

ANALYSIS OF TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH IRAQ IN THE REIGN OF JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY SINCE 2002: A NEO-CLASSICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract -Historically, Secularism and Westernization with the motto of “Peace at home, peace in the world” have been the fundamental codified principles of Turkish foreign policy, emphasizing pro-status quo and passive foreign policy. This policy shifted into a more proactive and autonomous foreign policy during the reign of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). The relationship between Turkey and Iraq is characterized by their shared borders, communities, beliefs, security concerns, trade, and cultural ties. Study argues that the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy under AK Party governments can be attributed to a combination of domestic factors, including the influence of powerful leaders, the role of the Turkish military, and the country's economic and interests' groups, and external factors, such as the destabilizing effects of the US intervention in Iraq and the complex dynamics of the Arab Spring. Consequently, Neoclassical Realism approach can offer an explanatory framework for understanding foreign policy decisions and decision-making processes in international relations.

Keywords: Activism, AK Party, Iraq, Neoclassical Realism, Turkish Foreign Policy.

INTRODUCTION

The states remain the primary actor in global politics, holding a significant position in international affairs, influencing the international system through their interactions and policies. The formulation of foreign policy goals bases these relationships, reflecting the dynamic interaction between domestic and international factors. Examining a shift or continuity in the policies of a state within the same political decision-making unit's or across the terms of several political decision-making units that succeed each other, assuming that all other variables remain constant during the period during which a change or continuity in a state's foreign policy occurs, is crucial in shaping the analysis by identifying the actors or factors that triggered or influenced the change and how the change occurred, and at what level (Üçbaş, 2020).

Neoclassical Realism approach can offer an explanatory framework for foreign policy decisions and decision-making processes in international relations, developed in the late 1990s mainly attributed to scholar “Gideon Rose”, who wrote about the theory in his article “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” in 1998. The neoclassical Realism perspective seeks to explain how the characteristics of states and the international system influence foreign policy behavior. It is rooted in the broader tradition of Realism, which emphasizes the role of power, security, and self-help in international politics since the international system is one of anarchy (Waltz 1993). Neoclassical Realism believes that foreign policy decisions are influenced not only by the constraints of the international system but also by the individual traits and abilities of the political decision-makers, who aim to maximize benefits in a given situation. As a result, analyzing the change in foreign policy decisions made by the same or different political decision-makers on the same issue in different systemic conditions becomes more comprehensible and insightful.



Rose (1998) further discusses three distinct theories of foreign policy: innenpolitik, offensive realists, and defensive realists. The innenpolitik approach highlights domestic politics as a primary factor shaping foreign policy, considering it a direct outgrowth of domestic political developments. Issues within local politics, including ideologies, economics, and culture, play a crucial role in shaping a country's foreign policies. The offensive realists' theory suggests that states seek to maximize their security by securing better positions in an anarchic framework (Rose, 1998). However, Guzzini (2013) challenges this notion, arguing that states occupying similar structural positions may not behave similarly in their foreign policy establishment. Lastly, Rose (2013) connects foreign policy with the defensive realists' theory, which views the international system as anarchic and argues that states adjust the power balance to counteract external threats. In this context, international violence is seen as a result of fear-inducing situations, with foreign policy often oriented towards peaceful international relations and responses.

In this study, whether a change has occurred in Turkish foreign policy will be discussed by looking at the period of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*-AK Party) governments since 2002, and the areas of change that occurred as well as causes and dimension of this change, particularly with Iraq will be investigated. The study argues that change in the decision-making units in institutions and bureaucracy led to that transformation in Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, it can be said that the change did not only originate from international systemic factors only but also from within the decision-making structure and unit.

Turkey's foreign policy in Iraq was principally motivated by interests in preserving security and supporting Iraqi territorial integrity and stability (Muftuler-Bac, 2014) and eventually securing its borders from possible threats. The AK Party was elected with a promise to modernize Turkey and strengthen its position internationally. Neoliberal principles emphasizing economic integration, democratic principles, and regional cooperation defined the party's early years foreign policy. Turkish foreign policy since 2007 has been concentrated on creating and growing diplomatic ties throughout the area and Iraq particularly by increasing its economic activities and direct investments pursuing economic interdependence as trade partners, diplomatically Turkey paved way for better ties with Iraqi-Kurds in north and recognized the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in 2008 and opened a its consulate in Erbil in March 2010 (Muftuler-Bac, 2014).

Analyzing Turkey's foreign policy toward Iraq under the AK Party, where systemic pressures like U.S. intervention in Iraq and its policies and regional dynamics interacted with domestic priorities, leadership choices, and institutional capacities to shape strategic outcomes, is especially pertinent to this framework because it provides a thorough lens for understanding complex foreign policy behaviors by taking into account the interaction of external and internal factors.

1. Decision Making Process in Foreign Policy

Foreign policy decision-making is a deliberate process through which national leaders, officials, and coalitions formulate strategies to advance their country's interests in the global arena. Rooted in the realist tradition, this process typically emphasizes power dynamics and national interests, focusing on how actors navigate international constraints and opportunities to secure their objectives. Importantly, individuals—such as presidents and high-ranking officials—play a central role in this process, shaping outcomes based on their preferences, experience, and strategic aims.

A key theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics is provided by Margaret G. Hermann, who categorizes foreign policy decision-making entities into three primary types of "decision units": the Predominant Leader, the Single Group, and the Coalition of Autonomous Actors. Each model presents a unique configuration of authority and influence. The Predominant Leader model refers to situations where a single leader, such as a president, holds the power to override dissent and make decisions independently. This is especially relevant in systems where executive authority is centralized. In contrast, the Single Group involves a cohesive decision-making body that reaches consensus internally. The Coalition of Autonomous Actors represents a more decentralized

structure where various independent actors—bureaucrats, agencies, or political entities—must negotiate consensus without a central authority to enforce decisions. Hermann's framework is widely applicable and includes actors such as cabinets, military juntas, legislatures, and revolutionary groups. The analysis reveals that the structure of the decision unit significantly influences how foreign policy is conceived and implemented.

In highly centralized systems, the individual leader's personality, interests, and level of expertise can directly impact foreign policy outcomes. Conversely, in fragmented or collective decision units, negotiation and compromise become crucial. Neoclassical realism provides a broader lens to analyze these variations by merging systemic international constraints with domestic-level variables—especially leadership traits and institutional dynamics. It highlights how the personal convictions, perceptions, and capacities of decision-makers affect foreign policy decisions, even under similar systemic pressures. For example, a leader's reaction to a given international challenge might vary depending on their political orientation, experience, or priorities. Margaret Hermann further suggests that predominant leaders become more engaged in foreign policy when they have either deep expertise or a strong interest in specific areas. For instance, President Dwight Eisenhower's involvement in nuclear policy was driven by his interest and knowledge in the field. In such cases, leaders might either maintain control over decision-making or delegate tasks selectively. The degree of their involvement varies depending on the issue and their leadership style.

A valuable case study that supports these theoretical insights is Sharifullah Dorani's dissertation, *The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Approaches and Their Applications: Case Study of Bush, Obama, and Trump towards Afghanistan*. Dorani analyzes how each U.S. administration approached the war in Afghanistan, revealing differences in decision-making structures and priorities. President George W. Bush's administration was marked by internal debates between minimal military intervention (Rumsfeld) and long-term nation-building (Powell). Obama's era saw similar conflicts, particularly around General McChrystal's troop surge request and Vice President Biden's opposition. Under Trump, the foreign policy focus shifted more towards domestic political considerations and dealing with global rivals like China and Iran, deprioritizing Afghanistan. Dorani's analysis highlights how each leader's ideology, administrative setup, and strategic focus led to different foreign policy paths, even when facing similar circumstances. This comparative study emphasizes the importance of understanding the internal dynamics of foreign policy-making—including the role of individual agency, political context, and decision-making frameworks.

This theoretical insight helps explain the evolution of Turkish foreign policy, particularly under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after 2002, who exemplifies a predominant leader. Erdoğan's increased centralization of power has made his personal interests and beliefs more consequential in shaping Turkey's external actions. His leadership style emphasizes control over foreign policy and limits the influence of alternative actors or institutions. Such concentration of authority increases both the decisiveness and the accountability of foreign policy outcomes.

2. Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey's foreign policy activism refers to the active engagement and involvement in international affairs, particularly in shaping and pursuing Turkey's foreign policy objectives. The first wave of activism in Turkish foreign policy refers to the period immediately after the Cold War. This phase was characterized by a proactive approach to foreign policy, as Turkey sought to redefine its role in the international arena. During this time, Turkey aimed to diversify its alliances and strengthen its relationships with both Western and non-Western countries. The country actively engaged in multilateral organizations and initiatives, such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Turkey also pursued closer ties with its neighbouring countries, particularly in the Middle East and the Caucasus region.

The foundational principles of Turkish policy were initially shaped by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk following the establishment of the new Turkish state in 1923. Kemalist ideology, dominating state


bureaucracy until the late 1980s, embodied a commitment to 'westernization' and 'status quo' foreign policy (Aydin,2004). The Kemalist ideology emphasized non-interference in conflicts and bloc politics, as well as a strategy of non-expansion and non-aggression—a departure from Ottomanism (Oruç, 2021). Kemalist's foreign policy consisted of a 'pro-western' stance, evident in NATO membership, the Turkish-American partnership post-World War II, and the proposition for EU membership in 1963. Additionally, it pursued a 'status-quo' approach, manoeuvring between superpowers to align with Turkish interests without actively supporting any bloc..

Adnan Menderes president of Turkey in 1950-1960 initiated changes in domestic and foreign policy, challenging traditional Kemalist principles. Turgut Ozal continued this deviation from orthodox Kemalism, introducing a proactive foreign policy characterized by extending influence to regions previously under Ottoman hegemony —referred to as Neo-Ottomanism and Ozalism in literature. initially used in relation to late President Turgut Ozal's economic reforms, mega projects, and active foreign policy (Oruç,2021). Neo-Ottomanism can be defined as an expansionist Turkish political view that supports greater political participation of the Republic of Turkey inside territories that historically were under the control of the Ottoman Empire, the previous state that encompassed the territory of modern Turkey, and many of the regions in the Middle East.

This departure from Kemalism was motivated by a belief in Turkey's best interests lying in an active regional role. Turgut Ozal, a prominent Turkish politician, engineer, and President from 1989 to 1993, played a pivotal role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy during a transformative period. Ozal's activism in Turkish foreign policy, often referred to as Ozalism, was marked by a departure from traditional norms. Born in 1927, Ozal's early career included roles in the Turkish State Planning Organization and as an economist for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Characterised as a Neo-liberal Economist, his diverse background in private industry and connections in business circles influenced his political ideology, blending Turkism, Islamism, liberalism, and American-style democracy.

Ozal's foreign policy approach was pragmatic and proactive, aiming for Turkey to become a leading state in former Ottoman territories (Yavuz,2020). His Neo-Ottomanism perspective was complemented by a strong pro-Western orientation, particularly admiring the United States. Domestically, Ozal advocated for a liberal economy, pro-EU policies, and a pluralistic inclusive approach, addressing issues such as the Kurdish problem within Turkey. His foreign policy activism was notably showcased during the Gulf War. Contrary to traditional Turkish foreign policy, Ozal actively supported the U.S.-led coalition, closed the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline, and backed an economic blockade against Iraq. This decision, motivated by a desire to demonstrate Turkey's importance in the post-Cold War era and reshape the region's geography, marked a significant departure from Turkey's historical non-interventionist stance. Ozal's Gulf War policy included opening borders to Iraqi Kurds fleeing Saddam's regime, establishing ties with Kurdish leaders, and contributing to the creation of a "no-fly zone" in northern Iraq. These actions reflected his commitment to assertive foreign policy and humanitarian considerations.

The AKP's foreign policy activism has been characterized by a shift in the main axis of Turkish foreign policy, with references to a drift away from the predominantly Western orientation towards a more "eastern-oriented" pattern of behaviour(Öniş,2009).This shift has sparked debates and discussions both domestically and internationally, with the claim of a significant change in Turkish foreign policy being a topic of vivid public debate. The changing nature of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government can be attributed to several factors. Öniş (2009) poses that one factor is the assumption of direct responsibility by Ahmet Davutoğlu as the new foreign minister in May 2009. His influence and vision played a significant role in shaping the new direction of Turkish foreign policy. Another factor is the desire to diversify Turkey's alliances and partnerships beyond its traditional Western orientation. This includes strengthening ties with countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, as well as pursuing a more active role in regional conflicts and crises. The AKP government's emphasis on a values-based foreign policy, which prioritizes justice, humanitarianism,



and solidarity, has also contributed to the shift. This approach seeks to position Turkey as a regional power and a mediator in international disputes. Additionally, domestic political considerations, such as the AKP's desire to consolidate its support base and project a strong image of leadership, have influenced the shift in Turkish foreign policy.

3.1 Structural Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy


Foreign Policy in Turkey have been significantly impacted by the structural factors that shape the country's foreign policy. These factors are anchored mainly in the Ottoman legacy, geographical reality. Turkey initiates its foreign policy judgments in a framework that is dynamic and complex due to these considerations. Turkey's foreign policy, according to Aydın (2004), is heavily influenced by its Ottoman background. Modern Turkey was founded on the diplomatic traditions and administrative expertise of the Ottoman Empire. But the empire's heterogeneous racial and religious variety presented difficulties for the newly formed republic in 1923. Comprehending Turkey's foreign policy strategies, both past and present, requires an understanding of these fundamental drivers (Aydın, 2004). Gaining an understanding of the structural factors that shape Turkish foreign policy is crucial to appreciating the complexity and development of Turkey's foreign policy, especially with regard to Iraq. These factors have their roots in the political changes that molded contemporary Turkey as well as in geographical and historical legacies.

3.1 Ottoman Empire Legacy

The Ottoman Empire has had a substantial impact on Turkish foreign policy; several aspects of this historical influence may be seen in the country's current diplomatic procedures and strategic orientations. Turkey's current foreign policy is greatly influenced by the Ottoman Empire, which ruled over most of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa for more than six centuries. William Hale (2013) examines this historical continuity and how it affects Turkish foreign policy now, in his book "Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774". The contemporary Turkish state was founded on a strong foundation cultivated during the Ottoman era's diplomatic traditions and administrative expertise.

The Ottoman Empire's bureaucratic framework, which was distinguished by an advanced system of diplomacy and government, made the transition to the Republic of Turkey, which was founded in 1923, easier. During the transitional era, Turkey was able to preserve both a functional state machinery and a cohesive foreign policy framework because to this continuity (Hale, 2013). The administrative and diplomatic traditions, the management of a diverse society, the geopolitical strategies, and the ideological foundations of the Ottoman era continue to influence Turkey's contemporary international relations. Understanding these historical determinants is crucial for comprehending Turkey's foreign policy strategies and decisions (Aydın, 2004; Kosebalaban, 2011; Hale, 2013). Each of these seminal works provides critical insights into how historical legacies and strategic considerations have shaped Turkey's approach to international relations, illustrating the complex and dynamic framework within which Turkey navigates its foreign policy. This legacy has enabled Turkey to navigate the intricacies of international relations effectively, leveraging its historical ties and strategic position to its advantage (Aydın, 2004).

Modern Turkish nationalism and statehood were also shaped by the intellectual underpinnings established during the late Ottoman era, especially the Tanzimat reforms and the Young Turk movement. Through its Western-oriented foreign policy and ambitions to join the European Union, the Republic of Turkey has carried out these reforms with the goal of modernizing the Ottoman Empire and integrating it into the European state structure (Kosebalaban, 2011). Turkish foreign policy has been shaped by Kemalism, the fundamental ideology of contemporary Turkey that emphasizes secularism, nationalism, and modernization, according to Aydın (2004) this historical trajectory was reinforced by the substantial reforms that brought Turkey closer to Western institutions as a result of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's vision for a secular and modern Turkey.



Despite these aspects, the Ottoman legacy also posed significant challenges for the Turkish Republic, particularly in managing its multiethnic and multireligious society. Redefining national identity and addressing minority issues were crucial throughout the Ottoman Empire's transformation to a nation-state, as it was a mosaic of diverse ethnic and religious communities. The Ottoman Empire was to be destroyed, and its lands divided among the victorious Allied forces in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), an event that had a profound impact on Turkish national consciousness. The successful negotiation of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and the settlement of the Mosul conflict was greatly aided by the League of Nations. After several rounds of mediation and negotiation, the arbitration procedure resulted in a verdict in December 1925 giving Iraq the province of Mosul. By signing the Frontier Treaty of 1926, the Turkish government consented to a settlement that included monetary compensation; instead of a set cash settlement, payments were made dependent on oil revenue. Although there were residual tensions and financial disagreements that continued until 1952, this deal officially ended the Mosul question (Cosar & Demirci, 2006). The most persistent challenge has been the Kurdish question. The Kurdish population, which spans across several countries in the region, including Turkey, has been a source of internal conflict and regional tension. The Ottoman policy of managing diverse groups through a system of autonomous millets (communities) did not translate well into the nation-state model adopted by Turkey, leading to ongoing issues of ethnic and cultural integration (Aydın, 2004). Furthermore, the dissolution of the empire and the subsequent struggle for independence left deep scars and a heightened sense of caution against external threats. This historical experience has fostered a national security mindset that continues to influence Turkey's foreign policy decisions.

3.2 Geographical Location

Turkey's strategic location at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East has had a significant impact on its foreign policy. Turkey's strategic advantages and major problems resulting from its unique situation have shaped its dealings with neighbouring countries and global forces. Turkey's geographical conditions have a significant influence on its foreign policy decisions and actions, as highlighted by Mustafa Aydın (2004). Turkey's geopolitical significance has long been acknowledged due to its advantageous location. Turkey, which is located on the Anatolian Peninsula, holds sway over important historical invasion routes that lead from the Caucasus and the Balkans into the Middle East. This position has made Turkey a pivotal player in regional politics, enabling it to influence events far beyond its borders. Historically, the Anatolian region has been a significant channel for migrations and invasions, fostering a sense of insecurity and necessitating robust defence strategies (Aydın, 2004). Turkey is both a land bridge and a fortress between continents because of the surrounding oceans and the hilly terrain in the east, which act as natural obstacles. Due to this dual nature, Turkish states—Ottoman Empire and modern Republic included—have always been forced to participate actively in both Western and Eastern affairs (Aydın, 2004).

Turkey was situated on the front lines of the war between the Eastern and Western blocs during the Cold War due to its geographic location. Of particular importance was the nation's dominance over the Turkish Straits, which link the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. These straits have historically been a point of contention, especially between Russia and Western powers, due to their strategic importance for maritime navigation and military movements. Turkey's role as a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member further underscored its strategic value in countering Soviet influence in the region. The Cold War dynamics necessitated a foreign policy that was closely aligned with Western interests while also addressing regional security concerns (Aydın, 2004).

Turkey is an important transit country for energy supplies, which has an impact on its economic policies, as vital centre for the transit of natural gas and oil from the Middle East and the Caspian region to Europe because of the pipelines that traverse its borders. Turkey's strategic importance has been emphasized by its economic geography, which calls for a foreign policy that strikes a balance between ties with countries that are abundant in energy and Western consumer markets. Turkey's foreign policy has been largely shaped by its geographic location at the intersection of Europe, Asia,

and the Middle East. The strategic advantages and challenges posed by this unique position have shaped Turkey's interactions with both regional and global powers, influencing its defence strategies, economic policies, and diplomatic engagements (Aydin, 2004).

Turkey's geographic circumstances continue to influence its foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Due to its strategic location in the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus, the nation is forced to actively participate in regional affairs while striking a balance between its traditional Western orientation and emerging regional dynamics. The geopolitical shifts have challenged Turkey's historical policy of regional isolation, pushing it towards greater involvement in regional conflicts and cooperation initiatives (Öniş, 2011). Despite these challenges, Turkey has maintained its pro-Western stance while seeking to leverage its strategic location to enhance its regional influence (Aras, 2009).

Turkey's distinctive geographic location and shared border with Iraq have a big influence on the two nations' bilateral ties. This border, which is around 367 kilometres long, affects many facets of their interactions, such as trade, security, the transportation of energy, and regional politics. This study looks at the significance of Turkey's location in respect to Iraq and how their shared border influences their diplomatic and commercial ties. Turkey's geographical realities have profoundly influenced its foreign policy, shaping its strategic decisions and international interactions. Due to its strategic location at the meeting point of two continents and its authority over important waterways, the nation has gained considerable geopolitical significance. Due to its strategic position, foreign policy requires finding a balance between global alliances and regional participation, addressing security issues and maximizing economic potential (Hale, 2013). Turkey's foreign policy objectives and tactics will be largely determined by its geographic circumstances as it navigates the complexities of modern geopolitics (Onis & Yilmaz, 2009).

4. Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Iraq Since 2003: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective

Since 2003, Turkey's foreign policy toward its southern neighbor Iraq has undergone significant transformation, influenced by both internal dynamics and regional developments. As one of the key actors in the Middle East, Turkey's approach to Iraq has been shaped by its geopolitical goals, security concerns, and shifting global order. The neoclassical realist framework, a theoretical model that incorporates both external and internal factors, including the changes in leadership and priorities of Turkey's military and security establishment, beside external factors regarding regional security concerns, such as 2003 US intervention in Iraq, Arab springs, and the rise of non-state actors like ISIS. Applying this framework allows for a well understanding of Turkey's foreign policy toward Iraq since 2003, taking into account the influence of both regional pressures and internal political changes.

4.1 Domestic Dynamics of Turkish Foreign Policy under JDP

4.1.1 Leaderships Role

The period after 2003 in shaping Turkey's foreign policy, largely influenced by the significant leadership roles of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoglu, as the Prime Minister, brought a dynamic and assertive leadership style to Turkish politics, emphasizing pragmatism, economic development, and a vision of Turkey as a regional power. Their approach to governance and foreign relations was characterized by a strong emphasis on national sovereignty, economic interdependence, and the strategic utilization of Turkey's geopolitical position.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan played a pivotal role in redefining Turkey's foreign policy in which under Erdoğan's leadership, the TFP shifted from a defensive, status quo-oriented approach to a more proactive, aggressive stance. This shift aligns with neo-realist principles, where systemic changes—such as the power vacuums in neighbouring regions—demanded decisive leadership to secure Turkey's national interests. Erdoğan's pragmatic decision-making emphasized leveraging Turkey's military and economic power to address security threats and increase regional influence. Erdogan's leadership is described as pivotal due to his centralisation of decision-making power and his ability to neutralise traditional Kemalist elites, thereby enabling the AK Party to consolidate its

political dominance. By 2011, much of Turkish foreign policy revolved around Erdogan's authority (Tziarras, 2014). His rhetoric and actions often aligned with the broader AK Party vision of a revisionist and ideologically driven foreign policy. The AK Party's foreign policy-making elite, including Erdogan and Davutoglu, exhibited a strong ideological orientation, often prioritizing values like justice and cultural affinity with the Islamic world. Their leadership styles facilitated Turkey's shift from a status quo power to a more revisionist regional actor.

Ahmet Davutoglu as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister in later years, played a crucial intellectual and strategic role in this period. Davutoglu's "Strategic Depth" doctrine served as the intellectual backbone of Turkey's foreign policy. His emphasis on soft power, historical depth, and proactive diplomacy reshaped Turkey's approach to its neighbours. By advocating for a balance between Turkey's Ottoman heritage and its modern republican identity, Davutoğlu envisioned a Turkey that could act as a bridge between the East and the West, as well as a stabilizing power in the region. In the context of Iraq, Davutoglu's doctrine emphasised the need for comprehensive engagement that went beyond traditional state-to-state relations. This included fostering relations with various ethnic and sectarian groups within Iraq, particularly the Kurdish population in the north. By promoting dialogue and economic cooperation, Turkey aimed to stabilize Iraq while advancing its own strategic interests.

Tziarras (2014) argues that leaders' worldviews and ideologies are crucial in filtering systemic pressures and translating them into specific foreign policy behaviours. Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party demonstrated a revisionist nature, driven significantly by the ideological outlook of its leadership. However, this revisionist tendency was not absolute and was often moderated by systemic factors such as shifts in international power relations, external threat perceptions, and global economic interdependence. In situations where external or domestic opposition was minimal, ideologically driven policies had a more pronounced effect on Turkey's foreign policy. Conversely, when systemic or domestic constraints were stronger, Turkey adhered to more status quo-oriented policies.

Together, Erdogan and Davutoglu created a synergy that redefined Turkey's foreign policy objectives. Erdoğan's leadership during this period was marked by his ability to consolidate power domestically while projecting Turkey's influence internationally. His rhetoric often emphasized Turkey's historical responsibilities and its potential as a leading actor in the Muslim world. While Davutoglu's intellectual contributions ensured these initiatives were grounded in a coherent strategic vision. This partnership was particularly evident in Turkey's relations with Iraq, where the interplay of ideological, economic, and security concerns necessitated a nuanced approach. Erdoğan's leadership facilitated the establishment of strong economic ties, particularly with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The pursuit of energy security and economic integration with Iraq became central to Turkey's policy, reflecting Erdogan's broader strategy of leveraging economic interdependence to enhance political influence. Turkey's engagement with Iraq during this period was also shaped by broader geopolitical and economic considerations, as articulated in Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth doctrine. Iraq's energy resources and strategic location made it a key component of Turkey's foreign policy in the region. These dynamics reflected a shift in Turkey's approach to the Middle East under the AK Party, which combined ideological aspirations with pragmatic responses to changing regional circumstances. This multi-faceted approach to Iraq underscores the interplay of systemic and domestic factors in shaping Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party era. It illustrates how economic interests, security concerns, and regional power dynamics influenced Ankara's strategies, reflecting the broader patterns of revisionist behavior in Turkish foreign policy during this transformative period.

4.1.2 Military Establishment Role

The transformation of Turkish foreign policy, especially in security and military domains, reflects a blend of systemic pressures and domestic leadership decisions. The strategic decisions of leaders

and institutions, particularly regarding cross-border military operations conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). The role of Turkey's security apparatus in shaping policies aimed at addressing cross-border operations, primarily concerning the PKK's presence in northern Iraq.

The TAF's role in Turkish foreign policy was critical in operationalizing the strategic objectives set by political leaders. The military's increasing alignment with political leadership under Erdoğan also marked a significant shift from earlier periods when the TSK operated as an independent power centre. This alignment reflected the AKP's ability to integrate military actions with diplomatic strategies, ensuring that security operations complemented Turkey's economic and political objectives (Tziarras, 2021). However, the TSK's operational significance in Iraq remained essential, particularly for responding to transnational threats such as terrorism (Uçar, 2021) demonstrating the interplay of leadership, institutional adaptation, and systemic pressures. Under the AKP, particularly after 2007, significant judicial and constitutional reforms reduced the political role of the TSK. This shift allowed the government to centralize foreign policy decision-making, diminishing the Kemalist establishment's traditional dominance. The reforms, supported by EU-backed democratization efforts, restructured civil-military relations, facilitating the AKP's consolidation of power and enabling a more centralized approach to foreign policy (Tziarras, 2021).

The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) played a significant role in shaping Turkish foreign policy (TFP) towards Iraq, particularly in response to security concerns such as the activities of the PKK and regional instability following the U.S. invasion of Iraq since 2003. After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the PKK announced the end of its ceasefire and resumed attacks against Turkey, utilizing its bases in Northern Iraq. This escalation of violence led to intensified Turkish cross-border military operations, further solidifying the TAF's role in addressing transnational security threats. Operations in Northern Iraq were primarily aimed at neutralizing the PKK, which had established strongholds in the region. For example, the Pençe-Kaplan operations focused on targeting PKK bases near Turkey's borders. The Pençe-Kaplan operation began on June 17, 2020, targeting the Haftanin region in Northern Iraq. This area is known as an extension of the Qandil Mountains, a stronghold for the PKK. The operation aimed to neutralize threats to Turkish border security through airstrikes and artillery support. The Ministry of Defence emphasized that the operation was conducted under Turkey's right to self-defence and aimed to protect local populations and national borders. These actions were justified under Turkey's national security doctrine and were consistent with a neo-realist understanding of ensuring territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The military's role underscored Turkey's commitment to safeguarding its borders while engaging in broader regional geopolitics. The TSK's actions reflect the interplay between systemic factors, such as regional instability and transnational threats, and domestic leadership decisions. While systemic pressures necessitated a strong military response, the leadership's strategic vision, particularly under Erdoğan, determined the broader framework within which these operations occurred. This demonstrates how leadership and institutional capabilities together shape TFP in complex security environments. Under Erdoğan's leadership, Turkey sought to position itself as a decisive regional power by utilizing military interventions as a primary tool to address these security concerns (Abdelaziz, 2022). These military interventions exemplify the AKP's reliance on hard power to combat perceived existential threats while simultaneously asserting Turkey's influence in the region (Abdelaziz, 2022, p. 60).

4.1.3 Economic and Business Interests Groups Role

The influence of domestic interest groups, such as MÜSİAD, rooted in the emerging Anatolian business class and closely aligned with the AK Party, pushed for stronger ties with the Middle East, Africa, and post-Soviet states to access new export markets.

MUSİAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association) has played a significant role in Turkey's foreign policy under AK Party rule, acting as a key non-state actor in advancing Turkey's economic and diplomatic interests. Closely aligned with the AK Party's political vision, MUSİAD

represents the interests of the emerging conservative business elite, which has become a vital force in shaping Turkey's foreign relations, particularly with Muslim-majority countries and developing economies. Under the AK Party, MUSİAD has actively promoted economic ties with regions historically underrepresented in Turkey's foreign trade, such as Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Its initiatives aligned closely with Ahmet Davutoglu's Strategic Depth doctrine, which emphasized Turkey's role as a regional and global power. MUSİAD facilitated international business connections through platforms like the International Business Forum, which brought together Turkish and foreign businessmen to enhance economic cooperation. These efforts reflected Turkey's broader goal of diversifying its economic partnerships beyond traditional Western markets.

By 2016, MUSİAD members, representing approximately 60,000 companies, accounted for around 20% of Turkey's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Their influence spanned sectors such as construction, textiles, media, and food production. The organization's activities reflect its emphasis on broadening Turkey's trade networks with regional partners like Iraq. MUSİAD's focus on Muslim-majority countries positioned Iraq as a vital trading partner. Through fairs and business to business (B2B) meetings, MUSİAD facilitated increased trade and investment opportunities between Turkish businesses and the Iraqi market. Its activities underscored the AK Party's strategy to leverage economic interdependence to strengthen regional influence. MUSİAD expanded its operations to 169 contact points in 65 countries by 2017. This expansion, including representation in Iraq, highlights its role in supporting Turkey's proactive foreign policy. It not only promoted trade but also worked to enhance Turkey's image abroad through public diplomacy efforts.

MUSİAD emphasized fostering relations within the Islamic world. Its activities often targeted Muslim-majority countries, reflecting its ideological alignment with the AK Party's focus on strengthening ties with these nations. Through trade delegations, fairs, and collaborative projects, MUSİAD positioned itself as a bridge between Turkish businesses and the global Islamic market. This approach not only supported the AK Party's economic priorities but also advanced its geopolitical strategy of enhancing Turkey's influence in the Muslim world. MUSİAD's alignment with the AK Party's foreign policy objectives demonstrates how non-state actors can play a crucial role in advancing state interests. Through its initiatives, MUSİAD not only strengthened Turkey's economic ties with key regions but also reinforced its image as a proactive and influential regional power under the AK Party rule. This highlights the dynamic interplay between domestic interest groups and state leadership in shaping Turkish foreign policy during this transformative period.

4.2 External/Systemic Dynamics of Turkish Foreign Policy under JDP

External and systemic dynamics significantly impacted the strategic approach and decision-making processes of Turkish foreign policy. The dynamics can be analysed using system-level independent variables. Transformations in global and regional power dynamics have profoundly influenced Turkey's foreign policy, especially during major developments like the U.S. intervention in Iraq and the Arab Spring.

4.2.1 The U.S. Intervention in Iraq (2003)

In the early 2000s, the U.S. government, under President George W. Bush, asserted that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and maintained ties to terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda. These claims were used to justify the need for military intervention, aiming to disarm Iraq and promote democratic governance. However, subsequent investigations revealed that the intelligence supporting these assertions was flawed, and no active WMD programs were found in Iraq. On March 20, 2003, a U.S.-led coalition, including forces from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland, initiated a military campaign against Iraq. The invasion started with an extensive aerial bombardment, followed by ground assaults that swiftly advanced towards Baghdad. By April 9, 2003, coalition forces had entered Baghdad, leading to the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. This rapid military success was symbolized by the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Squar in Baghdad. The war's consequences, such as the formation of federal

region of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the fragmentation of Iraq, created significant challenges for Turkey in addressing its security and geopolitical concerns.

The U.S. invasion led to a shift in the regional balance of power, with implications for Turkey's relations with both Iraq and the broader Middle East. Turkey's primary concern was the territorial integrity of Iraq, as the fragmentation of the country posed direct threats to its national security. The establishment of the KRG as an autonomous entity in northern Iraq was perceived as a double-edged sword: while it offered opportunities for economic engagement, it also raised fears of increased Kurdish separatism within Turkey (Aras, 2009). The enhanced activities of the PKK, facilitated by the power vacuum in Iraq, further exacerbated Turkey's security concerns, prompting military incursions into northern Iraq to neutralize perceived threats.

Economically, the invasion opened new avenues for Turkish trade and investment. The reconstruction of Iraq created opportunities for Turkish companies, particularly in construction and energy sectors, to expand their operations (Aydin, 2004). However, these economic interests were often overshadowed by the geopolitical complexities and security challenges posed by the unstable post-invasion environment. Furthermore, Turkey's relationship with the United States was tested during this period. The March 1, 2003, parliamentary decision, in which Turkey refused the U.S. request to use Turkish territory for its invasion of Iraq, marked a critical occasion. Despite the strong ties between Turkey and the U.S., this decision underscored Turkey's willingness to assert its national interests, even at the expense of traditional alliances. This was one of the first significant tests of the new AK Party government's foreign policy stance, reflecting both systemic constraints and domestic political dynamics. The U.S. dominance in the region post-2003 limited Turkey's ability to unilaterally influence outcomes in Iraq. The international system's constraints interacted with Turkey's domestic priorities, shaping its strategy toward advocating for Iraqi Turkmen rights and maintaining Iraq's territorial unity (Gunduz, 2024).

Turkey's engagement in later years after 2013 went beyond political support. It included military measures aimed at countering security threats to Turkmen regions, particularly during the rise of ISIS, which targeted some Turkmen town and areas with violence in Telafer town north west of Iraq. Despite these efforts, the Turkmen continued to face significant challenges, including political marginalization and demographic changes in their traditional strongholds. The broader geopolitical dynamics in Iraq, including the influence of external powers and internal ethnic divisions, often constrained the effectiveness of Turkey's interventions (Magdal, 2016).

The 2003 intervention in Iraq acted as a systemic shock that redefined Turkey's foreign policy toward Iraq. The 2003 Iraq War, therefore, became a defining factor in shaping Turkey's Middle Eastern policy under the AK Party. It provided an opportunity for the AK Party to assert Turkey's regional leadership while navigating complex systemic pressures, illustrating the interplay of international and domestic factors in Turkish foreign policy. The neoclassical realist framework underscores how this external pressure interacted with Turkey's domestic priorities and leadership perceptions to produce a proactive and multifaceted policy. The intervention not only compelled Turkey to address immediate security threats but also to advocate for Turkmen rights in Iraqi case as part of its broader strategy to maintain regional stability and protect its national interests.

4.2.2 The 'Arab Spring' (2011)

The Arab Spring, beginning in 2011, profoundly reshaped the regional dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa, acting as a critical systemic factor influencing Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government. İbrahim Çelikkbilek (2023), provides an in-depth analysis of this period, highlighting the interplay between systemic pressures, domestic political dynamics, and the pivotal role of AKP leadership, particularly Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The Arab Spring represented a fundamental disruption of the existing political order in the Middle East. A wave of uprisings across the Arab world led to the collapse of several authoritarian regimes and the emergence of new political uncertainties. According to Çelikkbilek (2023), the AKP government perceived these uprisings as an opportunity to project

Turkey as a model for Islamic democracy. The leadership envisioned Turkey as a central actor in shaping the political transitions of countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. This ambition was underpinned by the AKP's ideological alignment with Islamist movements, which gave Turkey a unique position in influencing the outcomes of the Arab Spring (Çelikbilek, 2023).

Syrian conflict became a defining issue in its foreign policy. Ankara initially supported opposition groups aiming to overthrow Bashar al-Assad, aligning with Western and Gulf partners. Turkey became the primary destination for millions of Syrian refugees fleeing the violence. By 2023, Turkey hosted over 3.5 million refugees, imposing significant economic, social, and political pressures. The war created a power vacuum that enabled the rise of ISIS and intensified PKK-linked activities in Northern Syria. The establishment of Autonomy Kurdish-controlled areas along Turkey's southern border rise Ankara's security concerns, prompting military interventions such as Operation Euphrates Shield (2016) and subsequent operations aimed at countering both ISIS and PKK affiliated groups. Turkey's support for opposition forces in Syria strained its relations with traditional allies like Russia and Iran, both of whom backed the Assad regime. At the same time, Turkey's alignment with Qatar and its stance on political Islam led to tensions with Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

For Turkey, the Arabic uprisings in 2011 presented multifaceted scenarios also: an opportunity to assert itself as a regional leader supporting democratic transformation in these countries mostly ruled with dictatorships, and a significant challenge due to the instability and security threats that followed the incident. Under the AK Party's leadership, Turkey initially viewed the Arab Spring as an opportunity to expand its influence in the region by aligning itself with emerging democratic movements. Drawing on its "zero problems with neighbors" policy and the soft power cultivated through cultural, economic, and political ties, Turkey sought to position itself as a model for Islamic democracy. This approach reflected the AK Party's broader vision of Turkey as a leader in the Middle East, promoting governance reforms and regional cooperation. However, the Arab Spring also unleashed significant instability, most notably in Syria, where peaceful protests escalated into a prolonged and devastating civil war.

The 'Arab Spring' and its aftermath can be analyzed through the lens of neoclassical realism, which considers both systemic pressures and domestic factors in shaping state behavior. Systemically, the power vacuum and realignment of alliances in the Middle East compelled Turkey to adapt its policies to safeguard its national interests. Domestically, the AK Party's ideological commitment to political Islam and its ambition to project Turkey as a regional leader influenced its proactive engagement in the region.


CONCLUSION

Evolution of Turkey's foreign policy under AK Party governments can be understood through lens of neoclassical realism in this study as a combination of both domestic factors mainly focusing on, role of leaderships, economic interest group's role and military establishment role. For external factors study focuses on geopolitical developments including the US-led 2003 Iraq intervention and "Arab Spring" in the region are likely to have played a significant role in shaping Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq. Turkey aimed to pursue a more proactive and autonomous foreign policy that gave priority to its own security and national interests. This thorough examination highlights the complexity of state behaviour in an evolving regional and global setting.

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