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## Davutođlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy

Bülent Aras



## ABSTRACT

Ahmet Davutođlu was appointed Foreign Minister of Turkey on May 1, 2009. Chief advisor to the Prime Minister since 2002, Davutođlu is known as the intellectual architect of Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party. He articulated a novel foreign policy vision and succeeded, to a considerable extent, in changing the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's new dynamic and multidimensional foreign policy line is visible on the ground, most notably to date in the country's numerous and significant efforts to address chronic problems in the neighboring regions. Davutođlu's duty will now shift from the intellectual design of policies to greater actual involvement in foreign policy, as he undertakes his new responsibilities as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Davutođlu era in Turkish foreign policy will deepen Turkey's involvement in regional politics, international organizations, and world politics.



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# DAVUTOĞLU ERA IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

**Bülent Aras\***

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan appointed Ahmet Davutoğlu as Turkey's new Foreign Minister on May 1, 2009. Davutoğlu has been a close associate of Erdoğan, and his chief advisor on foreign policy since 2003. Davutoğlu is known as the intellectual architect of the AK Party's foreign policy and has been influential in a number of major foreign policy developments. There is a consensus that it was Davutoğlu who largely changed the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy, bringing to it a dynamic and multi-dimensional orientation. He set the vision and the style of the new foreign policy line and provided a framework for pursuing it. At first, Davutoğlu's new vision and style were subject to much discussion and criticism; many wondered whether it would be suitable for Turkish foreign policy. After seven years, the discussion has mainly shifted to whether his policy would be sustainable without the AK Party and himself in the advisor's chair.

Davutoğlu vision has proven successful on the ground and his policy line has gained legitimacy in the suspicious eyes of critics in Turkey and abroad, although his approach continues to raise criticism. Davutoğlu's influence is mainly due to former Foreign Minister and current President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Erdoğan's willingness to appropriate his vision in the implementation of foreign policy. He is a well perceived person in Turkey's neighborhood, and in the eyes of major players in the international system, as was witnessed during French President Sarkozy's request that Turkey lend a hand to French diplomacy during the Gaza crisis. Davutoğlu's

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Turkey's domestic reform and growing economic capabilities have enabled the country to emerge as a peace-promoter in neighboring regions.

appointment to Foreign Minister will have implications beyond Turkey, both in the neighboring regions and among the international organizations in which Turkey takes active part. The major media outlets in the US, Europe and the Middle East covered his appointment extensively, and future close interest in Davutoğlu's moves as Foreign Minister of Turkey seems likely.

### **Davutoğlu Vision in Foreign Policy**

Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision has Turkey's domestic transformation in the background, specifically the consolidation of political and economic stability in the country. Turkey's domestic reform and growing economic capabilities have enabled the country to emerge as a peace-promoter in neighboring regions. Prior to Davutoğlu's rise to prominence, security in Turkey had been treated, to a considerable extent, as an internal problem. Foreign policies were seen as extensions of domestic considerations, and this attitude was traditionally accompanied by a visible tendency to externalize domestic problems and search for foreign enemies as the root causes of security problems. In some cases, there may indeed have been external causes for the problems, but political elites tended to exaggerate and manipulate them to preserve their hold on power. Davutoğlu developed his foreign policy on the basis of a novel geographic imagination which put an end to what he calls the "alienation" of Turkey's neighboring countries. One essential component of Davutoğlu's vision is to make negative images and prejudices, particularly those pertaining to the Middle East, a matter of the past. This shift has enabled Turkey to completely emancipate foreign policy from the chains of the domestic considerations.<sup>1</sup>

Davutoğlu's vision paved the way for the emergence of a new imagination, one which places different assumptions about regional countries in the minds of policymakers. The crux of the question lies within the aforementioned transformation, which reshaped foreign policy choices. In this sense, the new foreign policy took form under the impact of Davutoğlu's re-definition of Turkey's role in the neighboring regions and in international politics, namely its "strategic depth," with frontiers that have expanded beyond the homeland in the cognitive map of policymaker's minds. The territorial limits to Turkish involvement in neighboring countries has disappeared in this new mindset. The relationship between 'bordering and othering'<sup>2</sup> gained a new meaning after removing the strains of domestic threat perceptions in regional policy.

Davutoğlu's vision is likely to have a widespread impact on the culture of national security and the culture of geopolitics, which means widening the horizons of

1. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, (İstanbul: Küre, 2001), p. 49 and p. 409.

2. H. V. Houtum, "The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries," *Geopolitics*, 10(4), 2005, p. 674.

policymakers and the emergence of certain new attitudes in foreign policy. The change can be best understood in a multilateral framework that includes changes in the domestic landscape and the bilateral interaction of each component of the political, economic, and cultural transformation in relation to the emerging foreign policy line. For example, a more secure domestic atmosphere enters into a bilateral formative interaction with a confident foreign policy line. This process reconfigures the formulation of national security and integrates new factors into the foreign policymaking process. As Kirişçi notes, according to Turkish policymakers, “the political development, economic capabilities, dynamic social forces, and ability to reconcile Islam and democracy at home are the qualities that offer Turkey the possibility to develop and implement”<sup>3</sup> active and influential policies in the neighboring regions and in distant geographies like Africa and Asia.

Davutoğlu points out that Turkey promises to contribute to security, stability and prosperity in a wide range of territories that go beyond Turkey’s immediate neighborhood. He commented on Turkey’s projected activism in Africa as follows: “A country that undermines Africa can not have an international standing.”<sup>4</sup> Turkey’s newfound interest in these regions is the result of putting its home affairs in order, gaining self-confidence in international relations, developing a universal vision of foreign policy, and seeking a leadership role in world politics. As Ahmet Davutoğlu himself argues:

In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia’s vast landmass, it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character. Like Russia, Germany, Iran, and Egypt, Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region. Turkey’s diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously; in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs.<sup>5</sup>

Namely, although the distance between Turkey and other countries remains same, as Davutoğlu argues in his seminal book, *Strategic Depth*,<sup>6</sup> a new recognition of Turkey’s historical and cultural roots in the neighboring regions is changing perceptions of these geographies under the premises of a new geographic imagination. The physical distance and prior difficulties of getting involved in these

A new recognition of Turkey’s historical and cultural roots in the neighboring regions is changing perceptions of these geographies under the premises of a new geographic imagination.

3. Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times,” *Chaillot Paper*, 92, EU-ISS, Paris, September 2006, p. 96.

4. “Ties with Africa Help Ties with EU,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28 February 2009

5. Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Vision,” *Insight Turkey* 10, No.1 (2008), p. 78.

6. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*.

Turkey's zero problem policy is to minimize the problems in its neighboring regions, while avoiding involvement in international confrontations.

geographies no longer make sense in policy circles and among the public. What has emerged is a process of discovery of the 'closeness' of these geographies and their 'availability' for Turkey's involvement through the instruments of remembering past relations, unfolding cultural and civilizational affinities, and exploring opportunities for engagement. Turkey's new neighborhood policy appropriated a vision of minimizing the problems in its neighboring regions, which has been called zero problem policy by Davutoğlu himself, while avoiding involvement in international confrontations.<sup>7</sup>

The changing meanings of Asia or Africa in the new rhetoric of foreign policymakers exemplify the dynamic interaction between power and geography. There emerges a process of re-positioning, which places Turkey in a wider geographical landscape or makes it part of new regions. Turkey's new foreign policy places Turkey within various regions in such a way that it occupies not only an important geo-political position but is also able to emerge as a meaningful player in political and economic settings. Davutoğlu's vision has been appropriated by Turkey's foreign and security elite, and by the politicians in power. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan exemplified Davutoğlu's rhetoric of strategic depth when he said, "Istanbul is not only a center combining the continents but also a central symbol combining and synthesizing the civilizations."<sup>8</sup> Erdoğan place Istanbul in the center of a vast landscape, wherein Turkey's geography and cultural heritage gain meaning in a wider territorial context. As Davutoğlu further argues:

Turkey's engagements from Chile to Indonesia, from Africa to Central Asia, and from the EU to the OIC will be part of a holistic approach to foreign policy. These initiatives will make Turkey a global actor as we approach 2023, the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic.<sup>9</sup>

In this mindset, Turkey emerges as an influential player in a geography extending from Africa to the Far East and beyond.

Critics tend to present Davutoğlu's vision as neo-Ottomanism, emphasizing that most of Turkey's foreign policy activism occurs in former Ottoman territories. In fact, Davutoğlu's policies represent a continuity with Turkey's gradually developing activism during the era of former President Turgut Özal, as well as the radical steps towards EU membership taken by the coalition government that preceded the AK Party. Taking these trends further, Davutoğlu formulated a more comprehensive foreign policy vision and developed policy mechanisms to tackle the challenges of

7. Ibid.

8. R. T. Erdoğan, 'Speech to 38th annual meeting of the board of directors of the Asian Development Bank', Istanbul, 5 May 2005, available at <http://www.adb.org/annualmeeting/2005/Speeches/prime-minister-speech.html>.

9. Davutoğlu, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Vision," p. 96.

globalization in a post-nation state age. Davutoğlu's approach of making boundaries *de facto* meaningless while respecting national sovereignty creates geo-political imperatives to return to the backyard of the former Ottoman Empire. As İbrahim Kalın argues: "Turkey's post-modernity seems to be embedded in its Ottoman past."<sup>10</sup> Neither ignoring Turkey's Ottoman past nor seeking to merely recapitulate it as such, Davutoğlu's reference to historico-cultural affinities provides an advantage to Turkey in its involvement in neighboring regions. For example, his argument in *Strategic Depth* regarding the conflict over Jerusalem, namely that "no political problem in the region can be resolved without [utilizing] Ottoman archives,"<sup>11</sup> aims to bring the Ottoman past into play to provide a position for Turkey in the Middle East peace process. As a further note on the realistic account of Davutoğlu vision, Kirişçi underlines one priority of the new foreign policy as the emphasis placed on the rising importance of economic interdependence.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it would be misleading to consider neo-Ottomanism as the primary motive behind Davutoğlu's geo-political imagination.

Turkish foreign policy in neighboring regions does not assume a hegemonic role for Turkey but targets an inclusive approach for building peace and security based on the dynamics within these regions. Following this line of thought, Turkish foreign policymakers have gained a new self-confidence and political will to pursue peace attempts in the neighboring regions. Turkey now hosts Middle Eastern, Eurasian, and African leaders as well as high-level politicians and officials from Western countries, and facilitates platforms for the solution of conflicts in various geographies. Turkish policymakers try to overcome differences between countries in conflict through confidence-building measures and by acting as a mediator and facilitator to find solutions to chronic regional problems. Turkish policymakers' approach has enabled Turkey to emerge in the role of peace-maker in the periphery of the international system. As the driving force behind these developments, Davutoğlu's vision aims to prepare the ground for a new peace consciousness in a wide geography extending from the Middle East to the steppes of Eurasia.

## New Foreign Policy Instruments

Davutoğlu offers a number of mechanisms to realize the foreign policy objectives set forth in his new vision. The first is an integrated foreign policy approach.<sup>13</sup>

10. İbrahim Kalın, "Turkey and the Middle East: Ideology or Geo-Politics?" *Private View*, No.13 (2008), p. 26.

11. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 333.

12. Kemal Kirişçi, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No.40 (2009), pp. 29-57.

13. TRT 1 Enine-Boyuna Dış Politika Özel Programı, 23 Ocak 2009.

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Turkey needs to develop a new policy of integrating foreign policy issues within a single policy formulation framework.

According to Davutoğlu, Turkey was a country of priorities in its foreign policy orientation during the Cold War era. At that time, there was a certain hierarchy of priorities in the minds of foreign policymakers, and they pursued foreign policy in association with these static priorities. However, in Davutoğlu's view, this hierarchy is no longer valid in the current era. Instead, Turkey needs to develop a new policy of integrating foreign policy issues within a single policy formulation framework. Turkey does not have the luxury to turn its back on or avoid certain areas as it once did. Turkey has multiple regional identities and thus has the capability to follow an integrated foreign policy to bring a variety of issues into the same picture, from the Middle East peace process to Caucasian stability, giving priority to immediate issues without ignoring other foreign policy concerns.

According to this line of logic, foreign policy is a process and it should be considered from a longer perspective than had previously obtained. For example, contention surrounding the EU and Cyprus was on the agenda in the first half of 2004, and foreign policy focused on Iraq throughout the rest of 2004. The Gaza tragedy came onto the agenda in late 2008. As Davutoğlu argues, it would be wrong to artificially maintain a priority in any certain area; rather Turkish involvement should remain rooted in the principles of strategic depth, yet fluid and resilient enough to respond appropriately to the changes that occur in any given time period.<sup>14</sup>

Also related to this discussion, Davutoğlu opposes the notion that Turkey is guilty of a shift of axis in foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> For example, one may consider Turkey Cyprus-oriented if one looks at its 2004 activism, or Middle East-oriented if one looks at Turkey's intense diplomatic activities during Gaza crisis. Such categorizations would represent the mistake of evaluating Turkey's foreign policy at a certain short-term conjuncture, falling short of understanding it as a process. Turkey follows an integrated policy which collects all foreign policy areas and issues into a single picture of policy formulation. Rejecting the idea that Turkey has made a shift from the West to a Middle Eastern axis, Davutoğlu underlines that Turkey occupies a non-permanent seat in UN Security Council and is an active member of the G-20. Turkey also preserves its utmost commitment to the EU membership process.<sup>16</sup> These continuing commitments to involvement with the West, while deepening connections with the East, are the hallmarks of Davutoğlu's integrated foreign policy approach.

The second mechanism Davutoğlu offers to realize his foreign policy vision is a proactive foreign policy line supported by rhythmic diplomacy. Davutoğlu criticized in

14. TRT 1 Enine-Boyuna Dış Politika Özel Programı

15. Sami Kohen, "Davutoğlu ile Yeni Dönem," *Milliyet*, 3 May 2009.

16. TRT 1 Enine-Boyuna Dış Politika Özel Programı.



his book the low level of diplomatic engagement in the OIC, attributing to it Turkey's lost opportunity to place a Turkish candidate in the seat of secretary general at the OIC in 2000.<sup>17</sup> Davutoğlu guided foreign policy into a high degree of involvement with the OIC's election of a secretary general in 2004 when he was chief advisor to the Prime Minister. The result was the election of Turkish Professor Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu to the position of general secretary by democratic vote, for the first time in the history of the OIC.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Turkey's neighboring areas have seen more Turkish foreign policy elites and politicians in the past several years than they had in previous decades in their capitals. This proactive diplomacy targeted to achieve "zero problem" with Turkey's neighbors and stepped to the next stage, which has been named as "maximum cooperation" by Davutoğlu in his first press conference as Foreign Minister. Turkey hosts major summits of international organizations ranging from the Water Forum and the Least Developed Countries to the Caribbean Community. Turkey also hosts direct and indirect talks between the sides of disputes from the Middle East to the Eurasian steppes. Recent examples include the indirect talks between Israel and Syria and the direct negotiations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey also has acquired a non-permanent seat in UN Security Council, and an observer status in the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and the Organization of the American States (OAS). Turkey's development assistance exceeded 700 million USD in 2008 and Turkey is emerging as a donor country in the United Nations.

Turkey's proactive diplomacy's next step is "maximum cooperation" with the countries in the neighboring regions.

Third is presence on the ground, in particular during times of crisis.<sup>19</sup> As Davutoğlu put forward, Turkey needs to be on the ground whether it be in the European Union, the Middle East or the Caucasus, with a Turkish perspective. This mechanism has been exemplified in several cases, most recently during the Russia-Georgia crisis and the Gaza Crisis. Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Georgia, Azerbaijan and Russia before any other leader in the region and in Europe. Turkey offered a stability platform and carefully managed a potential NATO-Russia crisis in the Black Sea. Second, Erdoğan visited four influential Arab countries in the immediate aftermath of Israel's Gaza offensive, and a Turkish team led by Davutoğlu himself pursued shuttle diplomacy between Damascus and Cairo during the crisis.

Fourth is Davutoğlu's all-inclusive, equidistance policy. According to Davutoğlu, Turkish policy should aim to include all related actors, forming a broad coalition to solve problems and develop initiatives. In this sense, Turkey pursues its diplomacy carefully and modestly. Turkish policymakers keep an equal distance from all actors and avoid taking part in any regional alliances or groupings. Turkey's all-inclusive

17. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 264.

18. Bülent Aras, "Can Turkey Rouse the Muslim World?," *Daily Star*, 18 June 2004.

19. TRT 1 Enine-Boyuna Dış Politika Özel Programı

Business organizations, civil society, intellectuals, think-tanks, and other actors now provide input into the foreign policymaking process.

policy and equidistance policy satisfy the concerns of regional actors and assure them of the constructive nature of Turkish policies.

Fifth is total performance in foreign policy, which means considering NGOs, business communities and other civil organizations as part of the new foreign policy vision and mobilizing their support behind the new dynamic foreign policy line.<sup>20</sup> As a result of the facilitating impact of the new foreign policy understanding, various social groups increased their role in the making of foreign policy. Business organizations, civil society, intellectuals, think-tanks, and other actors now provide input into the foreign policymaking process. The new role of these institutions is part of this idea of total performance, in contrast to a past when regional policy and international relations were imagined in such a way that there was no room for these actors in the foreign policymaking process.

### **Davutoğlu's Foreign Policy Style**

Davutoğlu sparked a number of foreign policy initiatives in his capacity as chief advisor to the prime minister. Among these initiatives, Turkey's invitation to, and ongoing engagement policy with HAMAS has drawn more attention than any other, and has been the center of criticism against Davutoğlu. HAMAS' victories in the local elections of 2005 and in the Parliamentary Legislative Elections in 2006 opened a new era in the Palestinian question. HAMAS' refusal to recognize Israel was presented as the main concern of the international community, and the US and the EU started to discuss possible measures to force HAMAS to recognize Israel. Turkey's ruling party, the AK Party, under Davutoğlu's guidance, interpreted the HAMAS victory in a different way and favored diplomatic engagement with HAMAS to preempt possible problems. The Turkish position, as expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is that all related parties should respect the result of democratically conducted elections and that it would be against democratic principles if outside actors attempted to weaken the newly elected order by imposing economic measures against the Palestinian administration.<sup>21</sup> According to Turkish policymakers, HAMAS was in search of allies in the Middle East to put an end to the economic and political blockade it was facing from the international system. In such an environment, without Turkey's intervention, the only possible entry for HAMAS was the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis.<sup>22</sup>

Turkey's position is to include HAMAS in the political process; Davutoğlu's expectation was to persuade HAMAS to return to a truce in exchange for Israel's lifting of the

20. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 83.

21. Fikret Bila, "HAMAS'ın Ankara Ziyaretinin Hassas Yönleri," *Milliyet*, 17 February 2006.

22. Yasemin Çongar, "Meşal, Esad, Bush, Erdoğan," *Milliyet*, 3 July 2006.

blockade of Gaza. Turkish policymakers asked HAMAS to declare a ceasefire and work for the political accommodation of different groups within Palestinian politics.<sup>23</sup> Davutoğlu met twice in Syria with Khaled Mashal, HAMAS's leader-in-exile. Davutoğlu's second visit came as a result of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's request for help from Erdoğan. In this sense, Turkey has started a mediation process between HAMAS and international actors while maintaining regular contacts with Fateh, the Palestinian Authority and Abbas. Ankara's contribution at this point has been to motivate HAMAS to take pragmatic steps and ensure a rapprochement among the Palestinian factions.

Professor Richard Falk, the UN's special reporter on the occupied Palestinian territories, underlined the importance of Turkey's HAMAS engagement with a specific reference to HAMAS invitation in 2006 as follows: "It is tragic that this effort failed, and was at the time criticized. In retrospect, both the wellbeing of the Gazan civilian population and the security of Israel would have been greatly benefited by taking advantage of the Turkish initiative, and moving to implement the readiness of HAMAS to establish a long-term truce."<sup>24</sup> Davutoğlu participated in Sarkozy's meeting with Syrian President Bashar Asad, Javier Solana and the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security, in Damascus in January 2009. During the joint press conference of Sarkozy and Asad, Sarkozy expressed his appreciation for Davutoğlu's active contribution to the process.<sup>25</sup> A number of Western and Middle Eastern media joined Sarkozy in this exclusive acknowledgement of Davutoğlu's role with a further notice of his role in the truce between HAMAS and Israel.

Davutoğlu's foreign policy activism is not limited to the Middle East. The past seven years have witnessed similar activism in policies toward the EU, Cyprus and the Caucasus. Turkey's new dynamic foreign policy line toward the Caucasus on the eve of the Russia-Georgia crisis is a landmark example of Davutoğlu's policies in practice and on the ground. As a product of Turkey's new regional policy, in the wake of the Georgia-Russia crisis, Ankara streamlined a multilateral diplomatic initiative, the Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform, which will consist of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. This platform aims to develop a shared regional perspective, along with policy instruments to deal with issues like regional peace and security, energy security, and economic cooperation. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan pointed out that this Platform should appropriate the principles and norms of the OSCE and further argued that: "The failure of the Minsk group to produce any results is a fact that makes us think... The Caucasian Cooperation and Stability

As a product of Turkey's new regional policy, Ankara streamlined the Caucasian Stability and Cooperation Platform, which will consist of Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey.

23. İsmail Küçükkaya, "Davutoğlu Erdoğan'ın Neden Öfkelenildiğini Anlattı," *Akşam*, 21 January 2009.

24. Richard Falk "Understanding the Gaza Catastrophe," *Today's Zaman*, 4 January 2009.

25. "Gazze'de BM Okuluna Saldırı," *CNN Türk*, available at <http://www.cnnurk.com/2009/dunya/01/06/gazzedede.bm.okuluna.saldiri/507680.0/index.html>.

Ankara tries to avoid taking sides in any “Russia versus the West” struggles while developing its own relations with Moscow.

Platform will contribute to the efforts for the establishment of peace and stability in the region.”<sup>26</sup> Turkey’s position indicates Ankara’s preference for an inclusive approach to the situation. Armenia, the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have responded positively to the offer, and have praised the proposed project as a constructive attempt.<sup>27</sup> Turkey’s fresh approach of including both Azerbaijan and Armenia in regional peace efforts is targeted at ending the hegemony of Cold War-style binary oppositions. The Armenian administration too recognizes the need to put an end to the inimical patterns that create cycles of violence in the region.<sup>28</sup> Officials from the five countries met in Helsinki to discuss the aims, principles, and mechanisms of the Stability Platform after the OSCE meeting in Helsinki in December 2008.<sup>29</sup>

Ankara tries to avoid taking sides in any “Russia versus the West” struggles while developing its own relations with Moscow. Turkey pursued this policy actively during the Russia-Georgia crisis in August of 2008. Turkish policymakers acted carefully in order to minimize tension during the crisis and put forward the idea of a regional platform to settle regional problems. During the crisis, Prime Minister Erdoğan pointed out the importance of relations with Russia in the following way: “America is our ally and the Russian Federation is an important neighbor. Russia is our number one trade partner. We are obtaining two-thirds of our energy from Russia. We act in accordance to our national interests. [...] We cannot ignore Russia.”<sup>30</sup>

The armed conflict and escalation of tension between Russia and Georgia gave Turkey a tougher burden in the region. Trying to mediate among different parties in the area, Turkey faced a critical test of its neutral stance when US warships passed through the Turkish straits to deliver aid to Georgia. As a member of NATO, and also a neighbor, Turkey has supported Georgia both economically and politically since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Turkish policymakers aim to limit the Russian-Georgian crisis to the Caucasus region and prevent its expansion to the wider Black Sea region. At present, there is a clear tendency to seek support from outside actors and wider regional alliances for providing security in the region. Azerbaijan and Georgia rely on NATO and the Western powers and seek regional alliances with the Ukraine, Moldova, and Turkey. Armenia relies on Russia, while Russia calls on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to support the Russian cause in the Caucasus.<sup>31</sup>

26. “Kafkasya İşbirliğine Aliyev Desteği,” *Radikal*, 20 August 2008.

27. “Turkey Spearheads Creation of Caucasian Union,” *Global Insight*, 18 August 2008.

28. “Gül’le Sarkisyan ‘Kafkaslar’ı Görüştü,” *Dünya*, 7 September 2008.

29. *Hürriyet*, December 5, 2008.

30. Fikret Bila, “Erdoğan: Rusya’yı Gözardı Edemeyiz,” *Milliyet*, 2 September 2008.

31. The Russian President Medvedev briefed SCO heads of state on the Georgian crisis on 28 August 2008. The Dushanbe declaration did not extend a clear support while issuing a vague call for peaceful negotiations of the conflict. *Hürriyet*, 29 August 2008.

In response, Turkey suggested a Caucasian Stability Platform to configure a dialogue between the three Caucasian states, Russia, and Turkey in order to contain any crises in the region. Turkish policymakers stress the need to create a confidence and trust-building mechanism to foster a regional understanding of security. The EU gave the green light to this initiative, and the EU progress report on Turkey's accession negotiations positively mentioned the project.<sup>32</sup> NATO supported the platform as a constructive step for security in the wider Black Sea region with reference to Turkey's constructive policy line during the crisis.<sup>33</sup>

As a third example, under the strong influence of Turkey's new regional profile, Turkish policymakers present Turkey as the only country that can pursue constructive relations with all Iraqi actors and Iraqi neighbors. Erdoğan noted that his government pursues continuous and equal relations with all ethnic groups to motivate them for Iraq's unity and welfare.<sup>34</sup> In order to contribute to political stability in Iraq, Turkey has followed four complementary paths of diplomatic relations, exemplifying Davutoğlu's multidimensional foreign policy line and rhythmic diplomacy: through the UN Security Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Iraq's neighbours, and ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. Among these initiatives, the Platform for Iraqi Neighbors has arguably been the most important. The platform met for the first time in Istanbul on January 23, 2003 to find a peaceful solution and continued its activities after the beginning of the Iraq war.

As part of this platform, the foreign ministers of related countries have met formally eleven times and informally three times in different locations such as Istanbul, Baghdad and Tehran. Through the platform, Iraq's neighbors all agreed on the territorial integrity and political unity of Iraq. Some of the meetings were attended by representatives from the European Commission and the United Nations as well as the Secretaries General of the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference. The UN Security Council has taken these meetings seriously and has requested further regional cooperation on the Iraqi question. Inspired by this initiative, the UN Secretary General established a consultation group involving the platform members.

Turkey also plays an active role in making the Arab League and the OIC more sensitive to the ongoing issue of Iraq. Turkey engaged in backstage diplomacy by bringing together the Americans and the Sunnis on several occasions. During one such meeting before the elections in Iraq, the Sunnis agreed to end Sunni attacks while the Americans agreed to provide the conditions for a fair election.<sup>35</sup> In addition, Ankara brought major Sunni opposition figures and US envoys together to ensure

Turkish  
policymakers  
present Turkey as  
the only country  
that can pursue  
constructive  
relations with all  
Iraqi actors and  
Iraqi neighbors.

32. See Turkey 2008 Progress Report, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2008/turkey\\_progress\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2008/turkey_progress_report_en.pdf)

33. "Kafkasya İstikrar ve İşbirliği Platformu'na destek var," *Sabah*, 19 August 2008.

34. *Prime Minister's Speech*, 09 January 2007, available at [www.basbakanlik.gov.tr](http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr).

35. Taha Akyol, "Neden Türkiye başardı," *Milliyet*, 06 December 2005.

Sunni participation in Iraq's national elections on 30 June 2005. Tariq-al Hashimi, a prominent Sunni leader and Vice-president of Iraq, has met former US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Istanbul in another initiative aimed at involving all groups in the political process.<sup>36</sup> In order to contribute to the democratic process in Iraq, Turkey also organized training programs for 350 Iraqi politicians from various political parties.<sup>37</sup> As these efforts demonstrate, Turkey's ruling elite now enjoy a newly developed self-confidence that Turkey can play a constructive role in the Middle East, including Iraq. Turkey's Iraqi policy has been an asset in Turkish-American relations and a serious motive behind President Barack Obama's projected "model partnership" on a number of issues ranging from the future of Iraq to Afghanistan's stability.

### Concluding Remarks

It is not an overstatement to claim that the position of Foreign Minister is a challenging duty in Turkey even for Davutoğlu, who has long been chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan. More than an advisor, Davutoğlu is the intellectual architect of Turkey's new foreign policy. This dual role brings both advantages and disadvantages. Statements against and in favor of Turkey's proactive regional policy and growing international relations are usually targeted at Davutoğlu himself. Although such statements underestimate the role of institutional background and ignore other agents of Turkish foreign policy, there is a general consensus that Davutoğlu has played an influential role in the formulation of Turkish foreign policy since 2002. There are a number of challenges and difficulties ahead for Davutoğlu in his new position. The following notes may help to delineate the problems ahead; the recommendations may help partially to overcome some of them.

1. Davutoğlu has a strong academic background in philosophy, political science and international relations. He is very talented in building sophisticated foreign policy rhetoric vis-à-vis the problems on the ground. As minister of Foreign Affairs, the burden will shift more from rhetoric to practice. There will be more expectations of seeing actual results. Davutoğlu thus assumes a challenging duty since his vision promises a central role for Turkey in a wide range of geography from Africa to Asia, an area encompassing almost all of the major challenges to international security.
2. Davutoğlu's idea of integral foreign policy is persuasive in terms of identifying Turkey's foreign policy agenda. However, the validity of this idea is dependent on the size of the receptive audience. There is need to keep the EU membership and

reform process on the agenda in a way that facilitates the maintenance of a wide, receptive audience for integral foreign policy perspectives both inside and outside of Turkey.

3. Davutoğlu should consider Turkey's democracy as the main source of its soft power. The challenging task is to manage Turkish foreign policy in such a way to limit the securitizing impact of a number of issues—like the Cyprus issue and Northern Iraq—in domestic politics. Another dimension of this challenge is the need for public diplomacy in Turkey's actively involved regions and to create communication channels with Turkish public opinion. For example, the attempts for normalization with Armenia triggered a nationalist Azeri response and this response found support in Turkey in a form of allegation that the Turkish government is selling out Azerbaijan. Preventing this kind of negative input should be on the agenda in relation to Turkey's increasing activism in regional policy.
4. Davutoğlu will be in charge of Turkish foreign policy and will manage the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the new era. He will not have the luxury of opening a certain file and proceeding with it: he will have all the files of foreign policy at his table. He will probably not have the chance to be personally involved in all issues and problems. He will be working together with or delegating to the ministry cadres. As Temel İskit pointed out, he may encounter serious internal problems and obstacles while trying to reconcile his vision with the bureaucratic mechanisms of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> Populist pressure from both the government and the opposition parties will continue to complicate the situation as external obstacles.
5. In addition to its commitment to democracy, Turkey's soft power emerges from its on-the-ground influence in the Middle East and the Caucasus, coupled with its political, cultural and economic abilities. Turkey has gained its status in the neighboring regions by experimenting with its foreign policy and demonstrating achievements on the ground. The challenge for Davutoğlu is to consolidate Turkey's strategic-political achievements with economic and cultural engagements. The task is to create a feasible and sustainable trading state in close cooperation and coordination with the business community and state institutions.
6. US President Obama's visit contributed to Turkey's soft power image on the international stage. There is a need to constitute a solid base for Obama's notion of model partnership in order to secure long-term support and cooperation on the ground from the US administration. The challenge is to utilize converging regional and international interests between Turkey and the US in the current era in order to create a win-win situation for all sides.

38. Temel İskit, "Dış Politikada Berraklık Zamanı," *Taraf*, 5 May 2009.

Ahmet Davutođlu was appointed Foreign Minister of Turkey on May 1, 2009. Chief advisor to the Prime Minister since 2002, Davutođlu is known as the intellectual architect of Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party. He articulated a novel foreign policy vision and succeeded, to a considerable extent, in changing the rhetoric and practice of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's new dynamic and multidimensional foreign policy line is visible on the ground, most notably to date in the country's numerous and significant efforts to address chronic problems in the neighboring regions. Davutođlu's duty will now shift from the intellectual design of policies to greater actual involvement in foreign policy, as he undertakes his new responsibilities as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Davutođlu era in Turkish foreign policy will deepen Turkey's involvement in regional politics, international organizations, and world politics.

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