Explaining Miscalculation and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East during the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective

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Abstract

This article seeks to test the relevance of neoclassical realism in explaining the foreign policy behavior of a regional power in an era of turbulent change in the regional system. Taking Turkey's policy response to the Arab Uprisings as a case study, it tries to explain, from a neoclassical realist perspective, the causes of Ankara's miscalculations while formulating an ambitious policy in 2011, as well as its failure to adapt to the new realities on the ground between 2013 and 2016. Overall, it argues that neoclassical realism provides a satisfying explanation for Turkey's policy failure in this period, and that the problems of miscalculation and maladaptation in Turkish foreign policy were caused by distortive effects of certain unit-level factors. In this sense, while ideological tendencies of the ruling Justice and Development Party, as well as its consolidation of domestic power, shaped the content and styling of Ankara's policy response after 2011, the extensive utilization of foreign policy for domestic purposes by the ruling party hindered Turkey's adaptation to shifting balances in the regional power structure between 2013 and 2016.

Keywords: Neoclassical realism, Turkish Foreign Policy, Middle East, Arab Spring

1. Introduction

As "an emerging school of foreign policy [theory],"[1] neoclassical realism (NCR) is a relatively young branch of realism that provokes very fruitful theoretical debates within the discipline of International Relations (IR). Though still not considered a full-fledged theory of IR, it provides a satisfactory explanation about the foreign policy behaviour of particular states in particular cases. The main advantage of NCR is that it allows foreign policy researchers to integrate variables at the (sub)unit-level, such as decision makers' perceptions, strategic culture, domestic political constraints, and state-society relations, to the structural perspective of neorealism in order to better explain states' foreign policy behaviours. Yet, NCR still shares the core assumption of structural realism that states rely on themselves in order to survive in an anarchic international system. Additionally, like structural realism, NCR gives causal primacy to systemic material factors in constraining foreign policy behavior. Thus, it can be said that NCR "is a direct descendant of structural realism and is consistent with the underlying principles of realism."[2] However, unlike other structural realist approaches, it

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[1] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, The State, and Foreign Policy," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

[2] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 180.

treats unit-level factors as an imperfect transmission belt between systemic constraints and foreign policy outcomes, and as a potential source of dysfunctional and non-optimal behavior of some states in the face of structural constraints.[3] And unlike neorealism, NCR aims to explain the foreign policy behaviors of specific states rather than international outcomes at large.[4]

Taking Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East during and after the Arab Uprisings as a case study, this article aims to test the relevance of NCR in explaining a regional power's foreign policy behavior in an era of rapid changes in the regional system. The Arab Uprisings upended the power structures in the Middle East and North Africa, which had been relatively stable since the start of the Second Iraq War in 2003. Turkey, as an aspirant regional player that had acquired enormous power and prestige in the region during the preceding decade, hastened to fill this vacuum by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its affiliates in post-revolution Arab countries. Contrary to the soft-power oriented and accommodationist approach of the previous decade, Ankara adopted an ambitious and interventionist policy after 2011, aiming to increase Turkish influence in the Arab world. Therefore, the first aim of this article is to explain why the content and the style of Turkish foreign policy towards the region after 2011 changed in this way, and what the major (mis)calculation was behind it.

The ambitious policy of the post-2011 period proved somewhat successful, with electoral victories for the MB-affiliated parties in the first post-revolution elections in Tunisia and Egypt that led to the presidency of MB candidate Mohammed Morsi in Egypt in 2012. However, the turn of events in the following years swiftly altered regional balances. A number of domestic, regional, and global developments after 2013 substantially hampered Turkey's power projections in the post-Arab Spring era, and it became clear that Turkish policymakers had greatly miscalculated the domestic and regional balance of power while formulating their ambitious and interventionist policy towards the Arab Uprisings. At this point, Turkish policymakers were expected to revise their policy calculations and reformulate the Turkish policy response in order to adapt to the new status quo, which voided Ankara's previous calculations. Yet, it was not until 2016 that Ankara started to adjust its position to the regional imperatives by changing some basic policy preferences. As a result of this delay, Ankara was isolated from many states in the region between 2013 and 2016. Hence, the second aim of this article is to explain why it took so long for Turkish policymakers to adapt to the new realities on the ground.

The article aims to answer these research questions from a neoclassical realist perspective. In the first section, it begins with an analysis of the power structure in the Middle East before and during the Arab Uprisings and the opportunities that arrangement provided for Turkey as an aspiring regional power. Neoclassical realism treats the material structure of a system as an independent variable, and thus takes it as a starting point for its analysis.[5] Yet, although systemic factors have primacy, they have indirect causal links to state behavior. In contrast,

[3] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998), 146-47; Randall L. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism" in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fenidus Elman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 346.

[4] Schweller, "Neoclassical Realism," 316-17. However, recent studies stress that NCR is not merely an approach to explain empirical anomalies in structural realism, but can also explain a wider range of foreign policy behaviors, and even international outcomes at large. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, 12. The 57th Annual Convention of International Studies Association hosted a thought-provoking debate between the pros and cons of the theory at a roundtable discussion on the abovementioned volume: Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, "Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics" (roundtable discussion at the annual convention for International Studies Association, Atlanta, Georgia, March 16-19, 2016).

[5] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism," 150-51; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, 179.

unit-level factors, which are secondarily important, have direct causal links to state foreign policy.[6] Therefore, at the end of this section, the main unit-level factors that shaped the actual policy response of Turkey to the Arab Uprisings are analyzed as intervening variables between the systemic stimuli and the foreign policy outcome. The second section of the article examines the main elements of Turkey's ambitious policy towards the Arab Uprisings. In the third section, the major setbacks that Ankara's policy faced after 2013 are examined in detail at the domestic, regional, and global levels. The final section analyzes Ankara's maladaptation to the changing balance of power in the region by focusing on certain unit-level factors as the main cause.

This article argues that NCR provides a convincing explanation for Turkey's miscalculations while formulating an ambitious policy towards the Arab Uprisings in 2011, as well as its failure to adapt to the new realities on the ground until 2016. Turkey's miscalculations in its initial policy response to the Arab Uprisings were caused, firstly, by the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) ideological tendencies, which favored the MB as a potential partner in the region, and secondly, by its consolidation of domestic power by various means, which eventually enabled it to pursue an ambitious policy. Turkish policymakers' maladaptive behavior between 2013 and 2016 was mainly caused by the AKP's excessive internalization of foreign policy issues as a mobilization strategy to consolidate its powerbase in Turkey and strengthen its legitimacy at a time when it faced serious challenges from within. The first signs of Turkish foreign policy adaptation were observed only when the structural constraints made themselves seriously felt in mid-2016, seven months after the crisis began in Turkey's relations with Russia.

2. The Arab Uprisings: An Opportunity for Turkish Dominance in the Middle East?

In order to analyze Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab Uprisings from a neoclassical realist perspective, the relative distribution of power in the global and regional system, as well as the threats and opportunities it provided for Turkey, should be examined carefully. Before the outbreak of the Uprisings, the Iraq War, beginning in 2003, had been the last major event to shape the balance of power in the Middle East. The invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies proved the political and military weakness of the Arab world once again vis-à-vis Western penetration. The rapid fall of the Baath regime in Baghdad and the ensuing instability in post-invasion Iraq resulted in an enormous power vacuum in the Middle East. Meanwhile, all of the region's Arab states were in a state of stagnation that rendered them too weak to take any serious initiative with regard to international relations.[7] In this environment, two non-Arab countries saw an opportunity to increase their influence in the Arab World: Turkey and Iran.[8] On the one hand, Iran fortified the axis of resistance in the region by gaining new proxies among Iraqi Shiites, which also provided it with direct territorial access to its other regional country and organizational allies: Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Turkey, on the other hand, adopted a different approach. Under the single-party rule of the Islamist AKP since 2002, Turkey had been experiencing a serious transformation leading to relative political stability and economic development. Meanwhile, Ankara had exhibited unprecedented activism in

[6] Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 306.

[7] Samir Kassir, *Arap talihsizliği* [Arab malaise], trans. Özgür Gökmen (İstanbul: İletişim, 2011), 27-40.

[8] Mohammed Ayoob, "Beyond the Democratic Wave in the Arab World: The Middle East's Turko-Persian Future," *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 2 (2011): 57-70.

the Middle East and developed very favorable relations with nearly all regional actors. This activism, combined with the AKP's achievements in domestic politics, considerably raised Turkey's prestige in the region, and as a result, Ankara began to be considered a "soft power" in the Middle East.[9] The main goal behind this policy of activism was to embrace Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic legacy and accordingly cultivate Turkish dominance in post-Ottoman countries through soft and peaceful measures. Many analysts labeled this policy vision as "neo-Ottomanism."[10]

Post-2003, there was strong systemic incentive for Turkey's growing presence in Middle Eastern politics: the support and encouragement of the United States. As the US occupation of Iraq created a hegemonic overlay in the region, Turkey emerged as the most suitable partner because it possessed an advantageous combination of certain attributes that the US and its local allies were lacking: 1) an Islamist government with a charismatic (though in no way anti-systemic) leader; 2) a growing economy in tune with the principles of neoliberalism; 3) considerable armed forces, yet a member of NATO; and 4) a relatively stable and democratic political environment that preempted the growth of extremist movements. From the outset, Turkey seemed to be a perfect match for combating Iran's growing influence in the region, as well as a very suitable partner for the Bush administration's "Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative," which aimed at initiating political and economic transformations in regional countries and facilitating their integration into the global system. Hence, the US government strongly supported Turkey's diplomatic and economic activism and benefited considerably from its good offices in the Middle East.[11]

However, starting in 2009, there were some signs of discord between Turkish foreign policy and US policy preferences in the Middle East. This strain was most visible in the deterioration of relations between Turkey and Israel after the former's Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009), as well as Turkey's growing solidarity with Iran with regard to the nuclear crisis during Turkey's non-permanent membership at the UN Security Council (2009-2010). From a structural realist point of view, it can be argued that the main systemic factor causing this situation was the gradual disengagement of the US from the Middle East under the Obama administration, a result of the new "pivot to Asia" strategy.[12] With the US military pullback from Afghanistan and Iraq, regional powers such as Turkey and Iran found opportunities to manifest themselves in the region. Meanwhile, the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 substantially changed the regional balance of power. When combined with the US' disengagement from the region starting in 2009, the sudden collapse of once-stable Arab regimes beginning in 2011 created an enormous power vacuum in the Middle East. This situation gave Turkey a considerable structural incentive to engage more actively in regional affairs and fill the gap that was created with the unfolding revolutions.

[9] Bülent Aras, "Turkey between Syria and Israel: Turkey's Rising Soft Power," *SETA Policy Brief* 15 (2005); 1-6; Tarık Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (2007): 81-97; Phar Kim Beng, "Turkey's Potential as a Soft Power: A Call for Conceptual Clarity," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 2 (2008): 21-40; Hakan Altınay, "Turkey's Soft Power: An Unpolished Gem or an Elusive Mirage," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 2 (2008): 55-66; Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 2 (2008): 41-54.

[10] İlhan Uzgel and Volkan Yaramış, "Özal'dan Davutoğlu'na Türkiye'de Yeni Osmanlıcı arayışlar" [Yearnings for Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey from Özal to Davutoğlu], *Doğudan* 16 (2010): 37-49; Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," *Carnegie Papers* 10 (2008): 14-16.

[11] Nuri Yeşilyurt and Atay Akdevelioğlu, "AKP döneminde Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu politikası" [Turkey's Middle East Policy during the AKP period] in *AKP kitabı: Bir dönüşümün bilançosu* [The AKP book: balance-sheet of a transformation], ed. İlhan Uzgel and Bülent Duru (Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2009), 381-409.

[12] Fawaz Gerges, "The Obama Approach to the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?" *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 299-323.

According to Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, the neoclassical realist approach is most useful for explaining foreign policy choices when the system provides clear information on threats and opportunities but little guidance about the best policy response.[13] The first three months of the Arab Spring created exactly this kind of environment. The sudden turn of events demonstrated that the authoritarian stability model had come to an end and that change was inevitable in the Arab world, either by will or by force. Although systemic constraints were forcing global and regional powers to step in and fill the vacuum, there was little certainty about the content and style of the best policy response. Hence, it is no surprise that unit-level factors affected the nature and style of the Turkish foreign policy response to the extraordinary developments in its neighborhood.

It was during the Libyan Crisis (2011) that Turkish policymakers learned more clearly about the structural constraints and opportunities created by the Arab Uprisings. After the quick and (relatively) bloodless revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, it was Turkey's first serious encounter with the Arab Spring. As the uprising in Libya quickly evolved into an armed conflict between the regime forces and the rebels, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's initial policy was strictly against any kind of military intervention; instead, he encouraged a dialogue between the two sides.[14] However, there was not much support for this approach in either the Arab World or the West, and eventually it alienated the rebels. Unable to prevent the Arab League's and the UN Security Council's resolutions to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya, Turkey was forced in March 2011 to change its position and join the non-combat components of NATO operations under UNSC Resolution No. 1973.

Thus, it was mainly systemic factors that forced Ankara to change its soft-power oriented policy of the previous decade towards the Middle East at the beginning of the Arab Uprisings. In particular, the Libyan experience helped Turkish policymakers recognize the following structural conditions of the day: 1) the pervasiveness of revolution in the Arab world; 2) the immense power vacuum it creates; and 3) the readiness of other regional and global powers to fill this vacuum. After this experience, a cautious wait-and-see approach did not seem to be a viable option for Turkish policymakers, since it would risk Turkey being isolated and alienated while other global and regional powers hastened to step in.[15] For instance, France and Britain were leading an interventionist policy in Libya, Iran was framing the events as an Islamic Spring,[16] and Saudi Arabia was striving to maintain the status quo with friendly regimes while adopting an interventionist policy towards unfriendly ones.[17] In the end, Turkey opted for an ambitious and interventionist policy that sided with "people's demands" and favored "peaceful democratic change" in authoritarian Arab states.[18] In practice, this policy resulted in growing Turkish support and guardianship for MB movements in certain Arab countries.

Although the structural conditions were responsible for this dramatic change in Turkish

[13] Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, "Conclusion: The State of Neoclassical Realism," in *Neoclassical Realism,* 283.

[14] Gürkan Zengin, *Kavga: Arap Baharı'nda Türk dış politikası 2010-2013* [Quarrel: Turkish foreign policy during the Arab Spring 2010-2013] (İstanbul: İnkılâp, 2013), 67-70.

[15] Zengin, *Kavga*, 16.

[16] Muhammad-Reza Djalili and Thierry Kellner, *'Arap Baharı' karşısında İran ve Türkiye* [Iran and Turkey in the face of the 'Arab Spring'], trans. Hande Güreli (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2013), 21-22.

[17] Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 6 (2013): 1127-144.

[18] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes in the International System and Turkey," *The International Spectator* 48, no. 2 (2013): 5.

foreign policy at the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, the formulation of the new policy response needs further explanation. When analyzing the content and style of this ambitious policy, two unit-level factors can be singled out as intervening variables between the structural constraints and opportunities caused by the unfolding Arab revolutions and Ankara's actual policy response: the ruling party's ideological tendencies and its domestic power consolidation.

The AKP's ideological tendencies were responsible for the content of the new policy response which was overtly pro-MB. The AKP is a populist Islamist party that emerged from the Sunni Islamist National Outlook Movement (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*; NOM). Necmettin Erbakan, the late leader of the NOM, had a close relationship with Islamist movements in the region, including the Egyptian, Syrian, and Tunisian branches of the MB.[19] Since coming to power through free elections in 2002, the AKP has been a powerful source of inspiration for Islamist movements in the Arab world, especially the MB, which shares similar – though not identical – ideological and social roots with the AKP.[20] Now that the authoritarian regimes had been toppled, the MB (as the most organized opposition movement in most Arab states) benefited from a historical opportunity to prevail in post-revolutionary elections and eventually dominate the upended governments during their transition periods. And in fact, the AKP's guidance for the Egyptian, Tunisian, and Libyan MB started even before the elections took place in these countries. During Erdoğan's visit to Cairo in September 2011, the Egyptian MB asked for support from the AKP with their policies.[21] Two months later, an AKP delegation visited the MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) headquarters in Cairo.[22] Similarly, a delegation from the MB-affiliated Justice and Construction Party (JCP) in Libya visited AKP headquarters in Ankara in 2012 for consultations on the eve of the Libyan elections.[23] Last but not least, Rachid Gannouchi, the leader of the Ennahda (the Tunisian branch of the MB), likened his movement to the AKP's, and praised his relationship with AKP leaders at an interview in February 2011.[24] Therefore, there were strong indications to suggest that once in power, MB-affiliated parties would turn to their more experienced Islamist fellows in Turkey for further guidance and assistance. Hence, in this atmosphere, the AKP considered the MB as a powerful and promising proxy in the Arab world and supported elections in post-revolution countries that would eventually bring its Islamist fellows to government.[25] So in a sense, the AKP instrumentalized the ideological affinity between itself and the MB in order to establish its dominance in the region.

The AKP's consolidation of domestic political power was the other unit-level factor responsible for the ambitious style of Turkey's policy response to the Arab Uprisings. Between 2002 and 2011, the AKP gradually built its domestic powerbase and curbed the political

[19] Aaron Stein, "III. The End of 'Zero Problems', 2010-13," *Whitehall Papers* 83, no. 1 (2014): 37-40.

[20] Sadiq J. Al-Azm, "The 'Turkish Model': A View from Damascus," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 638-39.

[21] İpek Yezdani, "Muslim Brotherhood debates Turkey model," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 14, 2011, accessed October 12, 2016, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=muslim-brotherhood-debates-turkey-model-2011-09-14.

[22] "FJP Meets with Delegation from Turkey's AK Party," *Ikhwanweb*, November 17, 2011, accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=29209&ref=search.php.

[23] "Libya heyeti Genel Merkez'de" [Libyan delegation at the Headquarters], Ak Parti, June 5, 2012, accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/libya-heyeti-genel-merkezde/49044#1.

[24] Nazanine Moshiri, "Interview with Rachid Ghannouchi," *Al Jazeera English*, February 7, 2011, accessed October 12, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/02/2011233464273624.html.

[25] Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor' and the Arab Uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 3 (2014): 342.

aspirations of the Army, which had previously been quite influential in Turkish politics. In the 2011 general elections, the AKP secured a single-party rule for the third consecutive time since 2002 by gaining 49 per cent of the votes. For the AKP, it was a landslide victory that fortified its hegemony in Turkish politics and proved that opposition parties were still too weak to offer alternatives. This victory fed into the AKP's self-aggrandizement, and convinced its officials that they were ideologically and politically on the right path. In the following years, for instance, some senior AKP officials went so far as to propose that Turkey's successes under the AKP rule inspired the revolution and reform processes in the Arab world.[26] Turkey vigorously promoted the Turkish and the AKP model to Arab countries experiencing a period of regime change and political transition.[27] These activities included political intervention in these countries' internal affairs, and in some cases military intervention as well. The AKP's 2011 electoral victory provided the party with enough self-confidence and public support to implement an ambitious and interventionist foreign policy in the region.[28]

3. Ambitious Policy on the Ground (2011-2013)

Erdoğan's first visit to post-revolution Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia in September 2011, during which he was accompanied by a large delegation of bureaucrats and businesspersons, clearly illustrates the content and implementation of Turkey's policy towards the Arab Uprisings. During the visits, Turkey's eagerness for an active role in the reconstruction of these countries was underlined, and the merits of the Turkish/AKP model were introduced to transition governments and MB-affiliated Islamic movements.[29] Consequently, Turkey sought to increase its influence in the region through MB-affiliated parties, which did quite well in Egypt and Tunisia's post-revolution elections in 2011 and became dominant in their post-revolution parliaments.[30] These results fell completely in line with Ankara's wishes and expectations. With Morsi's election in June 2012, relations between Egypt and Turkey reached a historical peak. Ankara provided two billion USD in aid and loans to Cairo, which was experiencing serious problems with reaching an agreement with the International Monetary Fund; additionally, during Erdoğan's second visit to post-revolution Egypt in November 2012, 27 agreements were signed between the two parties.[31] In a speech at Cairo

[26] "Emrullah İşler: Artık iktidarlar Türkiye'de aciz değil, muktedirdir" [Emrullah İşler: Governments in Turkey are not helpless any more, they are powerful], *Milliyet*, November 23, 2014, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/emrullah-isler-artik-iktidarlar-turkiye-bursa-yerelhaber-487578/; Egemen Bağış, "Turkey as a Source of İnspiration in the Arab Spring," *FMA Bulletin* 42 (2003): 12-13.

[27] It is no coincidence that debates regarding the applicability of the Turkish/AKP model to post-revolution Arab states soared during this period. For a selection of works on this theme, see Mehmet Akif Kireççi, ed., *Arap Baharı ve Türkiye modeli tartışmaları* [Arab Spring and Turkish model debates] (Ankara: ASEM Yayınları, 2014).

[28] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 2 (2014): 213-15; Philip Robins, "Turkey's 'Double Gravity' Predicament: The Foreign Policy of a Newly Activist Power," *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 394; "Türkiye Arap Baharını şekillendiriyor" [Turkey is shaping the Arab Spring], *Milliyet*, June 24, 2011, accessed February 16, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-arap-baharini-sekillendiriyor/siyaset/siyasetdetay/24.06.2011/1406275/default.htm.

[29] "Erdoğan'dan Libya'da önemli açıklamalar" [Important remarks by Erdoğan in Libya], *Hürriyet*, September 16, 2011, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/planet/18747654.asp; "Erdoğan'dan Kahire'de tarihi konuşma" [Historic speech by Erdoğan in Cairo], *Sabah*, September 13, 2011, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/09/13/erdogan-kahirede-konusuyor; "Erdoğan Tunus'ta İsrail'e yüklendi" [Erdoğan charges Israel in Tunisia], *Sabah*, September 15, 2011, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/09/15/erdogan-tunusta-israile-yuklendi.

[30] At this point, a pro-government journalist maintained that the AKP ideology had become a commodity for export, and that it would eventually prevail in the Arab world. See Nevzat Çiçek, "AK Parti İdeolojisi artık ihraç ürünü" [AKP ideology is now an export commodity], *Timeturk*, June 13, 2011, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.timeturk.com/tr/makale/nevzat-cicek/ak-parti-ideolojisi-artik-ihrac-urunu.html.

[31] Metin Turan, "Başbakan'dan Netanyahu'ya gözdağı!" [PM defies Netanyahu], *DHA*, November 18, 2012, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.dha.com.tr/basbakandan-netanyahuya-gozdagi_389033.html.

University, Erdoğan stressed the growing alliance and solidarity between the two countries by using strong Islamic references.[32] Shortly afterwards, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu underlined the emergence of a new axis between Turkey and Egypt since Morsi's election and deemed this axis "extremely important in order to maintain order and stability in the Middle East."[33]

Turkey showed similar solidarity with the Ennahda, which had been leading the transition government in Tunisia since 2011. During Erdoğan's second visit to post-revolution Tunisia in June 2013, a High Level Strategic Council was established and 21 agreements were signed.[34] Moreover, Ennahda leader Rachid Gannouchi and Morsi were among the special invitees to the AKP's Fourth Congress in September 2012. The list of other prominent invitees to the Congress gives an idea about the structure of the new regional bloc Turkey was trying to establish: Hamas leader Khaled Meshal, President of Iraqi Kurdistan Mesud Barzani, and former Iraqi Vice-President Tariq al Hashimi.[35]

In post-revolution Libya, although the MB-affiliated JCP was generously supported by Turkey, it performed very weakly against the liberal National Forces Alliance led by Mahmoud Jibril in the General National Congress elections in 2012, winning only 10 per cent of the votes. Thus, Ankara was forced to temper its policy. It supported the reconstruction of country by training Libyan security forces and helped to develop economic infrastructure and services,[36] and kept its ties with the JCP.

Ankara applied its new policy most vigorously in Syria, which had been the success story of the AKP's soft-power-based "zero-problems with neighbors" policy and which had served as the AKP's gateway to the Arab world during the preceding decade. Shortly after the onset of anti-regime protests in March 2011, Erdoğan stated on numerous occasions that Turkey could not stay silent regarding developments in Syria, and that Syria was Turkey's "internal affair."[37] In the busy diplomatic traffic of the ensuing weeks, Turkey tried to convince Syrian president Bashar al Assad to pursue certain reforms, legalize the Syrian MB (which had been banned since 1982), and hold free elections.[38] Although these initiatives were not well-received by Damascus, and did not prove successful, Turkey demonstrated that it would not repeat the mistakes it had encountered in Libya; it would intervene more proactively on the issue in accordance with its ambitious policy, which aimed to form MB-dominated governments in post-revolution Arab countries.

As the armed conflict in Syria intensified, and as Erdoğan's political leverage in Damascus reached its limits, Turkey hardened its position by openly supporting the rebels and by breaking all contact with the Syrian regime. The Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) were formed in Turkey in 2011 and became Turkey's main proxies in the unfolding civil war in Syria.[39] The SNC, which was dominated by exiled MB figures, joined the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCSROF)

[32] "Erdoğan Mısır'dan çok sert çıktı" [Erdoğan speaks very harshly in Egypt], *CNN Türk*, November 17, 2012, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.cnnturk.com/2012/dunya/11/17/erdogan.misirdan.cok.sert.cikti/685013.0/.

[33] Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes," 8.

[34] Nebahat Tanrıverdi, "Tunus seçimleri arifesinde Türkiye-Tunus ilişkileri" [Turkish-Tunisian relations in the wake of the Tunisian elections], *ORSAM Rapor* 192 (2014): 19-20.

[35] For a full list of prominent invitees and excerpts from their speeches at the Congress, see "Yabancı devlet temsilcilerinden önemli mesajlar"[Important messages from foreign state representatives], Ak Parti, September 30, 2012, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/dunyaya-baris-ve-istikrar-selami/31785.

[36] Altunışık, "Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor'," 343.

[37] "Suriye, Türkiye'nin sabrını nasıl taşırdı" [How Syria tried Turkey's patience], *Hürriyet*, August 18, 2011, accessed February 17, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/suriye-turkiyenin-sabrini-nasil-tasirdi-18503989.

[38] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Back to Enmity: Turkey-Syria Relations since the Syrian Uprising," *Orient* 56, no. 1 (2015): 14.

[39] Fehim Taştekin, *Suriye: Yıkıl git, diren kal* [Syria: Break down, stay and resist] (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015), 107-09.

in November 2012. The MB managed to influence this new organization just as it had done with the SNC.[40] Due to its weak presence on the ground, however, the MB's influence on the FSA was more limited. Yet, the latter was mainly composed of Sunni Arabs, and was affiliated with the SNC and later with the NCSROF. Therefore, Turkey's sponsorship of these organizations was in full accordance, in a more aggressive way, with its grand strategy towards the Arab Spring.

Turkey's other concern regarding the developments in Syria was the armament and mobilization of Kurds in northern Syria and the possible repercussions for Turkey. These concerns intensified after the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Defense Units (YPG), gained power and declared autonomy without much fighting in three regions bordering Turkey (Afrin, Kobane, and Jazira) in 2012. Considering that the AKP's first Kurdish initiative of 2009 had failed, and that deadly clashes were taking place between Turkey and the PKK throughout 2012, Ankara's impatient and intolerant attitude towards the Syrian Kurds was not surprising. Yet Turkey's efforts to control Syrian Kurdistan with the help of the Kurdistan National Council, an affiliate of Mesud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraqi Kurdistan, did not succeed, and the YPG remained the sole armed Kurdish movement in Syria.[41] Furthermore, it declined to join both the SNC and the NCSROF because of both organizations' intimate relations with Turkey and their denial of Kurdish autonomy in Syria.[42]

4. Major Setbacks and Isolation

Since 2013, several crucial domestic and regional developments have demonstrated the limits of Turkey's power, influence, and attraction in the Arab world, and have clearly revealed that there was a serious miscalculation in Ankara's policy projections regarding the Arab Spring. To begin with, after 2013, certain prominent domestic developments began to erode the AKP's hegemony in Turkish politics. Firstly, the Gezi Protests of June 2013 revealed the growing discontent among liberal and secular segments of Turkish society against the AKP's authoritarian tendencies. Secondly, with Turkey's sensational corruption investigations of December 2013, a serious power struggle between the AKP and the Gülen movement (formerly allies) came to light within the ruling coalition, which climaxed during the failed coup attempt of Gülenist military officers in July 2016. Thirdly, in October 2014, deadly protests erupted around the country against Ankara's reluctance to help the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobane, which was facing heavy assault from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Finally, the results of the June 2015 general elections were disappointing for the AKP, as it lost its majority and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) passed the 10 per cent national threshold, a historical first for a pro-Kurdish party. As a result, the AKP's single-party rule was endangered for the first time since 2002. Although the AKP regained its majority in November 2015's early elections, intensifying deadly clashes between Turkish security forces and the PKK, along with increasing terrorist attacks by ISIL and TAK (a PKK offshoot) in Turkish urban centers, seriously jeopardized the country's security and stability.

[40] Raphaël Lefèvre, "Islamism Within a Civil War: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's Struggle for Survival," (Working Paper, Rethinking Political Islam Series, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2015), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Syria_Lefevre-FINALE.pdf, 1-2.

[41] Taştekin, *Suriye*, 202-6.

[42] Taştekin, *Suriye*, 110 and 225; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Salih Muslim: Syrian coalition does not represent Kurds," *Al Monitor*, January 31, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/pyd-leader-geneva-ii-include-syrian-kurds.html#ixzz40VcsVfTU.

These domestic developments indicated growing challenges to AKP rule and revealed the rising polarization among different social and political communities in Turkey. Accordingly, it became increasingly difficult for the AKP to govern with smooth and soft measures as before, and authoritarian tendencies prevailed. Since the AKP's Arab Spring policy was mainly legitimized by the AKP's democratic achievements in Turkey and its desire to export its "success story" to the Arab world, these developments and challenges curtailed Turkey's quest to be a model democracy for the Arab Middle East in the post-Arab Spring era.

There were also important regional developments after 2013 that shifted the regional balance away from Turkey. Firstly, in July 2013, a military coup in Egypt toppled President Morsi. The new government eventually banned the MB and jailed many of its members, including Morsi himself. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan were the main backers of the coup, and the US and the EU reacted weakly.[43] This was a serious blow to Turkey's power projections and the new alliance it was forging with MB-led Egypt. Secondly, the Ennahda-led government was unable to provide security and stability in post-revolution Tunisia, and was forced out in 2014. It lost the ensuing parliamentary and presidential elections to its secularist rival, Nidaa Tounis. These two developments completely went against the AKP's predictions of high performance from MB-affiliated parties in free elections. Finally, the growing chaos in Syria ran counter to the AKP's policy projections and started to destabilize and isolate Turkey at the same time. The resilience of the Syrian regime and the weakness of the opposition foiled Turkey's designs. It was soon evident that Bashar al Assad still enjoyed considerable support nationally, regionally, and globally. Moreover, the US disappointed the rebels in 2013 by reaching a deal with Russia on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.[44] The US gradually understood that under these circumstances, the removal of Assad without a viable alternative could only produce devastating consequences for the security and stability of the region. As ISIL consolidated its power in Syria's north and east with a new offensive in 2014, the fight against jihadist groups became Washington's new priority, which benefited the Assad regime.[45] Meanwhile, the Syrian opposition remained weak and fragmented – except the PYD, which emerged as the most effective force fighting against ISIL in the eyes of Western nations.

As these developments rendered Turkey's position more and more precarious, some global and regional actors started to show greater unease about Ankara's role in Middle Eastern conflicts. Turkey's ambitious policy based on supporting Sunni Islamist groups was interpreted as a sectarian approach,[46] and hence provoked a harsh reaction from Shiite actors. In actuality, Turkey had carefully avoided sectarianism in its foreign policy until 2010. Yet, during the 2010 general elections in Iraq, Ankara angered Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki by supporting the secularist al Iraqiyya Bloc against its Shiite rivals. The next year, in the wake of the US pullback from Iraq, Turkey more openly became part of the sectarian conflict by giving refuge to Iraqi Vice President Tariq al Hashimi – a prominent Sunni Arab figure and former head of the MB-affiliated Iraq Islamic Party – after an arrest warrant was issued against

[43] "International Reactions to Morsi's Removal," *Al Jazeera English*, July 4, 2013, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/201373223029610370.html.

[44] Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. and Russia Reach Deal to Destroy Syria's Chemical Arms," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2013, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/world/middleeast/syria-talks.html?_r=0.

[45] Adam Chandler, "Can the U.S. Defeat ISIS Without Removing Assad?" *The Atlantic*, November 13, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/can-the-us-defeat-isis-without-removing-assad/382735/.

[46] Bilgin Ayata, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World: Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor?" *Journal of European Integration* 37, no. 1 (2014): 97; Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Revolutions," 16.

him for bombing and murder charges.[47] Turkey's relative silence towards the repression of mainly Shiite protests in Bahrain by a Saudi-led military intervention in 2011 also called Ankara's intentions into doubt. With regard to the Syrian civil war, by emphasizing the "Nusayri" (Alawite – a branch of Shiite Islam) character of the Syrian regime[48] and openly supporting Sunni Islamist fighters (who are aligned with the Syrian MB) against Damascus (which is backed by Iran, Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shiite militias), Ankara clearly became part of a sectarian proxy war in Syria. Consequently, all these actions raised allegations of sectarianism against Turkish foreign policy and harmed Ankara's once-amicable relations with Shiite actors in the region: Iran, Iraq, and Hezbollah.

Ankara's activism in the region was not welcomed by all Sunni actors, mainly because Turkey was supporting a certain type of Sunni movement in the region: the Muslim Brotherhood. The rise of MB-type populist Islamist movements posed a serious threat to some Arab monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan. Therefore, these regimes were never at ease with Ankara's growing support to the MB in the Arab world, and in response, they supported secularist groups and figures against the MB in Egypt and Libya. For this reason, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi generously supported the military coup of Abdulfettah el Sisi in Egypt and later joined him in declaring the MB as a terrorist organization. Similarly, after the emergence of political division in post-revolution Libya in 2014, the abovementioned countries, along with Egypt, emerged as the main backers of the Tobruk-based, secularist Chamber of Deputies against the Tripoli-based General Nationalist Congress, which contained Islamist factions such as the JCP, and which was backed by Turkey and Qatar.[49] Saudi and Emirati discontent with Turkish foreign policy was also reflected in their efforts to prevent Turkey's campaign for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council in 2014.[50] The reaction of these Sunni states to Turkey's MB-focused policy had not been expected by Turkish policymakers and seriously hampered the effectiveness of Turkish foreign policy. Consequently, Qatar turned out to be the only Arab Gulf country that sided with Turkey in its MB-focused regional policy. Yet, in November 2014, Qatar was pressured by other Gulf States to step back from Turkey to a certain extent and normalize its relations with Egypt.[51]

While facing these challenges from the international community, Turkey was confronted by yet another setback in its foreign policy, this time with regard to the Syrian crisis. As the US and many EU countries prioritized the fight against ISIL and Al Nusra in Syria (and Iraq), and downgraded their campaigns against Assad after 2014, they repeatedly implied Turkey's responsibility in the rise of ISIL and put heavy pressure on Ankara to tighten border controls in order to cut off the organization's supply lines.[52] Although Turkey strongly denies any direct tie with these organizations and declares them to be terrorist groups, it is

[47] Semih İdiz, "Türkiye'nin Irak'ta yitirdiği nüfuz" [How Turkey lost its influence in Iraq], *Al Monitor*, June 6, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2014/06/krg-iraq-turkey-kurdish-oil-us-barzani-energy.html.

[48] Taştekin, *Suriye*, 298-99.

[49] Zülfikar Doğan, "AKP'nin Müslüman Kardeşler sevdası, Libya'yı kaybettiriyor!" [AKP's love of Muslim Brotherhood makes it loose Libya], *Al Monitor*, January 6, 2015, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2015/01/turkey-loosing-libya-due-to-muslim-brotherhood-passion.html.

[50] "Mısır, Suudiler ve İsrail lobi yaptı" [Egypt, the Saudis and Israel lobbied], *Hürriyet*, October 18, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/misir-suudiler-ve-israil-lobi-yapti-27407210.

[51] "Saudi hails Egypt-Qatar rapprochement," *Al Arabiya English*, December 20, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/20/Egypt-s-Sisi-meets-Saudi-Qatari-envoys.html.

[52] "US defense chief urges Turkey to 'do more' against ISIL," *Hürriyet Daily News*, August 21, 2015, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/us-defense-chief-urges-turkey-to-do-more-against-isil.aspx?pageID=238&nID=87294; "EU to press Turkey for help in anti-ISIL fight," *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 8, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/eu-to-press-turkey-for-help-in-anti-isil-fight.aspx?pageID=238&nid=75326.

an observable fact that the Turkish border has served as the main supply line of ISIL and Al Nusra. Additionally, it has been observed that Turkey-backed armed groups in Syria (such as the FSA and some Islamic Front units) are cooperating with Al Nusra in Northern Syria.[53] Turkey is also at odds with the West regarding the status of the PYD, which is considered to be a terrorist organization by Ankara due to its ties with the PKK. However, the EU and the US prefer to treat the two organizations separately.[54] All of these facts and allegations have damaged Turkey's image in the international arena, as the country has been frequently depicted as the main sponsor of jihadist groups in Syria.[55]

These problems indicate that Ankara seriously miscalculated its foreign policy towards the Arab Spring, eventually facing major setbacks and receiving negative feedback on the ground. Neoclassical realism underlines that misperception and miscalculation of relative powers by policymakers can cause serious assessment errors, and thus, may inhibit effective policy response.[56] As already indicated, the AKP's foreign policy formulation was largely affected by its ideological tendencies and domestic power consolidation, rather than a rational and realistic assessment of relative powers and possible reactions of major actors in the region. As a result, Turkish policymakers miscalculated the MB's political chances in Arab politics, over-assessed Turkey's power and influence, and did not predict the reactions of other regional and global actors to Turkey's MB-focused policy. Additionally, they did not predict the growing challenges against AKP rule in Turkey. Accordingly, the AKP's policy became ineffective and unwelcome for many in the region and in Turkey.

5. Maladaptation

These developments clearly demonstrate that since 2013, the balance of power in the region has been shifting at the expense of Turkey. Ankara's policy projections regarding the Arab Spring did not play out as expected. Instead of revising its foreign policy and adapting to the new status quo, the AKP stuck to its previous policy preferences until 2016. Its policies were met with suspicion in nearly all other Middle Eastern capitals, and this situation eventually caused Turkey's isolation from the region. This turn of events was in sharp contrast to Turkey's prestige and soft power in the region prior to 2011. It was only after the appointment of Binali Yıldırım as Prime Minister in May 2016 that Ankara started to revise its foreign

[53] For instance, FSA and Al Nusra units undertook a joint operation to capture Kasab border crossing in 2014. See "Keseb Sınır Kapısı muhaliflerin elinde" [Kasab Border Crossing is at the hands of the opposition], *Anadolu Ajansı*, March 22, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/keseb-sinir-kapisi-muhaliflerin-elinde/172669. This cooperation became more visible with the foundaiton of Jaysh al Fatah (Army of the Conquest) in 2015. See Mahmut Hamsici, "ÖSO: Fetih Ordusu ile birlikte hareket ediyoruz" [FSA: We liaise with Al Nusra], *BBC Türkçe*, May 5, 2015, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/05/150503_osama_abu_zaid_oso_suriye_roportaj.

[54] Serdar Karagöz, "President Erdoğan: EU, US should recognize PYD as a terrorist group," *Daily Sabah,* February 1, 2016, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2016/02/02/president-erdogan-eu-us-should-recognize-pyd-as-a-terrorist-group.

[55] Richard Spencer and Raf Sanchez, "Turkish government co-operated with al-Qaeda in Syria, says former US ambassador," *The Telegraph*, September 14, 2014, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11093478/Turkish-government-co-operated-with-al-Qaeda-in-Syria-says-former-US-ambassador.html; "Chomsky hits back at Erdoğan, accusing him of double standards on terrorism," *The Guardian*, January 14, 2016, accessed November 18, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/14/chomsky-hits-back-erdogan-double-standards-terrorism-bomb-istanbul; Ranj Alaaldin, "Turkey has spent years allowing jihadist groups to flourish - so beware its real reasons for shooting down a Russian plane," *The Independent*, November 24, 2015, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/turkey-has-spent-years-allowing-jihadist-groups-to-flourish-so-beware-its-real-reasons-for-shooting-a6747161.html.

[56] Schweller, "Neoclassical Realism," 236-39; Rose, "Neoclassical Realism," 157-58; Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman, "Introduction," 7, 29 and 32.

policy in order to restore ties with regional countries.[57] By then, however, Ankara had already lost much ground in Middle Eastern politics.

From a systemic perspective, the shifting structural conditions were expected to force Turkey to revise its foreign policy, make a strategic readjustment, and adapt to the new status quo in the region. This, however, did not happen until 2016. Ankara's only political maneuver up to that time was to intensify cooperation with Saudi Arabia after the ascension of King Salman to the throne in January 2015. Though still in separate camps with regard to the Egyptian and Libyan crises, the two countries began to work together in Yemen and Syria from 2015 onwards.[58] However, these actions failed to considerably change the balance of power in the region, as Russia involved its military in the conflict on the side of Damascus in September 2015. Meanwhile, relations with Russia dramatically deteriorated after the downing of a Russian bomber jet by Turkish F-16s over the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015, and this rift has put Turkey in a more precarious position. For example, while the PYD continued its territorial expansion along the Turkish border with the help of US and Russian airstrikes against ISIL, Turkey was unable to even fly its jets over Syria because of the threat posed by Russian anti-aircraft missiles deployed in Syria.

It was only after the negative effects of the rift with Russia were seriously felt in political, economic, and military terms in mid-2016 that Turkish policymakers initiated a revision process in foreign policy by taking steps to ease the tensions with Russia and Israel.[59] Until that time, they generally depicted the country's isolation from the region as a "worthy solitude" and explained Turkey's insistence on its initial policy as a consequence of its normative and honorable foreign policy approach based on defending "democratic principles" and the "will of people" against autocratic regimes in the Arab world.[60] This, however, does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation, considering numerous examples that contradict these very principles. Ankara's delayed condemnation of the atrocities committed by the Qaddafi regime against the Libyan rebels, its loose reaction to the suppression of civilian protests by force in Bahrain, its total disregard of the repression of the Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia, and its major contributions to the intensification of the civil war in Syria all contradict Turkey's "principled," "normative," and "peaceful" foreign policy approach. In fact, this normative approach has been very selective, and it was generally used as a *realpolitik* instrument in Turkish foreign policy during the Arab Uprisings.[61]

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[57] "Başbakan Binali Yıldırım: Dostlarını artıran düşmanlarını azaltan bir dış politika anlayışını güçlendireceğiz" [PM Binali Yıldırım: We will strengthen a foreign policy understanding that increases friends and decreases foes], *Hürriyet*, June 16, 2016, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/basbakan-binali-yildirim-dostlarini-artiran-dusmanlarini-azaltan-bir-dis-politika-anlayisini-guclendirecegiz-40118547; "Başbakan Yıldırım: Komşularımızla ilişkilerimizi geliştireceğiz" [PM Yıldırım: We will improve our relations with the neighbours], *NTV,* June 11, 2016, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/basbakan-yildirimkomsularimizla-iliskilerimizi-gelistirecegiz,RcvB4f8DN0aCqModfD33HQ.

[58] Mahmut Hamsici, "Türkiye, S. Arabistan ve Katar'ın 'Suriye ittifakı' ne anlama geliyor?" [What is the meaning of the 'Syrian alliance' of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar?], *BBC Türkçe*, May 6, 2015, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/05/150504_turkiye_suudi_arabistan_katar.

[59] According to some estimates, the economic cost of the crisis between Russia and Turkey would be at least 11 billion USD per year. See "Türkiye Rusya krizinin maliyeti 11 milyar doları geçecek" [The cost of Turkey-Russia crisis will exceed 11 billion US dollars], *Habertürk*, January 26, 2016, accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/is-yasam/haber/1186663-turkiye-rusya-krizinin-maliyeti-11-milyar-dolari-gececek.

[60] Davutoğlu, "The Three Major Earthquakes," 1-11; Zeynep Gürcanlı, "Dış politikada 'değerli yalnızlık' dönemi" ['Worthy solitude' period in foreign policy], *Hürriyet*, August 21, 2013, accessed February 25, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dis-politikada-degerli-yalnizlik-donemi-24553602; "Türkiye'nin politikası değer odaklı" [Turkey's policy is value based], *Anadolu Ajansı*, July 18, 2013, accessed February 18, 2016 http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/turkiyenin-politikasi-deger-odakli/231389; Nilüfer Karacasulu, "Interpreting Turkey's Middle East Policy in the Last Decade," *All Azimuth* 4, no. 1 (2015): 33-34.

[61] Ayşegül Sever, *Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu ilişkileri: Kavramsal ve olgusal bir analiz* [Turkey's relations with the Middle East: A conceptual and factual analysis] (İstanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2012), 49-93; Emel Parlar Dal, "Assessing Turkey's "Normative" Power

Neoclassical realism can provide an explanation for states' maladaptive and dysfunctional behavior when the regional system provides concrete and unambiguous information both on threats and on necessary policy responses.[62] According to the theory, focus should be placed on the distortive effect of unit-level factors in order to explain maladaptive behavior.[63] In the case of Turkey's dysfunctional behavior between 2013 and 2016, focusing on the changing parameters of domestic politics in Turkey can provide a satisfying explanation. Some prominent neoclassical realist works had already underlined state strength and state-society relations as intervening variables between great powers' systemic constraints and foreign policy behaviors.[64] Similarly, successive crises that the AKP faced in domestic politics and its attempts to consolidate power in a confrontational manner functioned as an intervening variable between changing regional conditions and Turkish foreign policy behavior between 2013 and 2016.

As already indicated, the AKP's domestic power has been diminishing since 2013. Slowly but steadily, it has been losing its hegemony in Turkish politics and relies more on coercion than consent to conduct its affairs. In order to consolidate its own powerbase and maintain its single-party rule, the AKP has sought to deepen the polarization within society through a strategy of internalization. This strategy comprises internalizing foreign policy issues and extensively utilizing them for domestic purposes.[65] Referring to Hagan's study on alternative political strategies adopted by governments and their divergent foreign policy effects, this approach can also be conceived as a strategy of mobilization, which is "most often associated with the game of retaining power in which a leadership manipulates foreign policy issues," and which includes building "coalitions by aggressively selling foreign policy, often to audiences outside the regime, and thereby increase support for their initiative while discrediting their opponents.[66] During the busy elections schedule between 2014 and 2015, which included one local, one presidential, and two general elections, foreign policy was extensively utilized for the AKP's domestic concerns, and thus, it eventually became too rigid to adapt to structural constraints in a rational manner.

It is obvious that the ongoing transformations in the Arab world are excessively internalized by the AKP government and used extensively to legitimize its own rule in Turkey, so much so that it is almost impossible not to hear on any given day a Turkish leader speaking to the public about the atrocities of the Assad regime against civilians or the heavy prosecution and injustice that the MB has faced since the military coup in Egypt. Through this process, the AKP has strongly identified itself with the MB and its affiliates by drawing parallels between each other's role as the representative of the people's will against military tutelage.[67] After the Egyptian coup, the four-finger salute of the MB ("R4abia") was widely

in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and their Limitations," *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 726. For a similar argument regarding the AKP's "honorable foreign policy" discourse, see Ugur Cevdet Panayirci and Emre Iseri, "A Content Analysis of the AKP's 'Honorable' Foreign Policy Discourse: The Nexus of Domestic–International Politics," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 62-80.

[62] Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, "Conclusion," 282-83.

[63] Schweller, "Neoclassic Realism," 340-41; Rathbun, "Neoclassical Realism," 309-10.

[64] Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[65] Gencer Özcan, "Dış politika analizi" [Foreign policy analysis] in *Küresel siyasete giriş* [Introduction to global politics], ed. Evren Balta (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), 337-38.

[66] Joe D. Hagan, "Domestic Political Explanations in the Analysis of Foreign Policy," in *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation*, ed. Laura Neack, Jeanne Hey and Patrick Haney (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995): 129-30.

[67] Ayata, "Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor," 106-08.

used by Erdoğan as a domestic political tool during his election campaigns throughout 2014 and 2015.[68] Moreover, the Anatolian Agency (Turkey's semi-official news agency) played a critical role in the dissemination of R4abia pictures to world media.[69] Hence, by supporting the MB and identifying closely with it, the AKP has sought to present itself as the guardian of the oppressed against the authoritarian regimes of the Arab world. The AKP has always claimed to be the representative of the oppressed in Turkey, but now it extends this vision by claiming to represent all oppressed peoples in the region. In this way, it seeks to fortify its domestic legitimacy. This is exactly what former Prime Minister Davutoğlu meant when he described Turkey as the last fortress where all oppressed people can take refuge and the AKP as the last line of defense for this fortress.[70]

While the AKP identifies itself with the MB and presents itself as guardian of the oppressed, it simultaneously equates its Turkish and Kurdish opponents with authoritarian regimes and the forces of counter-revolution in the region, and as major enemies of the MB. Thus, Turkish opposition parties and movements are continuously presented by the government as being "Baathist," "Assadist," or "supporters of coups d'état."[71] In this way, the political cleavages within regional countries are systematically used and intentionally internalized by the AKP in order to reproduce and deepen the ongoing political cleavages and polarization within Turkey. This strategy has become a critical way for the AKP in order to hold onto power against the growing discontent it has been facing at home since 2013. However, this internalization process has rendered Turkish foreign policy too rigid both in discourse and in practice, and the ruling party was unable to reformulate it in a realistic and rational manner until 2016. This thinking also explains Turkey's maladaptation to the shifting balance of powers in the region between 2013 and 2016.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article is to illustrate the relevance of neoclassical realism in explaining a regional power's foreign policy failure during an era of turbulent change in the regional system. Focusing on the case of Turkish foreign policy during the Arab Spring, it firstly illustrated that structural changes in the regional and international system throughout the Arab Spring did not directly determine the foreign policy response of Turkish policymakers. At the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, the system provided clear information on threats and opportunities but unclear information on policy responses. Thus, the political milieu was very suitable for unit-level factors to shape the nature, style, and timing of Turkey's policy response. More specifically, it was the AKP's ideological tendencies and its domestic power consolidation that greatly affected Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab world during this turbulent era. Yet, since 2013, the regional balance of power has evolved contrary to Turkey's expectations. Although the system was providing clear information both on threats

[68] Erdoğan later gave R4bia another meaning: one people, one state, one flag, and one homeland, each representing one finger. "Rabia da bizi işaretliyor" [Rabia signifies us], *Anadolu Ajansı,* December 6, 2013, accessed February 18, 2016, http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/rabia-da-bizi-isaretliyor/199416.

[69] *Yarım kalan devrim: Mısır* [The uncompleted revolution: Egypt] (Ankara: Anadolu Ajansı, 2014), 147-55.

[70] Zeynep Tuğrul Özel, "Başbakan Davutoğlu: Türkiye bütün mazlumların son kalesidir" [PM Davutoğlu: Turkey is the last fortress of all oppressed people], *Star*, February 3, 2016, accessed February 18, 2016, http://haber.star.com.tr/guncel/turkiye-butun-mazlumlarin-son-8200-3bkalesidir/haber-1086748.

[71] "CHP Türk, HDP ise Kürt Baas'ı" [CHP is Turkish Baath, and HDP is Kurdish Baath], *Milliyet,* December 15, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/chp-turk-hdp-ise-kurt-baas-i/siyaset/detay/1984379/default.htm; "Darbeci CHP ile problemimiz var" [We have a problem with pro-coup CHP], *Sabah*, December 11, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2014/12/11/oglun-14-yasinda-nasil-sigortali-oldu-acikla.

and on suitable policy responses, Ankara's policy response did not smoothly adapt to the new conditions. It is again the unit-level factors that explain this dysfunctional behavior. The excessive use of foreign policy issues in reproducing domestic political cleavages within Turkey during the busy election schedule of 2014-2015 prevented the government from pursuing a flexible foreign policy.

Overall, it is very clear that unit-level factors are driving the miscalculation and maladaptation in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East. The contentious character of domestic politics, the AKP's centralization of power, and the growing polarization among different segments of society make it almost impossible for the government to make rational calculations about regional developments and formulate reasonable policy responses. Since all developments in the region are read through the lens of domestic cleavages within Turkey, it becomes increasingly difficult to define the region's situation in a realistic manner and rationally determine Turkey's interests. Ankara considered a revision in its foreign policy only when political, economic, and strategic consequences of the crisis with Russia became unsustainable for the country in mid-2016. Thus, it was the short-term negative effects of the rift with a great power that forced Turkish policymakers to adapt to the structural constraints of the day in a more realistic manner. Meanwhile, the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, and the state of emergency that was declared shortly afterwards created a novel political atmosphere in Turkey, which has the potential to disrupt Turkish policymakers' ability to respond to structural constraints in a realistic manner, and cause new foreign policy failures in the short run. Turkey's recent military campaigns in Syria and Iraq may be an example of this new situation, though it is still early to talk about their long-term effects on Turkey's position in the region.

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