkin, "Yüzyılın Projesi" [Project of the Century], *Radikal*, December 15, 2006.

43. "İsrailliler Kuzey Irak'ta Faaliette" [Israelis are Active in Northern Iraq], *Radikal*, June 22, 2004; "Seymour Hersh: Israeli Agents Operating in Iraq, Iran and Syria," *DemocracyNow*, June 22, 2004, <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/06/22/148253>.
44. Benli Altunışık, "Turkish Policy toward Israel," p. 70.
45. Çağaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," p.46.
46. "Erdoğan ABD'ye Havada Vurdu" [Erdoğan Attacks the US on Air], *Yeni Şafak*, January 4, 2007; Semih İdiz, "AKP, İslami Eksenli Dış Politika Arayışında mı?" [Is AKP in Search of an Islamist Foreign Policy?], *Milliyet*, April 3, 2006.
47. "Başbakan Erdoğan İran'a Gitti" [Prime Minister Erdoğan goes to Iran], *Sabah*, December 2, 2006.
48. "Başbakan Erdoğan Lübnan'da" [Prime Minister Erdoğan is in Lebanon], January 4, 2007, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/395861.asp>.
49. Donat, *Öncesi ve Sonrasıyla 28 Şubat*, p.225.
50. Nuran Yıldız, "Başbakan'ın 'Beyninin Yarısı'" [Half of the Prime Minister's Brain], *Sabah*, July 30, 2006.
51. Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, p.158.
52. Kirişçi, "The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East," p.42.
53. Metin Münir, "Dış Politikanın Sisler Bulvarında" [In Foggy Boulevard of Foreign Policy], *Milliyet*, August 15, 2006.
54. AK Parti Programı [AKP's Party Program], p.41.
55. "Bölge Ülkeleri İsterse Ortadoğu'da Arabulucu Oluruz" [We Might Mediate if the Countries of the Region Ask], *Radikal*, January 4, 2007.
56. Sabri Sayarı, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.54 (Fall 2000), p.170.
57. Erdoğan emphasized that Turkey should not take sides in the conflict in Lebanon. Nuray Mert, "'Derdimizden Dolaşyoruz" [We Travel out of Necessity], *Radikal*, January 5, 2007.
58. Benli Altunışık and Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change*, p.90.
59. Çağaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," p.46.
60. Çınar, "Turkey's Transformation under the AKP Rule," p.475.
61. AK Parti Programı [AKP's Party Program], p.6.
62. Çınar, "Turkey's Transformation under the AKP Rule," pp.476-8.
63. Doğan, "The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance," p.21.
64. *Ibid.*, p.434.
65. Gareth Winrow, "Turkey and the Newly Independent States of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus," in Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi (eds), *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power* (London and Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p. 181.
66. Mustafa Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century," in Tareq Y. Ismael and Mustafa Aydın (eds), *Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: A Changing Role in World Politics* (Aldershot & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), p.13.