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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TURKISH MODEL IN US-TURKISH  
RELATIONS: THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TURKISH MODEL IN US-TURKISH RELATIONS: THE  
IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

ABD-TÜRKİYE İLİŞKİLERİNDE TÜRK MODELİNİN YÜKSELİŞİ VE DÜŞÜŞÜ: SURIYE  
KRİZİNİN ETKİSİ

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is designed to analyze the changing dynamics of contemporary US-Turkish relations with a specific focus on transformation in Turkish politics and political developments in the Middle East during the AKP administration (2002-2016). In that sense, this study conceptualized US-Turkish relations under the theoretical framework of “national role conceptions” in foreign policy analysis literature. As a consequence, this dissertation’s primary purpose is to provide a comprehensive understanding of US-Turkish relations with regard to Turkey’s national role conceptions under the AKP rule. Turkey was widely viewed as a model of democratization, economic growth and co-existence of a Muslim religious political elite and a secular state for the countries in the Middle East both by the Turkish officials and US officials after September 11 attacks. Firstly, the outbreak of the uprisings in the Arab world in late-2010 provided a great opportunity for the realization of the “Turkish model”. However, this process came to halt with the prolongation of the crisis in Syria. As a result of the increasing divergence of the US and Turkey in regard to Syria from late-2012 onwards and changing dynamics in Turkish politics, the “Turkish model” failed, therefore initiating a long term tense period in US-Turkish relations.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma AKP iktidarı döneminde (2002-2016) ABD-Türkiye ilişkilerini belirleyen değişen dinamikleri Türkiye'nin geçirmiş olduğu siyasal dönüşüm ve Ortadoğu'daki siyasal gelişmeler bağlamında ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışmanın teorik çerçevesini dış politika analizi literatüründeki “ulusal rol kavramsallaştırmaları” yaklaşımı oluşturmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu tezin birincil amacı ABD-Türkiye ilişkilerini AKP iktidarı döneminde Türkiye'nin ulusal rol kavramsallaştırmalarına göre değerlendirmektir. 11 Eylül saldırılarından sonra Türkiye Ortadoğu ülkeleri için demokratikleşme, ekonomik büyüme, ve yeni dindar Müslüman bir siyasal elit ile seküler bir devlet yapısının bir arada bulunması açısından birçok Türk ve Amerikalı yetkili tarafından Ortadoğu ülkeleri için bir “model” olarak benimsendi. 2010 sonlarında patlak veren Arap İsyancıları Türkiye'nin modelliği için büyük bir fırsat sundu. Fakat, Suriye krizinin derinleşmesi ile bu süreç sekteye uğradı. Türkiye ve ABD'nin 2012 sonlarından itibaren farklılaşan politikaları ve Türkiye'nin siyasal dinamiklerinin değişmesi ile birlikte Arap ülkeleri için sunulan “Türk modeli” başarısızlığa uğradı ve böylece Türkiye-ABD ilişkileri uzun bir gerileme sürecine girmiş oldu.

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## Acronyms

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
PM	Prime Minister
MP	Member of Parliament
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
JAN	Jabhat al-Nusra
SETA	Siyaset ve Toplum Arařtırmaları Vakfı
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
DP	Democrat Party (Turkey)
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
WINEP	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
BI	Brookings Institute
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
YPG	People's Protection Units
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
AQ	Al-Qaeda
NSC	National Security Council
US	United States
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

OPC

Operation Provide Comfort

ONW

Operation Northern Watch

## INTRODUCTION

After the World War II, the US has emerged in the international arena as a superpower, therefore playing a leading role in shaping the international system. For that reason, US-Turkish relations have been of crucial significance not only for Turkey's alignment in the international system and its foreign policy orientation but also for its domestic politics since the beginning of the Cold War.

Despite substantial changes in the underlying foundations of US-Turkish ties with the end of the Cold War, US-Turkish relations have turned out to be even more related to Turkey's positioning in the international arena and its domestic political trajectory. Therefore, the US was much more invested in improving relations with Turkey by anchoring the country further to the west until the early 2010s.

This research's primary aim is to give a comprehensive account of US-Turkish relations in a contemporary context. Therefore, it is exclusively concentrated on elaborating on multilayered dynamics of the US-Turkey relationship after the September 11 Attacks, especially during the rule of *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) in Turkey between 2002 and 2016.

By and large, the purpose of this study is to analyze US-Turkish relations in the context of Turkey's political transformation both in the domestic realm and in the international realm particularly under the AKP rule since US played a key role in this transformation process since the end of the Cold War. Accordingly, this study aims to conceptualize US-Turkish ties in terms of the direct influence of Turkey's political transformation with Turkey's EU process, demilitarization of the Turkish political system and new activism in Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East.

In that respect, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political fallouts of the Arab uprisings that swept the Arab world, specifically the Syrian crisis on US-Turkish bilateral relations within the context of the political transformation that Turkey went through under the rule of AKP between 2011 and 2016.

To be more specific, in the first chapter, this study focuses on the historical aspects of US-Turkish relations during and after the Cold War in order to clarify the foundational elements, areas of convergence and divergence in US-Turkish ties between 1946 and 2001.

Firstly, I try to come up with an elaborative answer to questions such as “How did US-Turkish alliance institutionalized under the NATO alliance”, “Why did Turkey was so eager to join the NATO alliance” and “Why did Turkey gained such significance in the eyes of the US officials during the Cold War”. Then, I dwell on the early sources of friction between the US and Turkey through questions such as “What are the early sources of friction between the US and Turkey in the 1960s”, “How did the Cyprus dispute affect US-Turkish economic and security relations”. In the last section of the first chapter, I try to build on the question “What are the newly emerging issues in US-Turkish ties in the 1990s after the Cold War”.

In the second chapter, this study centers upon the new dynamics of the US-Turkey relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a focus on global war on terrorism and Turkey’s political transformation under the rule of the AKP between 2001 and 2009. In that context, I try to elaborate on important questions such as “What role did Turkey play in the US policy of global war on terrorism” and “How crucial did the US role was in Turkey’s political transformation in terms of Turkey’s EU process, transformation in Turkish civil-military relations and shift in Turkey’s Kurdish and Cyprus policies under the AKP rule”.

After that, in the third chapter, this study concentrates on the new momentum in US-Turkish ties with the shift of power in the US administration after Obama was elected to the US presidency in 2009. Moreover, it also dwells on Turkey’s new foreign policy initiatives and their multifaceted impacts on US-Turkish relations, particularly in 2010. Lastly, the third chapter expands on the uprisings in the Arab world and Turkey’s rising image in the US as a model for the Arab world.

In the last chapter, the study lays special emphasis on the Syrian uprising and its long-term repercussions on US-Turkish relations. It stresses how Syria, a formerly secondary component of the US-Turkey relationship in the previous decades, rapidly

rose to prominence to dramatically shift the very fabric of bilateral relations between the countries from 2011 onwards.

In that sense, the last chapter tries to enlarge on questions such as “What are the areas of convergence between the US and Turkey regarding Syria between 2011 and 2012”, “Why did the US-Turkey convergence in Syria rapidly deteriorated from late-2012 onwards”, “What are the areas of divergence between the countries regarding Syria from 2013 onwards” and “How did the rise of jihadists during the course of the Syrian crisis affect US-Turkish relations in the long-term”. It also tries to give a comprehensive answer to “How did the Syrian crisis affect the trajectory of Turkey’s internal affairs” and “Which underlying factors determined and altered the Syria policies of the US and Turkey”.

In respect to the theoretical framework of the research, the study is predicated upon the foreign policy analysis literature, which is a subfield of international relations theory, with an actor-specific focus.<sup>1</sup> Within the foreign policy analysis literature, the study specifically singles out K. J. Holsti’s theory of “national role conception”,<sup>2</sup> as the optimal framework to conceptualize the multifaceted dynamics of US-Turkish relations in a contemporary context.

“National role conception” is an application of “role theory”, which is most discussed among sociologists, social psychologists and anthropologists, to the foreign policy analysis literature. It presumes that foreign policy behaviors of states are outcomes of “policymakers’ conceptions of their nation’s orientations and tasks in the international system or in subordinate regional systems”.<sup>3</sup> It is policymakers’ “image of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment”.<sup>4</sup> Holsti also stresses the fact that “national role conceptions are related to the role prescriptions coming from the external environment.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 no. 1 (2005): 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 14 no. 3 (1970).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

In the Turkish foreign policy analysis literature, “national role conception” is applied to define the new activist and multilateral trends in Turkish foreign policy especially in the Middle East during the rule of the AKP administration. In this sense, Turkish foreign policy during the AKP rule can be conceptualized under the framework of the “Turkish model” within a Middle Eastern context.<sup>6</sup>

The “Turkish model” is built on the idea that Turkey could be a source of inspiration, an example, a model for other countries in the Middle East with regard to its commitment to democratization, new activist foreign policy, economic development, secular state and Muslim identity. In that sense, the AKP administration and the US was at the forefront in defending the “Turkish model” in order to promote democratization in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The “Turkish model” was first put forward in a Middle Eastern context following the occupation of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005 to show Islam’s compatibility with democracy by embracing Turkey under the AKP administration.<sup>8</sup> Then the “Turkish model” was revisited in the midst of the Arab uprisings in 2011 and 2012 to demonstrate Turkey as an exemplary country that could foster democratization throughout the Arab world.<sup>9</sup>

However, the prolongation of the Syrian crisis came out as a major fault line in fulfilling the promises of the “Turkish model”. Accordingly, this study argues that the Syrian crisis not only brought down the “Turkish model”, but also created a major rift between the US and Turkey owing to the AKP administration’s failed regime change policy in Syria and Turkey’s declining democracy from 2013 onwards.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, this study’s primary goal is to take Holsti’s theory of “national role

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<sup>6</sup> Emel Parlar Dal and Emre Şen, “Reassessing the ‘Turkish Model’ in the Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective,” *Turkish Studies* 15 no. 2 (2014); Özgür Özdamar, B. Toygar Halistoprak and İ. Erkam Sula, “From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey’s Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11 no. 42 (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Dal and Şen, “Reassessing the ‘Turkish Model’ in the Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective”, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-72; Alper Y. Dede, “The Arab Uprisings: Debating the Turkish Model,” *Insight Turkey* 13 no. 2 (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Cihan Tuğal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism* (New York: Verso, 2016): 191-4; Ziya Öniş, “Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East,” *Mediterranean Politics* 19 no. 2 (2014): 210-2.“

conception” and apply it to define the trajectory of US-Turkish relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by arguing that the “Turkish model” provides the essential theoretical framework for a comprehensive analysis of current US-Turkish relations. As a matter of fact, the “Turkish model” had been the basis of a new proposed framework, “model partnership” in 2009, to define US-Turkish relations in the Obama administration.

In regard to the limitations of the research, this study is concentrated on examining US-Turkish relations particularly in a Middle Eastern context due to the region’s rising significance in the international arena following the increasing volatility in the region with the Gulf War, September 11 attacks, the war in Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq.

This focus creates important regional limitations for the study. To be more specific, the study does not focus on the implications of the political developments in Central Asia or in the Balkans for US-Turkish relations. An important example is the first formulation of the “Turkish model” in the early 1990s for Central Asian countries, which is outside the scope of this study.<sup>11</sup> Another example is the Armenian issue that had certain repercussion for the relations between countries from time to time.<sup>12</sup> Even though the study touches upon US-EU-Turkish trilateral relations, there is certainly room for more research in terms of the EU dimension of US-Turkish ties.

In addition, this study prioritizes analyzing the political and diplomatic relations between the US and Turkey. Accordingly, the scope of this research does not include the energy dimension that have significant consequences for the relations between the countries. Also, this study does not focus on examining economic ties between two countries that might have different implications for bilateral US-Turkish ties. Although this study includes elements of security relations between the countries, it is not considered a priority in the research; consequently, security dimension of the relations between the US and Turkey may need further exploration.

Lastly, it is essential to point out the time frame of the study especially in the

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<sup>11</sup> For further information on the “Turkish model” in the context of Turkic Republics in Central Asia, see; Dal and Şen, “Reassessing the ‘Turkish Model’ in the Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective”, 263-7.

<sup>12</sup> For further information on the Armenian issue’s impacts on US-Turkish relations, see; İhan Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III (İstanbul: İletişim, 2017): 296-301.

last chapter. The last chapter mostly concentrated on US-Turkish ties over Syria between 2011 and mid-2016. The reason for that is from mid-July 2016 onwards, US-Turkish relations came under the direct influence of the coup attempt on July 15, 2016 in Turkey and Syria started being a secondary issue for bilateral ties.

# 1. CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF US-TURKISH RELATIONS (1945-2001)

Before getting into the current dynamics of the relations between US & Turkey, it is vital to take a glance at the historical aspects of the US-Turkey relationship. To that end, the first chapter will start off by expanding on the buildup of institutionalization of the US-Turkish alliance. Then it will elaborate on US-Turkey relations in the light of the developments in the Middle East during the late 50s.

On the other hand, the chapter will also get the bottom of the early sources of conflict and divergence in US-Turkey relations during the Cold War era. For instance, there were 3 major issues that caused deterioration in US-Turkey relations. President Johnson's letter to İnönü regarding the Cyprus debate in 1964, the opium crisis towards the end of the 60s and the US arms embargo to Turkey in 1975 came to be major sources of friction in the US-Turkey relationship. Nevertheless, this strained period in US-Turkey relations ended with the Carter administration's decision to end the arms embargo in 1978 and US-Turkey partnership was revitalized in the 1980s.

Finally, this chapter will also briefly elaborate on the new major issues that have had relevance for the US-Turkey relationship from the end of the Cold War up until the turn of the century. To be more specific, the Gulf War reinvigorated the US-Turkey partnership in a changing Middle East. After the Gulf War, the changing structure of the Kurdish question created minor rifts between US and Turkey while it also came out as a platform for cooperation between the US and Turkey as can be seen in the process that led to the capture of Abdullah Öcalan. Another area of cooperation between the US and Turkey appeared in Turkey's improving relations with the EU. US officials gave enormous significance to Turkey's integration with the EU as part of a broader US strategy of democracy promotion in the Middle East.

## 1.1. Institutionalization of the US-Turkish Strategic Alliance

The end of the World War II marked a milestone in the history of international relations as it fundamentally altered the global power dynamics of the world. It paved the way for a new world order, where the Cold War created a bipolar international system. Thus, United States-Turkish relations, which were formerly very much limited to economic ties during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>13</sup> gained more significance after WWII.

First of all, the arrival of US warship Missouri in İstanbul in April 1946, carrying back the body of former Turkish Ambassador to the US, Münir Ertegün, stands out as a landmark as it signaled the beginning of bilateral strategic relationship between US and Turkey.<sup>14</sup>

The arrival of Missouri warship was enchanted by the Turkish press, who reflected their excitement on the cover pages of newspapers. The visit also created a sense of solidarity between the US and the Turkish administrations since Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu and President İnönü received the visitors enthusiastically.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the Soviet Union was putting pressure on Ankara over the status of the Straits in Turkey. Moscow was trying to change the Montreux Convention in order to make sure that the Turkish Straits were open to Soviet use. US was opposed to Soviet demands in the Straits and this brought about a platform where the US and Turkey's interests converged.<sup>16</sup>

As a response against the Soviet threat against Turkey, President Harry S. Truman requested authorization for the extension of military and economic assistance to Turkey in his address to the Congress on March 12, 1947.<sup>17</sup> Then, on July 12, 1947,

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<sup>13</sup> Füsün Türkmen, "Turkish-American Relations: A Challenging Transition," *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 1 (2009): 110.

<sup>14</sup> Füsün Türkmen, *Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri: Kırılgan İttifaktan "Model Ortaklığa"* (İstanbul: Tifaş, 2012): 60.

<sup>15</sup> Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Turkey's quest for NATO membership: the institutionalization of the Turkish-American alliance," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12, no. 4 (2012): 483.

<sup>16</sup> Çağrı Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası*, vol. I, ed. Baskın Oran (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016): 525-28.

<sup>17</sup> For the full speech, see Akis Kalaitzidis and Gregory W. Streich, *U.S. Foreign Policy. A Documentary and Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 145-50.

Turkey declared that it accepted to take the aids from the US with an aid agreement.<sup>18</sup>

From that day on, economic and military aids started flowing from US into Turkey. U.S. military aids that were steered into Turkey between 1948-1952 were \$ 687 million. To further enhance military relations between the sides, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established the Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Turkey (JAMMAT) by October 1949 after U.S. Ambassador's secret request to start communication between American and Turkish General Staffs.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, economic ties between US and Turkey were further strengthened with aids to Turkey under the Marshall Plan. Turkey was included in the Marshall Plan in the first of a series of meetings in Paris to discuss the economic needs of 16 European countries. The first aid under Marshall Plan was given to Turkey with the Economic Cooperation Agreement in July 1948.<sup>20</sup>

Then, the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, can be regarded as an important step towards institutionalization of the Cold War's geopolitical order. At the time, Turkey was enthusiastic about joining NATO because of perceived security threats from the USSR but its first application to membership in NATO in May 1950 was rejected.<sup>21</sup> However, following its commitments in the Korean War with 4,500 Turkish troops, Turkey became a NATO member in February 1952, and thus a strategic ally of the US, especially pertaining to its containment policy towards the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup>

Further on, the Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the 1951 NATO Forces' Status Treaty, led to the establishment of US air and strategic bases and radar and communication facilities throughout Turkey, one of being the İncirlik airbase, formerly called the Adana airbase.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. I, 533.

<sup>19</sup> Nuri Bilge Criss, "The American Cold War Military Presence in Turkey," in *American Turkish Encounters: Politics and Culture, 1830-1989*, ed. Nuri Bilge Criss et al. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011): 287.

<sup>20</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. I, 539-42.

<sup>21</sup> Ayşe Ömür Atmaca, "The Geopolitical Origins of Turkish-American Relations: Revisiting the Cold War Years," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 11, no. 1992 (2014): 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>23</sup> Türkmen, "A Challenging Transition", 112.

The first presidential visits from both sides occurred during the mid-1950s. Turkish President Celal Bayar's one-month official visit to the US in January 1954, visiting various cities including Washington DC, was followed by Prime Minister (PM) Adnan Menderes' visit to the US six months later. The first US President that paid an official visit to Turkey was Dwight D. Eisenhower as he visited Turkey 5 years later in December 1959.<sup>24</sup>

Another area of cooperation between the US and Turkey emerged in the Middle East with President Eisenhower's "New Looking Strategy". One of the main components of Eisenhower's policy was forming alliances in the Middle East against the Soviet threat in order to resolve the contentious issues in the region.<sup>25</sup>

Turkey came to the forefront in terms of the preservation of US interests in the region. Thus, the Democrat Party (DP) government relied on premises to draw its Arab neighbors to regional security formations. First of these series of security alliances was the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO). MEDO was unequivocally rejected by the King Farouk government in Egypt and was ultimately disbanded.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, after the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited a couple of countries in the Middle East including Turkey, the Baghdad Pact, comprised of Turkey, the UK, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, was formed in 1955 as a result of the efforts of the DP administration such as reaching deals with Pakistan and Iraq.<sup>27</sup>

US supported the pact but did not join it for fear of antagonizing Israel and exasperating the hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union. However, after the Iraqi coup d'état in 1958, it was realized that such a pact would not function properly without the US. After Iraq's withdrawal from the alliance in 1959, the name of the pact was changed to CENTO and US joined the organization.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the organization's principles were never put into practice and

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<sup>24</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. I, 561-63.

<sup>26</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "The USA-Turkey-Middle East: From the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 15 no. 2 (2013): 146.

<sup>27</sup> Atay Akdeveliöğlu & Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Ortadoğu'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası*, vol. I, 620-23.

<sup>28</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. I, 568-69.

was disbanded in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Therefore, the Menderes government failed in its efforts to materialize US goals in the Middle East. The Suez crisis of 1956 and Iraqi withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact considerably diminished Turkey's role in US policy-making endeavors in the region.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, in the aftermath of Turkey's accession to NATO, the Adana airbase in Turkey stood out as a major tool in the materialization of US policy-making endeavors in the Middle East. For instance, with the great support of the Menderes government, the Adana airbase was used by the US in its intervention in 1958 Lebanon crisis despite strong public opposition.<sup>30</sup>

All in all, the US-Turkey relationship during the onset of the Cold War in the 1950s is vital since this period marked the beginning of a long-term US-Turkey strategic partnership in political, military and economic terms. According to Türkmen, the bilateral relations between Turkey and US would never see such a peak point.<sup>31</sup>

## 1.2. Early Sources of Friction in the US-Turkey Relationship

On the other hand, there were signs of friction in US-Turkish relations in the coming decades. Firstly, worsening economy of Turkey and the economy policies of the DP administration in the late 1950s brought about a minor divergence between the US and Turkey. US did not provide sufficient economic aid to Turkey on the grounds that Turkey did not implement the necessary economic policies. Not to mention, in accordance with Turkey's increasingly unstable domestic politics, negative perceptions of Turkey prevailed in the US.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, coupled with the failure to materialize US interests in the Middle East, the Menderes government shifted its unilateral foreign policy, tilting towards a more multilateral one from 1958 onwards. In that sense, Turkey tried to balance its

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<sup>29</sup> Süleyman Seydi, "Turkish-American Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1957-63" *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3. (2010): 436.

<sup>30</sup> Selin M. Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye*. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012): 211-216.

<sup>31</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. II, 560-61.

relations with the superpowers, the US and Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup>

Another rift between US and Turkey occurred during the Cuban missile crisis. In response to the USSR's possession of intermediate and long-range ballistic missiles, the Eisenhower administration decided to place intermediate-range ballistic missiles in various NATO countries and Ankara signed an agreement in October 1959, accepting the installment of 15 Jupiter missiles in İzmir.<sup>34</sup>

However, in October 1962, the USSR started installing intermediate and long-range missile sites in Cuba in response to the US. Therefore, with the leverage of the US officials, US and Turkey reached an official agreement to dismantle the installed 15 Jupiter missiles in February 1963.<sup>35</sup> The missiles in İzmir were traded against the Soviet missiles shipped to Cuba under a secret deal between the US and the USSR, which was viewed in the Turkish memory as "the American betrayal of Turkey".<sup>36</sup>

The first major source of friction between the US and Turkey erupted with the Cyprus dispute throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to the 60s, Turkey, by and large, pursued a non-interventionist policy regarding the Cyprus issue, since it considered the conflict as falling under British sovereignty.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, the Turkish policy of non-involvement changed drastically when ethnic tensions were on the rise in 1963. Turkish and Greek Cypriots failed to reach a compromise to restore the London-Zurich Agreements and the Constitution. Consequently, violence erupted between two communities and US got involved in Cyprus for the first time.<sup>38</sup>

Following statements by Ankara that hinted towards a Turkish intervention in Cyprus as a response to the rising ethnic tensions in the island in 1964, the US got involved in the conflict. To resolve the issue, State Secretary Dean Acheson put forward a plan in Geneva. However, upon the rejection of the first plan by Greece and

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<sup>33</sup> Seydi, "Turkish-American Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1957-63", 436.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 450.

<sup>36</sup> Criss, "The American Cold War Military Presence in Turkey", 290.

<sup>37</sup> Aylin Güney, "Revisiting the Origins of the Cyprus Conflict: The Impact on the Cold War and Turkish American Relations," in *American Turkish Encounters: Politics and Culture, 1830-1989*, 303.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

the second by Turkey, the Acheson plan failed.<sup>39</sup>

After the failure of the Acheson plan, the İnönü administration started speaking of a possible Turkish military action in Cyprus. In response, Lyndon B. Johnson wrote a letter to the Turkish PM İsmet İnönü, which is largely considered as one of the biggest blows to US-Turkish relations. The Johnson letter warned against the use of US-supplied military equipment in a possible Turkish intervention in Cyprus and expressed its opposition to it.<sup>40</sup> İnönü sent a response to the US, agreeing to the US terms by postponing military action.<sup>41</sup>

Opium production in Turkey also turned out to be a friction between US and Turkey. Since 1962, the US urged the Turkish government to restrict the area of farmland in Anatolia where opium poppy was cultivated. As Anatolian opium found its way into the hands of transnational criminal networks, US pressure on Turkey intensified in the 1960s.<sup>42</sup>

Due to the rising levels of opium use among the American youth with the Vietnam War, the Nixon administration prioritized war on drugs. Thus, US increased pressure on Ankara for the complete eradication of poppy cultivation in Turkey. However, the provinces that cultivated poppy were too economically dependent on the crop, therefore making it hard for the Demirel government to take immediate action.<sup>43</sup>

The Erim government built on the plan that the Demirel administration initiated to put an end to opium production in Turkey. A government decree was issued on June 30, 1971 to end poppy production in 1972-73, which was followed by the US compensating for the negative economic effects of the ban with \$35 million of aid.<sup>44</sup>

With regard to the Cyprus issue, five days after the Cypriot coup d'état on July 15, 1974, Turkey carried out military operation in Cyprus. Under pressure from the Greek-American 5 lobby, US Congress reached 3 conclusions.<sup>45</sup> In that regard, US

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 304-05.

<sup>40</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," vol. I, 685-90.

<sup>41</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 100-02.

<sup>42</sup> Philip Robins, "The Opium Crisis and the Iraq War: Historical Parallels in Turkey-US Relations," *Mediterranean Politics* 12 no. 1 (2007): 21.

<sup>43</sup> James W. Spain, "The United States, Turkey and the Poppy," *Middle East Journal* 29 no. 3 (1975): 298.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>45</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," vol. I, 704.

Congress imposed arms embargo on Turkey in February 1975 despite firm opposition from the Ford administration, including the former State Secretary Henry Kissinger.<sup>46</sup>

In response to the US arms embargo, the Demirel government repealed defense agreements with the US on July 25, 1975 and US bases in Pirinçlik, Karamürsel, Sinop, Belbaşı and İncirlik were shut down. Their control was taken over by the Turkish military except for the fact that İncirlik remained open for NATO use.<sup>47</sup>

The arms embargo was lifted by the Carter administration in 1978 and Turkey, once again, became a pillar of US policy in the Middle East with the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In that sense, US-Turkey partnership was renewed in the 1980s. For example, American Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) was signed in March 1980. US military transfers to Turkey between 1984 and 1993 reached a total of \$6 billion.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3. US-Turkey Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War created a great challenge for US-Turkey relations in the absence of a bipolar world order. Thus, the very nature of the US-Turkish strategic alliance was questioned. The Özal administration's proposal for a free trade agreement between Turkey and US was not accepted by the US officials. Additionally, US reduced its military presence in Turkey by closing down military bases and reducing the number of its military personnel.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to the former US geostrategic approach to the country, Turkey was more viewed in the context of its new role in US interests in the Middle East. In general, US viewed Turkey as an aid in the containment of Iran and Iraq during the 1990s.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 705-08.

<sup>47</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 137-38.

<sup>48</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkish-American Security Relations: The Middle East Dimension," in *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future* ed. Mustafa Aydın and Çağrı Erhan. (London: Routledge, 2004): 152-54.

<sup>49</sup> Çağrı Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası*, vol II, ed. Baskın Oran (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015): 252.

<sup>50</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000): 223.

More specifically, Turkey was also vital for US interests in the Gulf with regard to the preservation of oil reserves in the region. In fact, Turkey's significance in terms of the American oil policy was realized even before the end of the cold war in the beginning of the 1980s. Albert Wohlstetter, being one of the founding fathers of the neoconservative movement, mentioned Turkey as an important NATO ally in protecting US interests in case of a war in the Persian Gulf.<sup>51</sup>

### 1.3.1. The Gulf War

The eruption of the Gulf War in 1991 was a breakthrough in US-Turkey relations. The Kuwait crisis persuaded U.S. leaders that strategic value of Turkey was more to be seen in the matter of what came to be called the greater Middle East than its previous NATO role during the Cold War. For the US, Turkey was increasingly seen as an anchor of stability in a volatile region.<sup>52</sup>

During the Özal administration, Turkey was mostly supportive of the US policy in the Gulf War. During Özal's visit to the White House, 7 months before the invasion of Kuwait, Özal warned President Bush that Saddam was the most dangerous man on earth and the only way to deal with him was through a US-led military coalition.<sup>53</sup>

The ANAP administration perceived the invasion of Kuwait as an opportunity to align Turkey with the US. According to Özal, Turkey could no longer pursue a passive foreign policy in a rapidly changing Middle East. Despite strong domestic opposition and the resistance of the Turkish political and military elite to Özal's proactive stance, the ANAP government adopted an assertive policy against Baghdad.<sup>54</sup>

After the invasion of Kuwait by 30.000 Iraqi troops on August 2, 1990, embargo under UNSC Resolution 661 was implemented on 6<sup>th</sup> of August and Turkey was one of the earliest supporters of it as President Turgut Özal announced that Kirkuk-Ceyhan

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<sup>51</sup> Selin M. Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü: ABD'nin Üs Politikası ve Türkiye*. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012): 332-3.

<sup>52</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 159.

<sup>54</sup> Altunışık, "Turkish-American Security Relations," 155.

oil pipeline was closed on August 8.<sup>55</sup>

In respect to Iraq, US had three major requests from Turkey. The first request was that Turkey send a battalion to join the allied forces in Saudi Arabia. The second demanded Turkey to deploy troops along the Turkey-Iraq border to help pin down Iraqi forces. The last request was permission to use Turkish bases for a US-led campaign against the Baghdad government, which is regarded as the most essential one.<sup>56</sup>

Once the Bush administration's focus was oriented towards military means in the Kuwait crisis, American pressure to use the Turkish bases increased accordingly. US State Secretary James Baker visited Ankara in the beginning of November 1990 to discuss military options to deal with the Kuwait crisis.<sup>57</sup>

After James Baker paid another visit to Turkey in mid-January, the Turkish parliament passed a resolution that expanded the power of government to send troops and allow foreign troops to be deployed in Turkish bases. Upon the expiration of the UN deadline for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait on 16 January 1991, the US-led coalition forces began a military campaign against the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. İncirlik air base was used for providing air support for the ground operation that started on 24<sup>th</sup> of February until the declaration of ceasefire 4 days later.<sup>58</sup>

The Özal administration had been inclined towards a much more pro-active policy during Operation Desert Shield. For instance, Özal had been supportive of dispatching troops to Iraq in spite of the fierce opposition within the parliament, the government and the military.

Despite Özal's attempts to receive war powers from the parliament, with the enormous help of the opposition from Özal's own Motherland Party, the Turkish parliament limited Özal's authority in responding to an Iraqi attack.<sup>59</sup> To be clear, Özal was given the authority to send troops abroad and receive foreign troops on September 5, 1990. Nonetheless, the opposition convinced Özal to roll back his strategy by

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<sup>55</sup> Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, 334.

<sup>56</sup> Ekavi Athanassopoulou, *Strategic Relations Between the US and Turkey 1979-2000: Sleeping with a Tiger*. (London: Routledge, 2014): 84.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, 339-43.

<sup>59</sup> Cameron S. Brown, "Turkey in the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003," *Turkish Studies* 8 no. 1 (2007): 89.

limiting Turkey's role in the Gulf War to a purely logistical one. Hence, Turkey refrained from sending troops abroad and did not allow coalition forces to open up a second ground front from Turkish soil.<sup>60</sup>

However, a comparatively active Turkish role in the Gulf War, caused many downsides. For instance, Özal administration's support for an anti-Iraqi campaign caused great controversy within the government as there was firm opposition. In protest against the resolution, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Bozer and National Defense Minister Safa Giray resigned. Moreover, Chief of General Staff Necip Torumtay resigned in December 1991 over the Turkish bases' role in the Gulf War.<sup>61</sup>

Turkey's cooperation with the US in the Gulf War left a heavy burden on the Turkish economy due to the absence of trade with Iraq, especially with the closedown of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which increased unemployment in the southeast of Turkey. Despite US aids to Turkey were increased, these aids had never reached a point that would have been adequate to compensate for the economic losses.<sup>62</sup>

Increasing engagement of Turkey in the Middle East during Özal era indicated the ongoing convergence of US-Turkish interests in the region. Bilateral ties between US and Turkey were enhanced as President Bush was the first president to visit Ankara and İstanbul in July 1991 in 32 years. Meanwhile in Turkey, anti-Americanism was on the rise due to the US support for the Iraqi Kurds during the Gulf War, which caused wide-spread rumors in Turkey that US supported an independent Kurdish state.<sup>63</sup>

### 1.3.2. Northern Iraq and the Kurdish Question

Under the ceasefire agreement on April 3, 1991, the Gulf War ended. However, Kurds of northern Iraq had already started revolting against the Baghdad government in the beginning of March 1991. The Iraqi government suppressed the revolting Iraqi

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, 37-38.

<sup>62</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. II, 258.

<sup>63</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 165-66.

Kurds, whose previous revolts were put down by nerve agents used by the same regime back in 1988. Thus, they fled their homes to seek refuge in bordering countries such as Iran and Turkey.<sup>64</sup>

For Turkey, the number of Iraqi Kurds piling up the Turkish border reached alarming levels. Özal's proposal to resolve the issue by forming a safe haven for the Iraqi Kurds in the northern Iraq paved the way for Operation Provide Comfort (OPC), which was initiated by the US in April in the wake of the establishment of a no-fly zone in the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel to provide humanitarian aid to Iraqi Kurds.<sup>65</sup>

During this process, İncirlik base was designated as the headquarter of the humanitarian operation. As a result, Iraqi Kurds started returning to northern Iraq. With the continued support of Turkey, subsequent operations were carried out to protect and provide aid for the Iraqi Kurds, namely Operation Provide Comfort II (July 1991) and Operation Northern Watch (OPN) in 1997.<sup>66</sup>

However, the ramifications of OPC and ONW caused divergence between US and Turkey in the long run after the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq. The ultimate aim of the US was to oust the Ba'athist regime by enforcing UN-backed economic and trade sanctions, supporting opposition groups and pushing for the establishment of a new Kurdish political entity in the northern Iraq whereas Turkish priorities differed significantly.<sup>67</sup>

With its economy suffering from the sanctions regime, Turkey strived to restore economic ties with Baghdad. Turkey also sought to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq. The formation of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq became a source of concern for Ankara due to its likely influence on Turkey's Kurds.<sup>68</sup>

First of all, Kurdish elections that took place in the North of Iraq on May 19, 1992 baffled both US and Turkish administrations. Between March and June 1991, Jalal Talabani and Mohsin Dizayee, representing Iraqi Kurds held meetings with the

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<sup>64</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. II, 260-61.

<sup>65</sup> Bölme, *İncirlik Üssü*, 343-44.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 345-54.

<sup>67</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "Turkish-American Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Issues of Convergence and Divergence," in *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future* (London: Routledge, 2004): 97.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Turkish officials. In these meetings, Iraqi Kurdish officials reassured the Turkish officials that a federation of Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds would not pose any threat to Turkey.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the emergence of a Kurdish political establishment in northern Iraq revitalized the armed conflict between Ankara as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) established itself in the region, which resulted in a considerable amount of increase in the activities of the PKK in Turkey.<sup>70</sup> US was the first country to enlist the PKK as a terrorist organization. High-ranking US officials emphasized Turkey's right to defend itself. However, there was also pressure from the US Congress on Ankara to come up with a political solution to the Kurdish question.<sup>71</sup>

For many US officials, the Kurdish question in and of itself cannot be reduced to the separatist violence of the PKK or the socioeconomic backwardness of the southeast of Turkey. The Kurdish question represented a major fault line within Turkish democracy for the US.<sup>72</sup> US officials were largely critical of Turkey when it made human rights violations during the armed conflict with the PKK. Because of Turkey's troublesome human rights records, the US Congress partially restricted arms transfers to Turkey to increase the pressure on the Ankara government.<sup>73</sup>

A 1999 report elaborates on the use of US-origin weaponry in Turkey's fight against the PKK, heavily criticizing the Turkish government's military approach to the Kurdish question, calling for democratic reforms designed to loosen the restrictions on cultural, linguistic and political rights of the Kurds within Turkey.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, as the İncirlik air base played a key role in bolstering US-Turkey cooperation from the Gulf War through OPC and ONW in the 1990s, Turkey was able to influence US policy towards the PKK.<sup>75</sup> Towards the end of the 1990s, capturing the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan became a major platform for

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<sup>69</sup> Marianna Charountaki, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 166-86.

<sup>70</sup> Altunışık, "Turkish-American Security Relations", 159-64.

<sup>71</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. II, 295.

<sup>72</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, 37-54.

<sup>73</sup> Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler", vol. II, 295-98.

<sup>74</sup> Tamer Gabelnick, William D. Hartung and Jennifer Washburn, "Arming Repression: U.S. Arms Sales to Turkey During the Clinton Administration," October, 1999.

<sup>75</sup> Sayarı, "Turkish-American Relations in the Post-Cold War Era", 97.

cooperation between the US and Turkey.

The issue came up because Syria was accused of providing a safe haven for the PKK leader Öcalan. After former President Süleyman Demirel threatened to intervene in Syria, the Syrian officials made a deal with Turkey, called the Ankara agreement and expelled Öcalan from Syria on October 9, 1998. From that day on, the US was very much involved in helping Turkey to capture Öcalan.<sup>76</sup>

US officials were in contact with their Turkish counterparts to inform them about Öcalan's whereabouts after he left Syria. After an intensive four-month campaign, he was eventually captured in Kenya on February 15, 1999 with the intelligence shared by the US.<sup>77</sup>

### 1.3.3. US Role in Turkey-EU Relations

US-Turkish relations acquired a new momentum with the beginning of Turkey's improving relations with the European Union (EU) in the mid-1990s. The beginning of EU-Turkey relations can be traced back to 1959 when Turkey applied for associate membership in the European Economic Community. Turkey became an associate member of the EEC with the Ankara Treaty in 1963 and it applied for full membership during the Özal era in 1987.<sup>78</sup>

Turkey's accession to the EU became a central issue for the US policy notably during the Clinton administration. US pushed for Turkey's full integration into the EU by lobbying on Turkey's behalf with the EU officials. With US diplomatic efforts, customs unions agreement was signed between EU and Turkey in 1995.<sup>79</sup> Turkey's candidacy for full membership was recognized in Helsinki summit in 1999 partially due to the efforts of the high-ranking US officials.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> İlhan Uzgel, "Abdullah Öcalan'ın Yakalanması," in *Türk Dış Politikası*, vol. II, 296.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid; Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Tip to Turkey Led to Capture of Öcalan," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Bruce Kuniholm, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Differences in European and US Attitudes, and Challenges for Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 2 no.1 (2001): 25-26.

<sup>79</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "Challenges of Triangular Relations: The US, the EU and Turkish Accession," *South European Society and Politics* 16, no. 2 (2011): 256-57.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

For instance, Deputy State Secretary Strobe Talbot, Assistant State Secretary Marc Grossman, US Ambassador to Turkey Mark Parris, US Ambassador to Greece Nicholas Burns were very much involved in constant behind closed doors advocacy in favor of Turkey's EU candidacy.<sup>81</sup>

The new US vision towards Turkey in the context of its relations with the EU can be demonstrably seen in former President Clinton's visit to Turkey on November 15, 1999, which was well-received by the Turkish officials and the press. President Clinton's visit to Turkey was longer than previous visits by his predecessors President Bush and Eisenhower.<sup>82</sup> More importantly, Clinton's visit demonstrated the firm US commitment to support Turkey's accession to the EU. During his address to the Turkish parliament, he underscored the importance of Turkey's accession to the EU.<sup>83</sup>

In conclusion, US-Turkey relations during the Cold War was largely determined by geostrategic considerations. In that context, Turkey aligned with the US in order to have leverage against the Soviet Union. Despite some significant setbacks to US-Turkey relations such as the Johnson's letter in 1964, opium crisis towards the end of the 60s and US arms embargo on Turkey between 1975-78, US-Turkish strategic alliance largely remained intact as US considered Turkey as a geostrategic asset.

However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a completely new era for US-Turkish relations. In the 1990s, US-Turkish relations were largely shaped by Turkey's new role in the Middle East as was seen during the Gulf War. Another crucial determinant of US-Turkey relations came to be Turkey's domestic politics. US position towards Turkey was largely shaped by massive changes in Turkey's political landscape. As a result of Turkey's role in the Middle East and the rising importance of Turkey's internal affairs, US officials saw Turkey as a model in the region, with its stability, growing economy and improving relations with the EU.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "Let's talk Turkey! US influence on EU-Turkey relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2012): 401-02.

<sup>82</sup> Marc Lacey, "Reporter's Notebook; In Turkey, Clinton Is, for the Moment, the Hero Adored," *New York Times*, November 18, 1999.

<sup>83</sup> William J. Clinton, "Remarks to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara," *The American Presidency Project*, November 15, 1999.

<sup>84</sup> The Turkish model thesis is explored in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

## 2. CHAPTER 2: POST-9/11 US-TURKEY RELATIONS (2001-2009)

This chapter will dwell on the changing dynamics of the increasingly complicated US-Turkey relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second chapter will first address global war on terrorism and democracy promotion and their impacts on US-Turkish relations. Despite some setbacks in relations with the March 1<sup>st</sup> motion and the hood event, Turkey's role both in the global war on terrorism and democracy promotion is particularly striking as US policy-makers explicitly started speaking of Turkey as a model to the region.

In that sense, Turkey's rapidly changing domestic politics under the AKP administration turned out to be an area of special interest among US policy-makers. To make the idea of the Turkish model viable by pushing for democratization in Turkey, US strongly supported Turkey's harmonization with the EU. Similarly, the AKP administration's support for the Annan Plan for Cyprus was widely backed by the US. In order to bring further democratization to Turkey under the EU process, US largely backed the AKP government in its endeavors to bring down the autonomy of the Turkish military in Turkish politics. Lastly, the AKP administration's efforts to start talks with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and to lift certain cultural and linguistic restrictions on Kurds in Turkey received the extensive support of the US policy-making community as well.

### 2.1. War on Terrorism, Occupation of Iraq and Turkey's Role

September 11 attacks paved the way for a rapid shift in the US policy in the Middle East. The global war on terrorism and democracy promotion came to be the core tenets of the US policy in the Middle East under the Bush administration. With regard to the global war on terrorism and democracy promotion under the Bush

administration, Turkey acquired a pivotal role in bolstering US aspirations in the region since the Turkish government's strategic interests converged with the US goals.

First of all, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the global war on terrorism launched by the Bush administration quickly became the central focus of the US foreign policy.<sup>85</sup> The global war on terrorism encompassed the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the ultimate defeat of the Al-Qaeda (AQ) leadership.<sup>86</sup>

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld determined Taliban, AQ and Iraq to be primary targets in a meeting led by President George W. Bush in Camp David.<sup>87</sup> At that point, Turkey had a unique role in the global war on terrorism since Turkey's strategic importance was evident in the eyes of US policy-makers.<sup>88</sup>

Initially, senior US officials suspected that AQ was behind the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington. Within hours, communications of AQ operatives verified the suspicions.<sup>89</sup> The Bush administration had an immediate response to the attacks and won support for war in Afghanistan from Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair and Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. On September 12, NATO announced its incentive to use Article V of the NATO Charter, which indicates that an attack on any NATO member will be treated as an attack on all.<sup>90</sup>

Later on, the Bush administration demanded the return of Osama bin Laden to the US for trial. The Taliban regime offered the US to detain bin Laden and try him under Islamic law, which was rejected by the Bush administration. Then, US launched a massive air assault against Afghanistan in the beginning of October 2001.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee, "US Middle East Policy after 9/11: Implications for Transatlantic Relations," *The International Spectator* 37, no. 3 (2002): 43.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Rogers, "The global war on terror: four years on," *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 22, no. 1 (2006): 4.

<sup>87</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri*, 188.

<sup>88</sup> Larrabee, "US Middle East Policy after 9/11", 50.

<sup>89</sup> "War in Afghanistan," *Strategic Survey* 102, no. 1 (2010): 231.

<sup>90</sup> David Wildman and Phyllis Bennis, "The War in Afghanistan Goes Global," *Critical Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (2010): 469.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

Turkey played a decisive role in the US mission in Afghanistan. Firstly, it provided access to air bases for coalition aircraft.<sup>92</sup> Just after the Bonn agreement established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Turkey participated in the joint military coalition.<sup>93</sup> As of early April 2002, Turkey sent 260 troops in Afghanistan and took the command of the operation from the British in June 2002.<sup>94</sup> Turkey has led the ISAF mission twice since 2002 and a Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) by retraining Afghan army units.<sup>95</sup> Turkey also provided intelligence to US on AQ's finances and detained individuals that were suspected AQ members.<sup>96</sup>

In regard to Iraq, US administrations were already pursuing a regime change policy since the 1990s. For fear of Iraq's possibility to reproduce the weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the Clinton administration launched Operation Desert Fox and US bombed the facilities suspected to have WMDs. Regime change policy became the official US policy when US Congress ratified the Iraqi liberation act in 1998.<sup>97</sup> Before the September 11 attacks, hardliners in the Bush administration had backed an attack on Iraq. Therefore, they saw 9/11 as an opportunity to mobilize support for a war that was deemed as vital in transforming the Middle East in accordance with US interests.<sup>98</sup>

During the initial phase of the global war on terrorism, President George W. Bush was hesitant to wage war against the Ba'ath regime in Iraq since he agreed with the assessments of State Secretary Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, who prioritized the fight against AQ and opposed to a war in Iraq, fearing it might deepen the turmoil in the Middle East. However, along with the support of Vice President Dick Cheney, neo-conservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, gained the upper hand and Iraq was eventually included in the package of the global war on terrorism.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> "War in Afghanistan", 233.

<sup>93</sup> Wildman and Bennis, 471.

<sup>94</sup> "War in Afghanistan", 251.

<sup>95</sup> Petros Vamvakas, "NATO and Turkey in Afghanistan and Central Asia: Possibilities and Blind Spots," *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 1(2009) :65.

<sup>96</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 259.

<sup>97</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 186.

<sup>98</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, "The US invasion of Iraq: Explanations and Implications", *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007): 220.

<sup>99</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri*, 188.

The negotiations between US and Turkey over Iraq began in January 2002 when PM Ecevit visited Washington. In March, Vice President Dick Cheney discussed the possibility of a military operation in Iraq with Ecevit while he was in Turkey. In July 2002, Deputy Defense Minister Paul Wolfowitz and Deputy Secretary of State Marc Grossman came to Ankara to meet with Ecevit again. In September, Foreign Minister Şükrü Gürel met with his US counterparts in Washington. First plans, which included opening a northern front from Turkey against Iraq, was presented to him there.<sup>100</sup>

The Turkish side was unanimously against Turkey's participation in a military operation against Iraq under the Ecevit administration. Ecevit's comments on Iraq in October 2002 made the government's position explicit: "We know that United States cannot carry out this operation without us. That is why we are advising that it abandon the idea. We're telling Washington that we are worried about the matter".<sup>101</sup> Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu was against the Iraqi war as well.

Before the AKP's rise to power, policies of the US and Turkey did not seem to match at all. Turkey wanted to continue its military presence in northern Iraq and close Turkish soil for a US-led Iraqi operation, while US sought to use Turkish soil for the invasion of Iraq and it did not want Turkish military presence in northern Iraq.<sup>102</sup>

After its election to power, the Islamist-rooted AKP immediately accelerated the bilateral ties between US and Turkey. One of the major issues of discussion between two countries was clearly Iraq. Wolfowitz and Grossman paid a visit to Ankara on 3 December for negotiations over Turkey's role in Iraq.<sup>103</sup> Then, during Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to the White House as the leader of Turkey's governing party, he hinted that Turkey might allow the creation of a northern front for the war in Iraq.<sup>104</sup>

However, the Turkish military was reluctant to agree to US demands. For instance, the National Security Council (NSC) concluded in a meeting towards the end

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<sup>100</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 270.

<sup>101</sup> Ian Fisher, "Turkey, in the Middle, Grows More Worried Every Day About a U.S. Attack on Iraq," *New York Times*, October 28, 2002.

<sup>102</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 270.

<sup>103</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Iraq: Turkey, the Deployment of U.S. Forces and Related Issues," *Congressional Research Service*, May 2, 2003, 3.

<sup>104</sup> David E. Sanger, "Threats and Responses: Allies; Turk Offers Partial Support on Iraq in Meeting with Bush," *New York Times*, December 11, 2002.

of 2002 that the Turkish armed forces were not mercenaries of the US and the Turkish military would act in accordance with Turkey's long-term interests in Iraq.<sup>105</sup>

In the beginning of 2003, the details of US requests from Turkey were being determined. US demanded 12 Turkish ports to be used by the US forces and 60,000 troops to be deployed to Turkish territory. Under the agreement between Turkey and US on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003, US officials began the preparations in Turkey.<sup>106</sup>

Later, TBMM passed the law that allowed the modernization of seaports and airports in February.<sup>107</sup> On February 8, a memorandum of understanding was signed between US and Turkey over Iraq, determining the legal status of the US personnel who came to Turkey during the modernization of seaports and airports.<sup>108</sup>

After an intense series of diplomatic meetings between the US board and the Turkish board, headed by Deniz Bölükbaşı, over Iraq, which started in the beginning of February 2002, US and Turkey reached a final agreement. During these negotiations, Turkey specifically took guarantees from the US in respect to the fight against the PKK, the legal status of northern Iraq and the position of the Turkomans in northern Iraq. But, most importantly, according to the final agreement between the sides, Turkey would deploy 31.000 Turkish soldiers along with heavy weapons and tanks into northern Iraq in return for opening a northern front for US ground troops in Turkey.<sup>109</sup>

On February 24<sup>th</sup>, the Cabinet of Turkey opened the military motion for signature in the Turkish parliament. There were clear divisions even within the government as Government Spokesman Abdullatif Şener, Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakış and Deputy PM Ertuğrul Yalçınbayır expressed their ambivalence to the motion.<sup>110</sup>

According to the motion, 62.000 US troops, 255 aircraft and 65 helicopters would be accepted into the Turkish soil. Also, Turkish ground troops were to enter Iraq with the US. Further on, the AKP decided to share the political burden of the motion

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<sup>105</sup> Fikret Bila, "Türk ordusu paralı asker değil," *Milliyet*, December 29, 2002.

<sup>106</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 271.

<sup>107</sup> "ABD'ye izin" *Hürriyet*, February 7, 2003.

<sup>108</sup> "ABD'yle mutabakat muhtırası imzalandı," *NTV*, February 8, 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 271.

<sup>110</sup> Murat Yetkin, "Bir Krizin Perde Arkası... (5)," *Radikal*, Haziran 13, 2003.

with the military and the president as they decided that they would wait for the result of the NSC meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> and the motion would be put to vote in the Turkish Parliament on March 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>111</sup>

Apart from that, US tried to convince the Turkish members of parliament (MP) by inviting them to the US embassy. Despite US efforts, neither the AKP government nor the Turkish military took the sole responsibility for the parliamentary vote due to strong public opposition. Hence, the Turkish military did not take a firm stand regarding Iraq during the NSC meeting before the parliamentary vote.<sup>112</sup> In the end, the motion was rejected. 3 votes were lacking in order to reach simple majority, which was needed to pass the motion. There were 264 votes in favor of the motion out of 553 MPs while there were 250 against, 100 of which were from AKP MPs.<sup>113</sup>

On the other hand, the leadership of the ruling AKP made great efforts to mend ties with the US after the rejection of the motion. After Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the PM on March 14<sup>th</sup>, with his pressure on the AKP MPs in the Turkish parliament, the TBMM passed a motion hastily on the same day that the occupation of Iraq started. Erdoğan warned the MPs that “it would be the end of the current government if the motion was rejected”.<sup>114</sup>

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, Wall Street Journal published Erdoğan’s article “My Country Is Your Faithful Ally”, which aimed at explaining the reasons behind the rejection of the March 1<sup>st</sup> motion and convincing the US policy-makers that his administration was in line with the US.<sup>115</sup> There was another article written by Erdoğan in Washington Post, laying emphasis on the fact that Turkey and US shared the same strategic visions despite the rejection of the parliamentary vote.<sup>116</sup>

Apart from that, the details of the secret agreement signed between Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül and his US counterpart Colin Powell on April 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 273.

<sup>113</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri*, 203; Murat Yetkin, “Bir Krizin Perde Arkası... (5),” *Radikal*, Haziran 13, 2003.

<sup>114</sup> “Erdoğan bastırıldı! Tezkere kabul edildi,” *Hürriyet*, March 20.

<sup>115</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “My Country Is Your Faithful Ally,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2003.

<sup>116</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “A Shared Strategic Vision,” *Washington Post*, April 21, 2003.

reveals the extent of the cooperation between US and Turkey over Iraq. Gül stated that “both sides did mistakes when it comes to the March 1<sup>st</sup> Motion” and made great efforts to restore good relations with the US.<sup>117</sup> In the meeting between Gül and Deputy State Secretary Richard Armitage in January 2005, Gül stressed that “Turkey’s relations with the US is above everything else.”<sup>118</sup>

As a consequence, US specifically put the blame for the parliamentary vote on the Turkish armed forces. According to the US Ambassador to Turkey Robert W. Pearson, the last meeting of the NSC aimed at hurting the parliamentary vote. Pearson thought that the Turkish military’s passive position over Iraq aimed at blocking Turkey’s cooperation with the US over Iraq.<sup>119</sup> Paul Wolfowitz stated quite clearly in CNN Türk that “for whatever reason they [the military] did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected.”<sup>120</sup>

The increasing tension between the Turkish military and the US military came to light as a result of the conflicting realities of the ongoing war in Iraq and the continuous Turkish military presence in the northern part of Iraq. For instance, according to the Military-Political Affairs Undersecretary Stuart Brown, a special team of Turkish military personnel who escorted a humanitarian aid convoy, was detained in Kirkuk by the US military on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. US military personnel deported the Turkish soldiers from Iraq the next day.<sup>121</sup>

Thereafter, regarded as one of the worst crises in US-Turkey relations, the hood event took place. US forces raided the headquarters of the Turkish Special Forces in Sulaymaniyah and detained 11 Turkish commandos, throwing hood over their heads and putting shackles on their wrists. Turkish commandos were charged with attempting to assassinate the elected governor of Kirkuk.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Fikret Bila, “İşte 10 yıldır tartışılan belge,” *Milliyet*, September 11, 2003.

<sup>118</sup> “Gül: Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri her şeyin üstündedir,” *Hürriyet*, January 3, 2005.

<sup>119</sup> Yasemin Çongar, *Artık Sır Değil: Amerikan Gizli Telgraflarında Türkiye* (İstanbul: Hemen Kitap, 2012): 347-48.

<sup>120</sup> “Wolfowitz: Accept your mistake, our partnership shall continue,” *Hürriyet*, May 7, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Çongar, 351.

<sup>122</sup> Türkmen, *Türkiye ABD İlişkileri* 206.

Guardian claimed that US soldiers confiscated 15kg of explosives, sniper rifles, grenades and maps of Kirkuk with circles drawn around positions near the governor's building.<sup>123</sup> Henri J. Barkey, a former political planner in the US State Department, interpreted the retirement of 3 high Turkish commanders in August 2003, as the ruling AKP's apology to US for the Turkish military's activities in northern Iraq.<sup>124</sup>

The hood event clearly demonstrated the fact that the Turkish military could not operate in the northern Iraq as freely as they operated in the 1990s because of the US military presence in Iraq.<sup>125</sup> US and Turkey reached a financial deal in Dubai on September 22<sup>nd</sup> and US was to lend up to 8.5 billion dollars to Turkey in exchange for the Turkish government's compliance to ensure that the Turkish military would not be active in northern Iraq.<sup>126</sup>

The AKP administration saw this tension as a part of US operation against the Turkish military. In fact, Erdoğan was opposed to sending a diplomatic note to the US, fearing to antagonize the US officials. In other words, tensions between US and Turkey caused by the hood incident can be deemed as a power struggle within the Turkish domestic politics between the AKP government and the Turkish military, therefore not directly affecting the US-Turkey relationship.<sup>127</sup>

## 2.2. Democracy Promotion and Turkey's Role

Along with the global war on terrorism, democracy promotion came at the forefront when it comes to US policy in the Middle East under the Bush administration. Turkey played a decisive role in promoting democracy and reforms in the region in accordance with the US interests. In the eyes of the US policy-makers, Turkey stood out as a model and a source of inspiration for the neighboring countries in the region

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<sup>123</sup> Michael Howard and Suzanne Goldenberg, "US arrest of soldiers infuriates Turkey," *Guardian*, July 8, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Tolga Tanış, *Beyfendi ve POTUS 2002 Gün Türkiye-Amerika ilişkisinin İnişli Çıkışlı Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2015): 25.

<sup>125</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 278.

<sup>126</sup> Özdemir İnce, "Dubai, 22 Eylül 2003," *Hürriyet*, September 22, 2003.

<sup>127</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 278.

due to its democratic endeavors.

US policy makers started considering the repressive nature of the regimes in the region as the underlying reason behind the rise of violent religious extremism. Therefore, promoting democracy came to be essential for US interests in the region.<sup>128</sup> In that sense, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice formulated a framework for addressing the turmoil in the Middle East.<sup>129</sup> She suggested that in a region where 22 countries' GDP could not even keep up with that of Spain, ideologies based on hatred easily found fertile ground to grow and US needed to step up to spread democracy and prosperity in the region to prevent violent extremist ideologies to flourish.

At that point, President Bush called for a "forward strategy for freedom" in November 2003, which meant "spreading democracy where it has not existed before". Moreover, Bush laid special emphasis on the fact that Islam and democracy are fully compatible with one another and he counted Turkey as a primary example.<sup>130</sup>

#### 2.2.1. Broader Middle East Initiative

In that sense, US launched the Broader Middle East Initiative at the Sea Island Summit of the G8 in June 2004. The initiative was predicated upon the United Nations (UN) Arab Human Development Reports in 2002 and 2003. The reports defined three deficits in the Arab world -freedom, knowledge, and women's empowerment that posed a threat to national interests of all G-8 members.<sup>131</sup> The alarming statistics in the Arab world such as high unemployment and low education rates showed that there could be a rise in extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal immigration. This initiative was founded to prevent extremism from flourishing in the region.<sup>132</sup>

The initiative included 22 Arab countries along with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and

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<sup>128</sup> Christopher Hobson, "A forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East: US democracy promotion and the war on terror," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59 no. 1. (2005): 40.

<sup>129</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "Transforming the Middle East," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2003.

<sup>130</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: President Bush Calls for a 'Forward Strategy of Freedom' to Promote Democracy in the Middle East," *The White House*, November 6, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> "President Bush's 'Greater Middle East Partnership Initiative,'" *Dar al Hayat*, March 15, 2004.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Afghanistan. Turkey was an ideal US partner as the AKP government warmly welcomed the initiative since its inception. PM Erdoğan declared his utmost support for the initiative in the G8 Summit in Sea Island in order to make the Middle East “an area of peace, prosperity and modernity”.<sup>133</sup>

Turkey took part in the G8 meeting in Sea Island and assumed co-leadership of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue with Yemen and Italy. Under DAD, TESEV hosted several conferences in order to bolster women’s participation in public life, gender equality and political participation in the MENA region.<sup>134</sup>

Turkey also participated in the Forum for the Future in the ministry level.<sup>135</sup> PM Erdoğan counted himself as one of the co-chairmen of the Broader Middle East Initiative on several occasions. He regarded the province of Diyarbakır in Turkey as a future center for the initiative.<sup>136</sup> As part of his duties as a leading partner, Erdoğan visited Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Morocco and Tunisia in 2005.<sup>137</sup>

“Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership” document in 2006 was the product of US-Turkey partnership in democracy promotion. It provided a structural framework for the advancement of the US-Turkey partnership, underscoring shared values and ideals in their regional and global objectives; promotion of peace, democracy, freedom and prosperity.<sup>138</sup>

### 2.2.2. The Turkish Model in the Making

The idea of Turkey being a model nation was becoming increasingly important for the US in its democracy promotion efforts. From the mid-1990s onwards, prominent US officials started regarding Turkey as a model, an example and a source

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<sup>133</sup> “Press Conference with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan,” *G7 Information Centre*, June 9, 2004.

<sup>134</sup> Hüseyin Bağcı and Bayram Sinkaya, “The Greater Middle East Initiative and Turkey: The AKP’s Perspective,” In *The Importance of Being European: Turkey, the EU, and the Middle East*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Amikam Nachami (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007): 166-69.

<sup>135</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 268.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>138</sup> US Department of State, “Shared Vision and Structured US Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership,” July 5, 2006.

of inspiration for the region due to its western-leaning political system and its growing ties with the EU. Even before the AKP's rise to power, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld put forward Turkey defending that its model can be an example for the region in 2002.<sup>139</sup>

The idea of Turkey as a model gained popularity during the 2000s because of the AKP's efforts to promote itself as an exemplary political actor. Starting from the late-1990s, the founding fathers of the AKP had formed close ties with the US diplomats and experts. The leadership of the AKP got in touch with the neo-conservatives in the US through figures such as Cüneyd Zapsu and Egemen Bağış.<sup>140</sup>

Erdoğan contacted US think tanks and institutions such as American Enterprise Institute, Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Congress. Erdoğan paid 3 vital visits to the US, two to Washington and one to the Datioavos meeting in New York in 2001 and 2002 to explain his party's policy agenda and seek US support. In addition, in 2004, Erdoğan was given the Profile of Courage award by the American Jewish Congress.<sup>141</sup>

After the AKP came to power, as the leader of the party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underscored the idea of the Turkish model during his visit in Washington in December to gain support from the US policy-makers. Erdoğan's speech at a major think tank could not have made the significance of the Turkish model for the AKP more explicit:

The Turkish model offers the basic example of the ability of a society, the majority of whose citizens follows Islam, to make democracy based on secularism live, while providing the highest democratic norms. Turkey is emerging as one of the leading actors in the project to replace the clash of civilizations with the compatibility of civilizations.<sup>142</sup>

What is more, in January 2003, the Prime Minister Erdoğan gave a speech in the Harvard Kennedy School, where he articulated that the example that Turkey set

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<sup>139</sup> US Department of Defense, "Wolfowitz Says Turkey's Example Important to Muslim World," July 15, 2002.

<sup>140</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 259.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "CSIS Statesmen's Forum Hosts Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, December 9, 2002.

was an evidence for Islam's compatibility with democracy.<sup>143</sup> Later on, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül sent similar messages by strongly advocating the need to make societal reforms, adopt contemporary norms and take the necessary precautions against rising religious extremism in his speech in Tehran in May 2003.<sup>144</sup>

Gül laid special emphasis on the role of Turkey as a model of democracy and economic prosperity for the region in an interview in 2008 after he became the President. His statements explicitly illustrate the AKP's utilization of the idea of the Turkish model in boosting its position in the world stage:

I wish to see Turkey as an island where the European standard of democracy is being fulfilled and the free market economy is functioning very well. This will be a real gift to the region, to the world, for peace. And Turkey will be a source of inspiration for so many.<sup>145</sup>

UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was another vital tool of promoting Turkey as a model to the Middle East. UNAOC was an initiative proposed by the Spanish government at the 59<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2004. The initiative originally aimed at countering Huntington's clash of civilizations theory by trying to bridge the Western nations with predominantly Muslim countries after the global war on terrorism.<sup>146</sup>

After his visit to Spain in March 2005, Erdoğan assumed the co-sponsorship of UNAOC and appointed his chief foreign policy advisor Rafet Akgünay as Turkey's representative for the project. PM Erdoğan repeatedly emphasized the significance of the initiative in ending the clash of civilizations in Hatay in October 2005 and in Palma de Mallorca in November 2005.<sup>147</sup>

In the initiative's meeting in İstanbul in 2006, Erdoğan declared that "Turkey is a source of inspiration for the peoples of the region that wish to see modernization,

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<sup>143</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Democracy in the Middle East, Pluralism in Europe: Turkish View," *Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government*, January 30, 2003.

<sup>144</sup> Uğur Ergun, "Çağdaş normları benimseme zamanı," *Hürriyet*, May 29, 2003.

<sup>145</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "US must share power in new world order, says Turkey's controversial president," *Guardian*, August 16, 2008.

<sup>146</sup> Ali Balcı and Nebi Miş, "Turkey's Role in the Alliance of Civilizations: A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy?" *Turkish Studies* 9 no. 3 (2008): 391-92.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 394-99.

pluralism, democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms in their own country” and “Turkey presents an important opportunity and is a model country which can negate the ‘clash of civilizations’ scenarios.<sup>148</sup>

As a result of these efforts by the AKP, the US viewed the Islamist AKP as a moderate Islamist force that could transform the internal affairs of Turkey in accordance with US interests. US officials thought that the AKP could become an exemplary political actor for other Islamist movements in the region, which reconciled with democracy and free-market economy and toned down anti-Western tendencies.<sup>149</sup>

An opinion piece in *New York Times* in 2003, “The Erdoğan Experiment”, characterized the new ruling party of Turkey and its leader as an “experiment”. Article described Erdoğan as “a devout Muslim with an Islamist past who had nonetheless evolved into a modern, pro-Western democrat” and said that “he had the potential to set a powerful example for the region”.<sup>150</sup>

Additionally, as a former US Ambassador to Turkey, Mark R. Parris pointed out the fact that US-Turkish relations needed a new framework in the post-Iraq war era. In the absence of a bigger threat such as the Soviet Union or Iraq, he suggested that the domestic reforms in Turkey could be one of the pillars of Washington’s geostrategic calculations. He made the case that new directions in Turkish politics<sup>151</sup> could be “compelling for strategists in Washington looking for models of successful Muslim societies”.<sup>152</sup>

The Turkish model quickly became a strong tool for the US. President Bush’s speech at the end of the June 2004 NATO summit in İstanbul can be regarded as an example of the utilization of Turkey as a model for other nations in the region:

Your country, with 150 years of democratic and social reform,  
stands as a model to others, and as Europe's bridge to the wider world.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 268.

<sup>150</sup> Deborah Sontag, “The Erdoğan Experiment,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2003.

<sup>151</sup> New directions in Turkish politics include issues such as EU reforms, the change in Turkey’s Cyprus, Kurdish and Northern Iraq policies that are elaborated on in the following section “Turkey’s Transformation under the AKP and US role”.

<sup>152</sup> Mark R. Parris, “Turkish-American Relations: Looking to the Future,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, November 2013.

Your success is vital to a future of progress and peace in Europe and in the broader Middle East -- and the Republic of Turkey can depend on the support and friendship of the United States of America.<sup>153</sup>

President Bush raised the issue of the Turkish model once again after his meeting with PM Erdoğan in June 2005. He expressed his gratitude to Erdoğan for his strong support of the Broader Middle East Initiative and praised Turkey's democracy for being an important example for the people in the broader Middle East.<sup>154</sup>

### 2.3. Turkey's Transformation and US Role

In contrast to the Cold War years, where Turkey was perceived as more of a geostrategic asset against the USSR, Turkey's internal affairs gained much more importance for the US in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. US experts and officials increasingly viewed Turkey as a model for political and economic development in the Middle East.<sup>155</sup> Thus, Turkey's transformation under the AKP rule determined the trajectory of US-Turkey relations. In general, US played a key role in facilitating this transformation.

First of all, Turkey's transformation was largely shaped by Turkey's integration with the EU. Accordingly, the ruling AKP strategically aligned Turkey with the EU in order to strengthen its hand in its domestic power struggle against the opposition and the military. US supported the AKP's pro-EU policies in the 2000s because the US policy-makers viewed Turkey in the context of its domestic political transformation which was compatible with US strategic interests in the Middle East.

US had a role in each and every step of Turkey's way to the beginning of full membership talks with the EU.<sup>156</sup> Ambitious US efforts to pressure EU officials on the accession of Turkey to the EU can be seen in German Minister for Foreign Affairs,

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<sup>153</sup> "George Bush addresses the NATO summit in Turkey," *Guardian*, June 29, 2004.

<sup>154</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "President Bush Welcomes Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan to the White House," *The White House*, June 8, 2005.

<sup>155</sup> Ian O. Lesser, "A Strategic Relationship Revisited," in *Beyond Suspicion: Rethinking US-Turkish Relations* (Washington DC: Wilson Center, 2007): 26; Graham E. Fuller, "Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities," *The Washington Quarterly* 27 no. 3 (2004).

<sup>156</sup> US efforts to push for Turkey's integration with the EU in the 1990s was explored in the first chapter.

Joschka Fischer's remarks that US wanted them to marry their close female friend.<sup>157</sup>

Further on, just before the meeting in Copenhagen on December 12, 2002 to discuss Turkey's membership status, President Bush called Denmark's Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to express US support for Turkey's efforts to join the EU.<sup>158</sup> In the beginning of December, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz encouraged the EU to start the negotiations on Turkish accession in the EU summit on December 12.<sup>159</sup> On December 10, President Bush received the leader of Turkey's new ruling party, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the White House, where he, once again, declared his support for Turkey's pursuit of EU membership.<sup>160</sup>

EU officials postponed the full membership talks with Turkey to December 2004. However, US continued to press on EU to give Turkey a date for the accession talks. Just before the NATO summit in İstanbul, Bush praised Turkey's democracy, freedom and the rule of law and repeated his support for Turkish accession to the EU.<sup>161</sup>

After Bush met with Erdoğan again on June 29, he declared that "as Turkey meets the EU standards for membership, the EU should begin talks that will lead to full membership for Turkey".<sup>162</sup> US efforts were successful as the EU decided in December 2004 that it would start the full membership talks with Turkey in October 2005.

However, a period of stagnation followed the beginning of full membership talks in October 2005 in respect to Turkey's EU process. This was mostly because US officials achieved two of their main goals, namely, the recognition of Turkey's candidacy and the beginning of accession negotiations between Brussels and Ankara.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> "ABD bizi kız arkadaşıyla evlendirmek istiyor," *Hürriyet*, November 21, 2002.

<sup>158</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Lobbying for Turks' Aid Move on Iraq," *New York Times*, November 28, 2002.

<sup>159</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "Let's talk Turkey! US influence on EU-Turkey relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2012): 403.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Richter, "Still Courting Turkey, Bush Meets With a Top Politician," *L.A. Times*, December 11, 2002.

<sup>161</sup> "Bush praise for key ally Turkey," *BBC News*, June 27, 2004.

<sup>162</sup> "Chirac chides Bush over Turkey," *CNN*, June 29, 2004.

<sup>163</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "Challenges of Triangular Relations: The US, the EU, and Turkish Accession," *South European Society and Politics* 16 no. 2. (2011): 258.

### 2.3.1. Annan Plan for Cyprus

Another area that US had direct impact on was the Cyprus issue. US played a key role in the formulation of the Annan Plan for Cyprus.<sup>164</sup> In addition, the AKP's Cyprus policy became a battleground between the administration and the military. Therefore, US backing of the Annan plan for Cyprus and AKP's support for it strengthened AKP's hand in its domestic power struggle with the military. Change in Turkey's Cyprus policy also contributed positively to Turkey's EU process.

The Cyprus issue has functioned as a justifying tool for the autonomous power of the military in Turkish politics throughout the history of the Cyprus conflict.<sup>165</sup> Accordingly, before the AKP came to power, Turkey's Cyprus policy was largely based on national security concerns and thus not open to political debate.

With the rising significance of US influence on EU-Turkey relations, US also encouraged Turkey to use its influence on the Turkish Cypriot leaders to reach an agreement with their Greek Cypriot counterparts. US was actively involved in the negotiations, which led to a new plan by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in 2004. Washington's efforts, together with the pressure from Brussels, was decisive in Turkey's support for the Annan Plan for Cyprus.<sup>166</sup>

After it's coming to power, AKP's stance was very much in line with both the EU and the US view that supported a viable solution to the Cyprus debate. In that sense, the ruling party embraced the Annan Plan for Cyprus and received the strong support of the US officials.<sup>167</sup> During PM Erdoğan's visit to the White House in January 2004, President Bush expressed his support for the Turkish government's efforts in the Cyprus dispute. In this meeting, PM Erdoğan ensured that Turkey was committed to a viable solution in Cyprus by taking the Annan Plan for Cyprus as a reference point.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>165</sup> Alper Kaliber, "Türkiye'de Güvenleştirilmiş Bir Alan Olarak Dış Politikayı Yeniden Düşünmek: Kıbrıs Örneği," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 2, no. 7 (2005): 34.

<sup>166</sup> Sayarı, "Challenges of Triangular Relations: The US, the EU, and Turkish Accession", 260.

<sup>167</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 376.

<sup>168</sup> US Department of State, "Remarks by President Bush and Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan in Photo Opportunity," January 28, 2004.

However, the Turkish Northern Cyprus President Rauf Denktaş and Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök were reluctant towards a viable solution to the Cyprus debate by seeing the issue from a national security standpoint.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the leader of the CHP, Deniz Baykal stated that it was not in the ruling party's power to change Turkey's Cyprus policy. NSC was also highly critical of the AKP's policy as well.<sup>170</sup>

In the end, Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan for Cyprus in a referendum on April 24, in 2004. US was disappointed with the Greek Cypriots' rejection of the UN peace plan. New York Times called the vote in Cyprus "destructive" while praising the PM Erdoğan's "courageous" move to support the peace plan.<sup>171</sup>

### 2.3.2. The Power Struggle Between the AKP and the Turkish Military

During the AKP administration, civil-military relations in Turkey went through a massive transformation. Even though US officials were hesitant to be involved in any domestic issue in Turkey, it can be argued that by and large, the US supported the AKP government in its power struggle with the Turkish armed forces.

Throughout the history of modern Turkish Republic, the Turkish armed forces have been known as a powerful political actor in Turkish politics. In 1960 and 1980, the military staged coups and overthrew governments. In 1971, it issued a memorandum and forced the government to step down. Lastly, in 1997, it intervened again by forcing the coalition government of Erbakan out of power. Even though the military went back to their barracks each time a coup occurred, it made sure that military's political power was embedded in Turkey's political system.<sup>172</sup>

Nevertheless, with the beginning of EU accession process towards the end of 1990s, the Turkish armed forces' conventional power in Turkish politics was in serious question. In particular, Agenda 2000, a 1997 action plan, preparing the EU for future

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<sup>169</sup> Erdan Güven, "Kıbrıs'ta yeni politika bekleyelim, görelim," *Radikal*, January 10, 2003.

<sup>170</sup> Ali Balcı, "Meydan Okuma: 2003-4 Annan Planı ve Kıbrıs," *Dış Politikada Hesaplaşmak: AK Parti, Ordu ve Kemalizm* (İstanbul: Etkileşim, 2015): 84-85.

<sup>171</sup> "A Destructive Vote," *New York Times*, April 27, 2004.

<sup>172</sup> Tuba Ünlü Bilgiç, "The military and Europeanization Reforms in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45 no. 5. (2009): 803.

enlargement, laid emphasis on the ambiguities in the Turkish legal system with regard to civilian control of the military.<sup>173</sup>

Consequently, the EU reforms induced by the Copenhagen criteria were partly designed to curb the autonomous power of the Turkish military. The AKP intensified this reform process by passing 9 harmonization packages into law within two years and vital institutional changes in NSC, High Audio-Visual Board and Council of Higher Education diminished the military's power in Turkish politics.<sup>174</sup>

The AKP managed to undermine the power of the military with the widespread support of the US officials. For instance, prominent figures within the US policy advisor community such as Ian Lesser, Henri Barkey and Graham E. Fuller supported the demilitarization of the Turkish political system.<sup>175</sup> Graham E. Fuller deemed the militaries in the vast majority of the Muslim countries as the most powerful political actor preventing democratization and identified Kemalism as an outdated ideology that provided pretext for the autonomy of Turkish military.<sup>176</sup>

Apart from that according to the secret documents leaked by Wikileaks,<sup>177</sup> Robert W. Pearson clearly stated that the Turkish armed forces were an important part of the Turkish Deep State and they constituted an enormous challenge to Turkey's democratization. According to Pearson, Turkey's harmonization process with the EU was a crucial opportunity to transform civil-military relations in Turkey.

The contestation between the Turkish military and the elected government manifested itself in a number of issues such as the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the hood event in northern Iraq and the AKP's Cyprus policy. From 2007 onwards, tensions between the government and the military exacerbated. The AKP government started facing severe challenges to its authority from the military, for instance, in 2007 when the Turkish armed forces issued an e-memorandum in its website in April in opposition

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 804.

<sup>174</sup> For further details on the impact of the EU reform process on the demilitarization of the Turkish political system, see Yaprak Gürsoy, "The impact of the EU-Driven Reforms on the Political Autonomy of the Turkish Military," *South European Society and Politics* 16 no. 2 (2011).

<sup>175</sup> Uzgel, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 255.

<sup>176</sup> Graham E. Fuller, "Otoriteriyenizm ve Kemalist Ruh," in *Türkiye ve Arap Baharı: Ortadoğu'da Liderlik* (Ankara: Eksi, 2016): 95-112.

<sup>177</sup> Çongar, 25-29.

to Abdullah Gül's candidacy in the upcoming presidential election in August.

The issue was taken a step forward by the Republic Protests, which was a series of peaceful rallies defending a rigid version of state secularism, calling for military action against the government. In the end, the AKP administration overcame this serious challenge in the presidential election when Abdullah Gül became the president.

By and large, US stood behind the elected Turkish government during this crisis. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice clearly stated that the military should stay out of the dispute. In addition, State Department spokesman Tom Casey directly warned the Turkish military to avoid interfering in the constitutional process.<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, the US support for the ruling AKP came to be evident when PM Erdoğan paid a visit to Washington in late-September 2007. He visited one of the most prominent think tanks in the US, where Erdoğan's presence was widely celebrated and his leadership was highly praised by the moderator Richard Holbrooke.<sup>179</sup>

In 2008, the AKP came up against another major challenge, this time from the judiciary, with the AKP closure trial. According to a RAND report, the closure of the AKP would stand for a setback to the Turkish model in respect to the coexistence of pro-Islamic party and secular democracy.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, International Religious Freedom Report by the US State Department regarded the closure case as an example of restricting freedom of religion in Turkey.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, former US Ambassador to Turkey Morton I. Abramowitz called the AKP closure case a judicial coup d'état.<sup>182</sup>

The AKP responded to these challenges by taking extraordinary measures to undermine the power of the military with Ergenekon and Balyoz investigations by prosecuting against alleged coup plotters within the military, as well as in other public and private sectors. The coup trials in Turkey created a mixed reaction in the US as there were those who were suspicious about the sweeping arrests under the coup trials. Soner Çağaptay from WINEP pointed to Fethullah Gülen and his Islamist movement

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<sup>178</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Turkey's 2007 Elections: Crisis of Identity and Power," *Congressional Research Service*, July 2011, 2007.

<sup>179</sup> "A Conversation with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 27, 2007.

<sup>180</sup> Angel Rabasa & F. Stephen Larrabee, "The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey," *Rand Corporation* (2008) :94.

<sup>181</sup> US Department of State, *Turkey: International Religious Freedom Report 2008*.

<sup>182</sup> Morton Abramowitz, "Turkey's Judicial Coup D'état," *Newsweek*, May 4, 2008.

as the driving political force behind these trials.<sup>183</sup>

However, at the same time, Washington Post article championed the coup trials by claiming that “battered by allegations of corruption and scandal, the authority of the once-unchallenged military is being whittled away by an increasingly assertive and confident public”.<sup>184</sup> The AKP administration also had the opportunity to reshape the structure of the judiciary with the constitutional referendum in 2010. Just before the referendum took place, Ömer Taşpınar from Brookings Institute (BI) deemed the AKP as the only “agent of change” and stated that the only option for Turkey’s democratization was the AKP.<sup>185</sup>

The 2010 referendum result was mostly celebrated by the US officials. New York Times stated that “the [legislative] changes were intended to bring Turkey’s military-imposed Constitution in line with European standards of law and democracy”.<sup>186</sup> President Barack Obama called and congratulated PM Erdoğan for “the vibrancy of Turkey’s democracy as reflected in the turnout for the referendum”.

In spite of minor suspicions about this power shift in Turkish politics, US generally endorsed the demilitarization of the political regime in Turkey. US officials backed the AKP government’s endeavors to transform Turkish civil-military relations, considering that civil-military relations were being adjusted to European standards.

For the AKP administration, the areas of confrontation between the government and the military always served the ruling party’s agenda to strengthen its grip on power as the AKP managed to gain the support of most US officials by presenting itself as the only legitimate power in driving Turkish politics forward.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Soner Çağaptay, “What’s Really Behind Turkey’s Coup Arrests?” *Foreign Policy*, February 25, 2010.

<sup>184</sup> Janine Zacharia, “In Turkey, military’s power over secular democracy slips,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 2010.

<sup>185</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, “Judicial Independence and Democracy in Turkey,” *Brookings Institute*, July 12, 2010.

<sup>186</sup> Şebnem Arsu & Dan Bilefsky, “Turkish Reforms Pass by Wide Margin,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2010.

<sup>187</sup> Ahmet K. Han, “From ‘Strategic Partnership’ to ‘Modern Partnership’: AKP, Turkish-US Relations and the Prospects Under Obama,” *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, May 2010: 96-97.

### 2.3.3. Turkey's Changing Kurdish Policy and Shift in US Policy Towards the PKK

Turkey's transformation also manifested itself in its changing Kurdish and Northern Iraq policies. With the Gulf War in 1991 and the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the Kurdish issue became central for the US-Turkey relationship. For the most part, the AKP's Kurdish policy became essential for cooperation between US & Turkey.

Formerly, Turkey's Kurdish and Northern Iraq policies was formulated within the confines of national security, which deteriorated its relations with the US. In that regard, after its coming to power, the AKP tried to distant itself from the conventional policies that the Turkish military had been devising in respect to Northern Iraq and Kurds of Turkey, which turned out to be in line with US interests.

After the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the AKP administration could not have the chance to have an active role in the reorganization of the political structure of Iraq mostly due to the rejection of March 1<sup>st</sup> Motion. In that respect, Iraqi Kurds became a crucial ally for the US during the occupation of Iraq and KRG was established under the interim law in Iraq in March 2004.<sup>188</sup>

On the other hand, the AKP took a different approach with regard to the Kurdish issue and Northern Iraq. With the EU harmonization process, certain restrictions on freedom of speech and Kurdish language rights were eased. Cultural and linguistic reforms geared to increase the rights of Kurds living in Turkey, were emboldened by many US officials, especially in the liberal side of the political spectrum. According to the Center for American Progress, these reforms demonstrated the AKP's openness.<sup>189</sup>

In contrast to the hardcore policies that the military espoused, the AKP gradually changed Turkey's discourse of Kurds living in northern Iraq. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül criticized Turkey's former policies, reminding sensitivities of Kurdish citizens residing near the Iraqi border of Turkey.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, the Ministry of

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<sup>188</sup> Ali Balçı, *Dış Politikada Hesaplaşmak*, 98.

<sup>189</sup> Michael Werz and Max Hoffman, "The United States, Turkey and the Kurdish Regions," *Center for American Progress* (2014): 12.

<sup>190</sup> Yalçın Çetinkaya, "Abdullah Gül: Türkiye Küresel Barışın Teminatıdır," *Anlayış* no: 9, June 2004.

Foreign Affairs saw no harm in referring to the newly established Kurdish government in northern Iraq as “Kurdistan” in official correspondence.<sup>191</sup>

However, in 2007, the AKP’s efforts to change Turkey’s Kurdish and Northern Iraq policy became another area of conflict between the military and the government. Erdoğan’s remarks supporting talks with the KRG drew negative attention from the Chief of the General staff Yaşar Büyükanıt.<sup>192</sup>

For the US, these signs for a significant turn in Turkey’s Kurdish and Northern Iraq policies was promising. Hence, US mostly sided with the ruling party in its efforts to change Turkey’s Kurdish and Northern Iraq policies. According to Graham E. Fuller, “encouraged by the EU’s stipulations for reform in this area [the Kurdish issue], the outlook for defusing this conflict with the Kurds has never been more promising”.<sup>193</sup>

Since the end of the PKK’s unilateral ceasefire in June 2004, the PKK accelerated its violent activities in the Turkish soil and Turkish officials repeatedly urged the US to take necessary steps against the PKK in northern Iraq.<sup>194</sup> PM Erdoğan visited Washington in June 2005 to seek support from the US against the PKK.<sup>195</sup>

However, the necessary steps were never undertaken by the US until the fall of 2007. The change in US policy regarding the PKK materialized towards the end of 2007, only when Turkey’s shifting Kurdish policy was matching US demands during the AKP administration.<sup>196</sup> By and large, the US was in favor of a political solution that involved amnesty to the former PKK members, expansion of cultural and linguistic reforms, democratization of the army and formation of a productive Turkey-KRG relationship along with further suggestions.<sup>197</sup>

However, Turkey was not eager to put in place a political solution to the Kurdish problem unless there was a significant move against the PKK. In 2007, the

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<sup>191</sup> Serkan Demirtaş, “Dışişlerinden Kürdistan İtirafı,” *Cumhuriyet*, July 15, 2004.

<sup>192</sup> Ali Balcı, *Dış Politikada Hesaplaşmak*, 104-105.

<sup>193</sup> Fuller, “Turkey’s Strategic Model: Myths and Realities,” 62.

<sup>194</sup> Banu Elgür, “Turkish-American Relations Since the 2003 Iraqi War: A Troubled Partnership,” *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, No. 6, 2006.

<sup>195</sup> Jim VandeHei, “Bush Praises Turkey, Offers Ally Little More,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 2005.

<sup>196</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 288.

<sup>197</sup> David L. Phillips, “Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Worker’s Party,” *National Committee on American Foreign Policy*, October 15, 2007.

PKK intensified its attack in Turkey and the military option was on the table. In search of international support, Turkey sought to reach an agreement with Syria, Iraq and Iran in August and September 2007.<sup>198</sup>

The PKK attacks on October 7<sup>th</sup> in Garbar, Şırnak and on 21<sup>st</sup> in Dağlıca, Hakkari caused a further escalation of tensions and pressures for a cross-border operation in northern Iraq reached a peak. The Turkish government passed a motion on October 17<sup>th</sup> that allowed the deployment of Turkish troops abroad for one year.<sup>199</sup> State Secretary Condoleezza Rice pledged US help against the PKK and described the PKK as a common threat after meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.<sup>200</sup>

Bush-Erdoğan meeting on November 5, 2007 gave way to a bilateral agreement that signaled a vital shift in US policy towards the PKK. In this meeting, Bush defined the PKK as “an enemy of Turkey, a free Iraq and the US” and promised to increase its efforts to share intelligence with the Turkish officials in northern Iraq. This shift in US policy came to fruition since the PKK activities in northern Iraq started posing a threat to the security of US forces in Iraq and the territorial integrity of Iraq.<sup>201</sup>

With the change in US policy and Turkey’s increasing leverage against the PKK with Turkish airstrikes and ground offensive in northern Iraq from December 2007 to February 2008, Turkey’s northern Iraq policy went through a significant change as well. After Bush agreed to boost US support to Turkey in its fight against the PKK in November, the KRG followed suit and restricted the PKK’s latitude in northern Iraq.<sup>202</sup>

As a consequence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to assume the full responsibility of Turkey’s Northern Iraq policy from the Turkish Special Forces and were able to take the necessary steps to initiate high-level talks between Turkey and the KRG in 2008. For that matter, with the approval of NSC, bilateral ties were established between Turkey and the KRG.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 289.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> US Department of State “Press Availability with Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan,” November 2, 2007.

<sup>201</sup> Steven Lee Myers, “Bush Pledges to Help Turkey on Intelligence,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2007.

<sup>202</sup> “Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?” *International Crisis Group*, No. 81. November 13, 2008, 11.

<sup>203</sup> Uzgel, “ABD ve NATO’yla İlişkiler,” in *Türk Dış Politikası* vol. III, 290-92.

In October 2008, Turkey's special envoy to Iraq Murat Özçelik and Ahmet Davutoğlu met with the President of KRG Nechirvan Barzani in Baghdad, which initiated a series of formal contacts between Turkey and the KRG. Hence, there was a substantial improvement in Turkey-KRG relations especially in the economic realm.<sup>204</sup>

The positive momentum in Turkey-KRG relations was mostly supported by the US experts as it was seen as an essential step towards ending the armed conflict between Turkey and the PKK. For example, Henri J. Barkey from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) and David L. Phillips from Atlantic Council directly pointed to the significance of Turkey's improving relations with the KRG in resolving the Kurdish question in Turkey.<sup>205</sup>

Later on, Ankara shifted its approach to the Kurdish issue. In this direction, the AKP administration declared that they had initiated the Kurdish opening in July 2009. This was the first serious attempt of the Turkish government to improve the rights of Turkey's Kurds since Turgut Özal was the PM in the mid-1980s.<sup>206</sup>

The Interior Minister Beşir Atalay, who was also the coordinator of the democratic initiative announced the measures taken under this initiative. The opening of the TRT-6 as the first official Kurdish TV channel, the replacement of the names of the villages in the South-east region of Turkey with their original Kurdish ones, introduction of optional Kurdish language courses in private schools, and the opening of several institutes for the living languages, including Kurdish, in Turkey were presented as the main reforms implemented under the Kurdish opening.<sup>207</sup>

US supported AKP's efforts to resolve the Kurdish problem. In fact, as early as 1998, Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller had already laid the foundations for these cultural and linguistic reforms in their book called *Turkey's Kurdish Question*.<sup>208</sup> A 2006 CFR report on US-Turkey relations addressed the Kurdish issue by discussing

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<sup>204</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee & Gönül Tol, "Turkey's Kurdish Challenge," *Survival* 53 no. 4 (2011): 144.

<sup>205</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 9, 2009; David L. Phillips, "Confidence Building Between Turks and Iraqi Kurds," *Atlantic Council*, June 1, 2009.

<sup>206</sup> Larrabee & Tol, 147.

<sup>207</sup> Cuma Çiçek, "Elimination or Integration of Pro-Kurdish Politics: Limits of the AKP's Democratic Initiative," *Turkish Studies* 12 no. 1 (2011): 20.

<sup>208</sup> Henri J. Barkey & Graham E. Fuller, "Toward a Solution of the Kurdish Problem," *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 185-87.

similar means to achieve a peaceful solution.<sup>209</sup>

New York Times pronounced the onset of the Kurdish opening as a significant step towards ending decades of conflict and the announcement of the plan to resolve the Kurdish problem on November was considered to be a landmark.<sup>210</sup> Another New York Times article praised Erdoğan's courageousness, supporting him in his domestic power struggle on the Kurdish issue:

Mr. Erdoğan has shown sound leadership with his plan for the Kurds, despite fierce opposition from nationalist politicians. For Turkey to fulfill its potential as a secular Muslim democracy, he will have to keep battling the nationalists and others to make additional political and economic reforms, without sacrificing free political debate.<sup>211</sup>

Apart from that, Henri J. Barkey deemed the Kurdish opening as "a very serious effort by the AKP government", regarding it "as the most coherent and comprehensive attempt ever made in Turkey on this [Kurdish] issue" in CEIP's discussion event specifically on the Kurdish opening.<sup>212</sup>

In conclusion, there were two vital determinants in US-Turkish relations during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, after the September 11 attacks, Turkey's significance increased in the eyes of the US policy-makers as it played crucial roles both in the global war on terrorism and democracy promotion. US officials utilized Turkey as a model nation to others in the Middle East. Secondly, in order to make the "Turkish model" viable, the US was mostly supportive of the transformation of Turkish politics under the AKP administration.

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<sup>209</sup> Steven A. Cook and Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, "Generating Momentum for a New Era in US-Turkey Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations* no. 15, 2006, 24-27.

<sup>210</sup> Şebnem Arsu, "Turkey Plans to Ease Restrictions on Kurds and Help End Decades of Conflict," *New York Times*, November 13, 2009.

<sup>211</sup> "Turkey and the Kurds," *New York Times*, November 23, 2009.

<sup>212</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "The Kurdish Opening in Turkey: Origins and Future," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 1, 2009.

### 3. CHAPTER 3: US-TURKEY RELATIONS IN THE OBAMA ERA (2009-2011)

The third chapter will expand on the new dynamics of US-Turkish ties under the Obama administration as the trajectory of US-Turkish relations shifted significantly. First of all, towards the end of the second term of the Bush administration, US officials started giving greater importance to US-Turkish relations, as most of the US high ranking officials, regarded Turkey as a critical ally of the US in the context of Turkey's political transformation and its growing regional influence.

In that sense, starting from the election campaign, this chapter will focus on Obama administration's attempts to prioritize its relations with Turkey, as can be seen in President Obama's two-day visit to Turkey. After a series of bilateral meetings between US officials and their Turkish counterparts, US-Turkey relations were formulated under a new loose framework, namely model partnership.

On the other hand, this chapter will also focus on minor sources of divergence in US-Turkish relations in 2010. For instance, new activism in Turkish foreign policy casted doubts on Turkey's long-term commitment to the West in the eyes of the US officials. More precisely, Turkey's rift with Israel and rapprochement with Iran created a short-term tension in US-Turkish relations. Among the US experts, the voices that regarded the new activism in Turkish foreign policy as a shift of axis or a radical drift from the West, became louder. However, after Turkey agreed to host a missile defense shield system inside Turkish territory in 2010 Lisbon summit, relations entered into a new upward phase and disputes about Turkey's possible shift of axis waned.

Finally, the third chapter will dwell on the outbreak of the uprisings in the Arab world in late-2010, and rising cooperation between US and Turkey. This chapter will argue that uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya generated an unprecedented positive momentum in the US-Turkey partnership. During regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the AKP and PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in particular, took on a leadership role in the region, which the US was highly supportive of.

### 3.1. US-Turkish “Model Partnership”

US-Turkish relations went through a dramatic change after the Cold War, with the transformation of Turkey’s political landscape and rise in its regional influence. Therefore, geographical dimension of the US-Turkish partnership was replaced by the rising importance of Turkey’s internal dynamics and regional roles. According to Ian O. Lesser, Philip H. Gordon and Ömer Taşpınar, Turkey should be considered in the context of it what it is rather than where it sits geographically.<sup>213</sup> Matthew Bryza from Atlantic Council underscored the importance of invigorating the US-Turkish relations by revisiting the conventional concepts of the US-Turkish partnership based on geopolitics.<sup>214</sup>

In 2008, many US experts started drawing attention to Turkey’s importance for the US, and the urgency to improve US-Turkish relations in the years to come. For that matter, US policy experts were trying to come up with policies to reverse the rising trend of anti-Americanism in Turkey.<sup>215</sup> Anti-American sentiment in Turkey was rising among the Turkish public, starting from the Gulf War and reached critical levels with the occupation of Iraq, the rejection of March 1<sup>st</sup> motion and the hood event in northern Iraq.<sup>216</sup> This trend also drew the attention of the US mainstream media.<sup>217</sup>

Even though the rise in anti-Americanism was used by the US as a pretext to boost cooperation with Turkey, it did not reflect the stance of the AKP government.<sup>218</sup> During the 2000s, the ruling AKP was pro-US, while anti-Americanism became a

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<sup>213</sup> Ian O. Lesser, “Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics,” *Survival* 48 no. 3 (2006): 84-85; Ian O. Lesser, “A Strategic Relationship Revisited,” in *Beyond Suspicion: Rethinking US-Turkish Relations* (Washington DC: Wilson Center, 2007): 26; Philip H. Gordon & Ömer Taşpınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey Can Revive A Fading Partnership* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2008).

<sup>214</sup> Matt Bryza, “Invigorating the US-Turkey Strategic Partnership,” Turgut Özal Memorial Lecture, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 24, 2008.

<sup>215</sup> Gordon & Taşpınar, *Winning Turkey: How America, Europe and Turkey Can Revive A Fading Partnership*, 4; Mark R. Parris, “Common Values and Common Interests? The Bush Legacy in US-Turkish Relations,” *Insight Turkey* 10 no. 4 (2008); Lesser, “Turkey, the United States and the Delusion of Geopolitics”, 85-86.

<sup>216</sup> Pew Research Center, *Most Muslim Publics Not So Easily Moved: Confidence in Obama lifts US Image Around the World*, Pew Global Attitudes Project, July 23, 2009; Aylin Güney, “Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44 no. 3 (2008): 480-81.

<sup>217</sup> Karl Vick, “In Many Turks’ Eyes, US Remains the Enemy,” *Washington Post*, April 10, 2005.

<sup>218</sup> “Partimiz ABD düşmanı değil,” *Amerikanın Sesi*, June 11, 2005.

default ideology of the opposition in Turkey.<sup>219</sup> In fact, PM Erdoğan put the blame on the main opposition party, CHP for exasperating anti-Americanism in Turkey.<sup>220</sup>

Mark R. Parris argued that George W. Bush would leave the US-Turkish relations worse than he found them and US needed to reinvigorate its relations with Turkey.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, Parris laid out the Obama administration's policy agenda, and what it meant for Turkey. He highlighted the important role of Turkey's domestic politics in driving the US-Turkey relationship forward.<sup>222</sup> Moreover, in James F. Jeffrey's statement as Ambassador-designate to Turkey on September 24, 2008, he singled out Turkey's transformation as a great opportunity for the US as "Turkey became more democratic, more open and more economically vibrant".<sup>223</sup>

Then, Barack Obama and his running mate Joe Biden laid emphasis on the necessity to restore strategic partnership with Turkey during their election campaign.<sup>224</sup> Obama's efforts to restore the partnership between Turkey and the US were received quite positively in the Turkish media as the Turkish media mostly focused on Obama's emphasis on the increasing attacks of the PKK.<sup>225</sup>

For the Turkish administration, Obama's election stood for a whole new era not just for Turkey, but for the whole Muslim world. In that sense, Obama's election was widely celebrated by the Turkish media, where almost all sides of the political spectrum, received the US election results quite positively in Turkey.<sup>226</sup>

Pro-government Turkish think tank *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı* (SETA) indicated that the Turkish government welcomed the Obama administration's security council appointments. Jim Jones as National Security

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<sup>219</sup> Füsün Türkmen, "Anti-Americanism as a Default Ideology of Opposition: Turkey as a Case Study," *Turkish Studies* 11 no. 3 (2010).

<sup>220</sup> Turan Yılmaz, "CHP'nin ABD karşıtı olması talihsizlik," *Hürriyet*, June 8, 2005.

<sup>221</sup> Parris, "Common Values and Common Interests? The Bush Legacy in US-Turkish Relations," 5.

<sup>222</sup> Mark R. Parris, "Prospect for US-Turkish Relations in the Obama Era," *Brookings Institute*, February 11, 2009.

<sup>223</sup> James F. Jeffrey, "Statement of James Jeffrey Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Turkey Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," September 24, 2008.

<sup>224</sup> Barack Obama and Joe Biden, "Restoring the Strategic Partnership with Turkey" *A Stronger Partnership with Europe for A Safer America*, 2008.

<sup>225</sup> "PKK'yı Bush azdırdı," *Gazete Vatan*, October 24, 2008.

<sup>226</sup> Fatma Nisan, "2008 ve 2012 ABD Başkanlık Seçimlerinin Türk Yazılı Basınında Sunumu," *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi* 3 no. 4 (2014): 71-73; Han, "From 'Strategic Partnership' to 'Modern Partnership': AKP, Turkish-US Relations and the Prospects Under Obama", 78.

Advisor, Robert Gates as Defense Secretary and Hillary Clinton as State Secretary were seen as close names to the Turkish administration.<sup>227</sup>

Furthermore, US policy towards Turkey was seen by the pro-government circles in Turkey as having a regional perspective.<sup>228</sup> Ömer Taşpınar further elaborated on this issue by pinpointing the role of the Middle Eastern affairs that could foster the US-Turkish partnership in the Obama era.<sup>229</sup>

The Obama administration immediately generated a new momentum in US-Turkey relations by arranging bilateral meetings. First of all, US envoy to Middle East George Mitchell paid a special visit to Turkey in February 2009. In his meeting with PM Erdoğan in Ankara, he indicated that “Turkey can have a significant influence on our efforts to promote comprehensive peace in the region”.<sup>230</sup>

Later on, on March 7, State Secretary Hillary Clinton paid a visit to Ankara, where she met with Turkish Foreign Minister Babacan.<sup>231</sup> These visits and the upcoming visit of Obama to Turkey on April 6 were well-received in the Turkish side as according to an article published by SETA, US-Turkey relations were about to enter a golden age.<sup>232</sup> In the same article, Bülent Aras also underscored the fact that US foreign policy vision converged with the domestic political landscape in Turkey.

In that context, President Obama’s two-day visit to Turkey can be considered a landmark in US-Turkey relations as it represented the positive momentum in US-Turkey relations. Firstly, Obama started his visit by paying a visit to the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of modern Turkey, Anıtkabir.<sup>233</sup> Then, Obama met with President Abdullah Gül at Çankaya Mansion, where Obama

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<sup>227</sup> Tark Oğuzlu, “The Hillary Clinton Impact on Turkish-American Relations,” *SETA Policy Brief* no. 30, January 2009, 7.

<sup>228</sup> “Obama Dönemi Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri,” *SETA*, April 2009.

<sup>229</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, “Obama’s Turkey Policy: Bringing Credibility to Strategic Partnership,” *Insight Turkey* 11 no. 1 (2009): 16.

<sup>230</sup> “US’ Mitchell: ‘Turkey has a unique role to play in achieving lasting peace in the mideast’,” *Dünya*, February 27, 2009.

<sup>231</sup> US Department of State, “Joint Statement by Turkey and the United States of America on the Occasion of the Visit of the US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton Upon the Invitation of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey Ali Babacan,” March 7, 2009.

<sup>232</sup> Bülent Aras, “A golden Era for US-Turkey Relations?” *SETA*, April 4, 2009.

<sup>233</sup> “Barack Obama Türkiye’de,” *BBC Türkçe*, April 6, 2009.

mentioned a new “model partnership” between the US and Turkey.<sup>234</sup>

This “model partnership”, stems from the US-backed idea that Turkey could be a model for the Muslim world in terms of its democratic progress and economic growth.<sup>235</sup> It also reflects the idea that relationship between the US and Turkey was a model partnership in which a Western superpower and a pre-dominantly-Muslim regional power could forge a working, productive relationship in the post-9/11 era.

In his address to the Turkish parliament, Obama laid stress on his choice of Turkey as his first official overseas visit by asserting that it was a deliberate attempt to send a message to the world.<sup>236</sup> Obama continued his speech by underlining the continued support of the US for Turkey’s political transformation under pro-EU reforms that demilitarized the political system in Turkey, reshaped the judiciary accordingly, loosened certain restrictions on freedom of expression and improved the linguistic rights of Turkey’s Kurds.<sup>237</sup>

Not to mention, Obama expressed US support for Turkey in the fight against the PKK but also made it explicit that the US backed dialogue between the parties regarding the Kurdish issue, including the Iraqi government, Iraqi Kurds; and political reforms that intended to promote education and opportunity for Turkey’s Kurds.<sup>238</sup>

Obama continued his Turkey visit in İstanbul by speaking with students at a student roundtable in Tophane Cultural Center on April 7. During this event, Obama elaborated on the new US vision towards the Middle East under his administration and tried to negate negative stereotypes about the US and he elucidated on how a stronger US-Turkish partnership could foster a more peaceful and prosperous region.<sup>239</sup>

President Obama further dwelled on the new US approach to the Muslim world in his Cairo speech in in June to improve the damaged US image in the region after the Bush administration’s aggressive policies. Obama mentioned Turkey in building a

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<sup>234</sup> Barack Obama, “The President’s News Conference With President Abdullah Gül of Turkey in Ankara, Turkey,” *The American Presidency Project*, April 6, 2009.

<sup>235</sup> “Obama says U.S., Turkey can be model for world,” *CNN*, April 6, 2009.

<sup>236</sup> “Full text of the US president’s speech at Turkish parliament,” *Hürriyet*, April 6, 2009.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks of President Barack Obama at Student Roundtable,” *The White House*, April 7, 2009.

more constructive dialogue between the West and the Muslim world by welcoming the leadership role that Turkey played in the Alliance of Civilizations.<sup>240</sup> After meeting with Hillary Clinton on June 5, Davutoğlu endorsed the renewal of US approach to the Middle East by praising Obama’s speech in Cairo on June 4.<sup>241</sup>

This new “model partnership” between US and Turkey was discussed in an event at BI, on US-Turkish relations in the Obama era. Soli Özel deemed this framework as representative of an ideal relationship between a predominantly Christian and a Muslim nation. In the same event, Mark R. Parris, once again, indicated that the US was making Turkey a priority as a result of Turkey’s political transformation that went along with US interests.<sup>242</sup>

Dr. Stephen J Flanagan stated that stability in the Middle East, countering terrorism and extremism, sustaining a global economy, securing energy flows, advancing the stability and sovereignty of the states in Caucasus and Central Asia, and maintaining productive relations with Europe were identified as the main areas of “model partnership” between US and Turkey. The Obama administration and the AKP government’s interests converged both on a global and a regional scale.<sup>243</sup>

The “model partnership” was espoused by the AKP government. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu indicated that Turkey acknowledged these attempts to improve the US-Turkish partnership under the new “model partnership” framework.<sup>244</sup> He later stated that the foreign policies of the Obama administration and the AKP government fully converged.<sup>245</sup>

Foreign Minister Davutoğlu spelled out the details of the model partnership between US and Turkey in a way to illustrate the importance of this new framework in

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<sup>240</sup> “Barack Obama’s Cairo speech 2009: the full transcript,” *The Telegraph*, June 4, 2009.

<sup>241</sup> U.S. Department of State “Remarks with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu,” June 5, 2009.

<sup>242</sup> Mark R. Parris, Arzuhan Doğan Yalçındağ, Ömer Taşpınar & Soli Özel, “US-Turkish Relations: A Historic Era,” *Brookings Institute*, April 13, 2009.

<sup>243</sup> Stephen J. Flanagan, “The United States and Turkey: A Model Partnership,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, May 14, 2009.

<sup>244</sup> Ramazan Gözen, “Türkiye’nin ABD Politikası 2009,” in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2009*, ed. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat & Muhittin Ataman (Ankara: SETA, 2011): 305.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

a conference.<sup>246</sup> During his visit to Washington in December 2009, PM Erdoğan stressed the political importance of the “model partnership” between US and Turkey.<sup>247</sup>

For the US, Turkey was becoming a more pivotal state in terms of the role it was deemed to play in promoting stability in the Middle East. In the National Security Strategy document published by the US State Department in 2010, Turkey was mentioned as a European partner to be “engaged with on a broad range of mutual goals, especially with regard to pursuit of stability in its region.”<sup>248</sup>

### 3.2. New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy

2010 turned out to be a rough year for US-Turkish relations as new foreign policy issues created grave challenges for the US-Turkish partnership. Triangular foreign policy issues came to be vital for bilateral relations with the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu as the Turkish Foreign Minister in May 2009.

At this point, it is essential to point out that there were vital signs for an activist foreign policy vision starting from the early 1990s. President Turgut Özal adopted a pro-active foreign policy approach, which was followed by former Foreign Minister İsmail Cem’s multi-dimensional foreign policy vision between 1999 and 2002.<sup>249</sup>

During the AKP era, there were crucial domestic reasons behind Turkey’s increasingly activist foreign policy. Domestic power struggles resulted in the reiteration of AKP’s political consolidation after 2007. Turkey’s EU process, general elections in 2007, the ascendance of Abdullah Gül to presidency, and the diminishing power of the military in Turkish politics enabled AKP to adopt a pro-active foreign policy.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey-US Relations: A Model Partnership, Global and Regional Dimensions,” *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 2, 2009.

<sup>247</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey after meeting,” *The White House*, December 7, 2009.

<sup>248</sup> Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington DC: The White House, 2010): 41.42.

<sup>249</sup> Ziya Öniş, “Multiple Faces of the ‘New’ Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique,” *Insight Turkey* 13 no. 1 (2011): 49.

<sup>250</sup> Han, 95-97; Meltem Müftüler Baç, “Turkish Foreign Policy, its Domestic Determinants and the role of the European Union,” *Southeast European Society and Politics* 16 no. 2 (2011): 286.

Davutoğlu's impact on Turkish foreign policy was crucial as he has been a close associate of PM Erdoğan and his chief advisor on foreign policy since 2003.<sup>251</sup> Davutoğlu is considered to be the architect of AKP's foreign policy and his vision has had great impact on many foreign policy issues since AKP came to power.<sup>252</sup> This was largely because of the former Foreign Minister and President Abdullah Gül's and PM Erdoğan's willingness to implement Davutoğlu's vision.<sup>253</sup> Davutoğlu outlined the roadmap to this new activist foreign policy vision in his book published in 2001.<sup>254</sup>

He emphasized that Turkey's rising influence in its region came from its ability to balance democratic values and security concerns.<sup>255</sup> Davutoğlu elucidated Turkey's increasing engagement with its region under the AKP rule by calling it "zero problem policy toward Turkey's neighbors".<sup>256</sup> Pro-government circles promoted this foreign policy vision as Turkey's soft power.<sup>257</sup> Bülent Aras promoted Turkey as an emerging regional power and a "peace-maker on the periphery of the international system".<sup>258</sup>

Turkey's new foreign policy vision was largely well-received, especially among the policy-making communities that were close to the Obama administration. For instance, Mark R. Parris praised activist tendencies in Turkey's foreign policy as he described Ahmet Davutoğlu as Turkey's Henry Kissinger.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, a New York Times article in January 2011 praised Davutoğlu's character by defining him as "an extra-ordinary figure, brilliant, indefatigable, self-aggrandizing and always the hero of his narratives".<sup>260</sup> The Economist singled out Davutoğlu in generating an activist foreign policy, representing Turkey as a regional power.<sup>261</sup>

Not to mention, during his trip to Washington, Davutoğlu tried to convince the

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<sup>251</sup> Bülent Aras, "The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey* 11 no. 3 (2009): 127.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>254</sup> See, Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, (İstanbul: Küre, 2001).

<sup>255</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey* 10 no. 1 (2008): 79-80.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>257</sup> Aras, "The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy"; Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Soft Power," *Guardian*, April 14, 2009.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> "Mark Parris: Davutoğlu Türkiye'nin Henry Kissinger'ı," *Türkiye Gazetesi*, October 29, 2008.

<sup>260</sup> James Traub, "Turkey's Rules," *New York Times*, January 20, 2011.

<sup>261</sup> "The Davutoğlu effect: All change for foreign policy," *The Economist*, October 21, 2010.

US policy-makers of Turkey's position in the international arena by visiting CFR. In his speech, he argued that the policies of the Obama administration and the AKP government were one and the same.<sup>262</sup> During an event at BI on US-Turkish relations, Philip H. Gordon, who was the Assistant Secretary of State during the first term of the Obama administration, clarified the Obama administration's approach towards Turkey's rising influence in the Middle East. Gordon underlined the fact that the Obama administration largely saw Turkey's increasing engagement in the Middle East as compatible with US interests and Turkey continued to be firmly rooted in the Euro-Atlantic alliance.<sup>263</sup>

Hugh Pope, who is a prominent Turkey expert in the US, expanded on Turkey's rising Middle East profile in his article in *Foreign Policy* by arguing that Turkey's growing engagement in the Middle East was "complement to and even dependent on its ties to West".<sup>264</sup> According to Steven A. Cook, Turkey's Middle East policies were generally consistent with those of the US, thus Washington could leverage these policies to advance its regional goals.<sup>265</sup>

### 3.2.1. Turkey's Rift with Israel

On the other hand, Turkey's rift with Israel and rapprochement with Iran, created tensions between the US and Turkey in 2010. there were allegations about a possible shift of axis in Turkish foreign policy in the US contrary to Turkey's conventional pro-Western orientation. US-Turkey rift in 2010 was sparked with Gaza flotilla raid on May 31 and Turkey's veto to UN sanctions on Iran on June 9.<sup>266</sup>

To begin with, Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations gained a momentum in the beginning of the 1990s. Diplomatic relations reached ambassadorial level. High-level

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<sup>262</sup> "A Conversation with Ahmet Davutoğlu," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 14, 2010: 3-4.

<sup>263</sup> Strobe Talbott, Philip H. Gordon & Fiona Hill, "The United States and Turkey: A View from the Obama Administration," *Brookings Institute*, March 17, 2010: 10-12.

<sup>264</sup> Hugh Pope, "Turkey's rising Middle East profile," *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2010.

<sup>265</sup> Steven A. Cook, "The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 1, 2009.

<sup>266</sup> Tanış, 166.

state visits increased and military cooperation between Turkey. The number of joint Israeli-Turkish military exercises in the eastern Mediterranean also increased. Furthermore, Turkey and Israel signed a free trade agreement in 1997.<sup>267</sup>

During the first term of the AKP administration, Turkish-Israeli relations were in good shape. The AKP's leaders visited Israel many times and PM Erdoğan paid his respects at Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Furthermore, companies close to the AKP did good business in Israel. The AKP government signed more official agreements with Israel than any former government.<sup>268</sup> In 2008, Turkey also played a mediating role in the Syrian-Israeli peace process over Golan Heights.<sup>269</sup>

However, when Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations were going on, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza in early 2009, which was a watershed moment in the steady decline of Turkish-Israeli relations.<sup>270</sup> For a start, PM Erdoğan stormed out of a World Economic Forum debate at Davos after clashing with the moderator of the event and criticizing the Israeli offensive in Gaza.<sup>271</sup> After his walkout at Davos, Erdoğan was hailed by the leaderships of Hamas and the Arab League.<sup>272</sup>

From then on, the Turkish leadership expressed their support for the Palestinian cause much more openly at the expense of jeopardizing bilateral economic, diplomatic and security relations with Israel. Turkey has also become increasingly vocal of Israeli actions in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>273</sup> After the incident at Davos, Israel's participation in a military exercise called "Anatolian Eagle" was cancelled in October 2009.<sup>274</sup>

On the other hand, the Turkey and Israel tried hard to minimize the harm in bilateral relations. Erdoğan cautiously put the blame on the moderator at Davos, David

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<sup>267</sup> Tarkan Oğuzlu, "The Changing Dynamics of Turkey-Israel Relations: A Structural Realist Account," *Mediterranean Politics* 15 no. 2 (2010): 274.

<sup>268</sup> Hugh Pope, "Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey's New Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2010: 168.

<sup>269</sup> Bülent Aras, "Turkey's rise in the Greater Middle East: peace-building in the periphery," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11 no. 1 (2009): 35-36.

<sup>270</sup> Sabrina Tavernese and Ethan Bronner, "Gaza War Created Rift Between Israel and Turkey," *New York Times*, February 4, 2009.

<sup>271</sup> "Recep Erdoğan storms out of Davos after clash with Israeli president over Gaza," *Guardian*, January 30, 2009.

<sup>272</sup> "Erdoğan hailed after Davos walkout," *Al Jazeera*, January 31, 2009.

<sup>273</sup> Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", 51-52.

<sup>274</sup> "'One minute'un ardından 'Anadolu Kartalı' gerilimi," *Radikal*, October 12, 2009.

Ignatius, not the Israeli President Peres.<sup>275</sup> Not to mention, Erdoğan and Peres had an amicable phone conversation after the incident.<sup>276</sup>

The Obama administration was trying to “compartmentalize” its relations with Turkey by continuing to improve relations with both Turkey and Israel. US government did not want Israel to be a source of friction with Turkey. Apart from that, the Obama administration was making use of the critical stance of the Turkish government in order to implicitly criticize Israeli actions in Gaza.<sup>277</sup>

Tensions between Turkey and Israel further escalated with the Gaza flotilla raid on 31 May 2010 when Israel attacked six civilian ships of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that carried humanitarian aid to Gaza. The incident infuriated nearly all sides of the political spectrum in Turkey.<sup>278</sup>

Davutoğlu met with Clinton in Washington the day after the incident. In *Hard Choices*, Clinton points out that the meeting was mostly about the Israeli raid of the flotilla, where Davutoğlu was emotional and tried hard to receive the support of the US regarding the incident. Davutoğlu and Clinton did not have a press conference after their meeting since the US neither wanted to condemn Israel nor wanted to give the impression to the Turkish officials that US was indifferent to the incident.<sup>279</sup>

The phone conversation that took place between Obama and Erdoğan raised Ankara’s concerns over US support to Turkey regarding the raid since the phone conversation took place later than expected. Not to mention, Obama suggested that it was important to find other means to deliver humanitarian aid.<sup>280</sup>

US Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates spoke of Turkish-Israeli friction as “a matter of concern”, and he put the blame on Turkey’s drift towards eastward in its foreign policy orientation on the EU on the grounds that the EU refused to “give Turkey the kind of organic link to the West Turkey sought”.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> “Erdoğan: Tavrım moderatöre,” *Hürriyet*, January 30, 2009.

<sup>276</sup> “Peres, Erdoğan in ‘amicable talks’ after Davos spat,” *CNN*, January 30, 2009.

<sup>277</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 138-39.

<sup>278</sup> Jason Motlagh, “Angry Grows Over Israeli Raid of Gaza Flotilla,” *TIME*, June 1, 2010.

<sup>279</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 142-144.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-46.

<sup>281</sup> “US Defence Secretary Gates blames EU for Turkey ‘drift’,” *BBC News*, June 9, 2010.

Furthermore, there were significant doubts in the US about the ruling AKP's ties with the charity organization İnsani Yardım Vakfı (İHH) that sent the flotilla to Gaza. US officials were doubtful about the Turkish government's direct role in the incident.<sup>282</sup> Wall Street Journal accused the Turkish government of having close ties with the İHH that had alleged links to Hamas and extremist groups.<sup>283</sup> Erdoğan's increasingly assertive foreign policy, which includes Turkey's support of Hamas, increasingly close relations with Iran and Syria, was defined as a "radical drift".

Similarly, according to Steven Cook, this trend towards a sharp shift in Turkish foreign policy with regard to Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel and improving relations with Iran indicated that the US and Turkey were becoming strategic competitors instead of strategic partners.<sup>284</sup>

After the meeting between Obama and Erdoğan in the G20 Summit in Toronto on the Iranian nuclear program, Erdoğan accused Obama of not showing interest in the Turkish-American killed in the flotilla incident. US Ambassador James F. Jeffrey replied to these comments by saying that the remarks of Erdoğan were offensive.<sup>285</sup>

### 3.2.2. Turkey's Rapprochement with Iran

Amid increasing tensions between the US and Turkey due to Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel after Erdoğan's Davos outburst and the Mavi Marmara incident, the Iranian nuclear program came about as another source of friction between the US and Turkey in 2010. As Fuat Keyman and Onur Sazak pointed out, Turkish-Iranian relations can be defined as a roller coaster ride, constantly shifting from suspicion and mistrust to cooperation and solidarity throughout the years especially from the 1990s onwards.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 148-49.

<sup>283</sup> "Turkey's Radical Drift," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2010.

<sup>284</sup> Steven A. Cook, "How Do You Say 'Frenemy' in Turkish?" *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2010.

<sup>285</sup> Carol Migdalovitz, "Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views," *Congressional Research Service*, November 28, 2010: 47.

<sup>286</sup> E. Fuat Keyman & Onur Sazak, "Turkey and Iran: The Two Modes of Engagement in the Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17 no. 3 (2015): 328.

Turkish-Iranian relations entered into a new phase of normalization in late 2002 when US intentions to occupy Iraq came into place. The potential emergence of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq brought about a period of increasing cooperation between Iran, Turkey and Syria where they held conventions to develop strategies that would contain such result.<sup>287</sup>

This period coincided with the rise of the AKP in Turkey. With the sweeping political transformation of Turkey<sup>288</sup> the dynamics of the relationship shifted dramatically. For instance, Tehran no longer had to deal with a secularist elite. Similarly, Ankara did not have to question the regime in Iran, which was vastly different from how the relations played out in the late 1990s.<sup>289</sup>

In July 2007, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to transport 30 billion cubic meters of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe. As a result of this deal, the construction of two separate pipelines was envisaged. US criticized this deal as it would prefer to see Turkey import gas from Iraq instead.<sup>290</sup>

In general, from 2004 to 2011, the Turkish-Iranian relations were on the rise despite minor divergences. The Turkish government tried to mediate between Iran and 5 permanent members of the UNSC in respect to the Iranian nuclear program. PM Erdoğan called on major powers especially Israel to decrease their nuclear arsenal before they called on Iran to do the same.<sup>291</sup>

Then, in 2010, Iran's nuclear program became a major issue of contestation between the US and Turkey. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates singled out Iran's nuclear program as a source of concern that put peace in the Middle East at risk in his Turkey visit in February 2010.<sup>292</sup>

During nuclear security summit in Washington between 12-14 April in 2010, Turkey's policy regarding the Iranian nuclear program was formed. Turkey's policy

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>288</sup> For Turkey's political transformation under the AKP rule see chapter 2.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics," *Survival* 52 no. 2 (2010): 165.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>292</sup> Fred W. Baker, "Gates: Iran's Nuke Program Puts Middle East at Risk," *US Department of Defense*, February 6, 2010.

was largely shaped by Hakan Fidan, who was soon to be the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization on April 17. Turkey's nuclear policy was to push for complete denuclearization of the region.<sup>293</sup>

In that sense, the Turkish officials brought its concerns about Israel's nuclear arsenal at the forefront in order to convince the international community. Therefore, Turkish officials made use of the controversy about the Iranian nuclear program to legitimize its assertive stance against Israel.<sup>294</sup>

After the nuclear summit in Washington, Obama sent a letter to the Brazilian and Turkish leaders in order to make recommendations for what to do about the Iranian nuclear program on April 20. In the letter, President Obama seemed quite open to a fuel swap deal between Turkey, Brazil and Iran.<sup>295</sup>

On May 17, Turkey, along with Brazil, agreed on a nuclear fuel swap deal with Iran when world powers were in talks to impose a fourth round of U.N. sanctions on Iran.<sup>296</sup> Joint declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil stated that Iran agreed to deposit 1200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey.<sup>297</sup>

However, US was extremely skeptical of this deal as US officials thought that it undermined the US efforts to broaden the scale of sanctions on Iran. New York Times indicated that this deal could "derail a fragile international consensus", which includes the US, Russia and Europe.<sup>298</sup> Washington Post claimed that this deal would do nothing to restrain Tehran's nuclear program, calling it a bad nuclear deal.<sup>299</sup>

Hillary Clinton publicly attacked the deal and accused Turkey and Brazil of being "international ingénues, suckered into a spoiling operation by Iran".<sup>300</sup> She further expressed her concerns over the deal since there were a number of issues missing from the deal such as "Tehran's continued enrichment of uranium in breach of

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<sup>293</sup> Tanış, 161-162; "Erdoğan: Hiçbir ülkede nükleer silah olmasın," April 13, 2010.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 164-65; Laura Rozen, "W.H. pushes back on letter leak," *Politico*, May 28, 2010.

<sup>296</sup> Parisa Hafezi, "Turkey, Brazil seal deal on Iran nuclear fuel swap," *Reuters*, May 17, 2010.

<sup>297</sup> Julian Borger, "Text of the Iran-Brazil-Turkey deal," *Guardian*, May 17, 2010.

<sup>298</sup> David E. Sanger & Michael Slackman, "U.S. Is Skeptical on Iranian Deal for Nuclear Fuel," *New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

<sup>299</sup> "Bad nuclear deal with Brazil and Turkey hands Iran a diplomatic coup," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2010.

<sup>300</sup> Daniel Dombey, "Clinton attacks Turkey-Brazil deal with Iran," *Financial Times*, May 18, 2010.

five UN resolutions”.<sup>301</sup>

Despite Davutoğlu’s eager efforts to explain the motivation behind the deal with Iran under Turkey’s zero-problems policy,<sup>302</sup> US seemed unconvinced. Clinton commented on the nuclear-fuel exchange deal with Iran, calling it “dangerous” for global security.<sup>303</sup> On June 9, 2010, U.N. agreed to impose another round of sanctions on Iran over Tehran’s nuclear program despite Turkey and Brazil’s veto.<sup>304</sup>

During this controversy about the Iranian nuclear program, US strived to take a measured stance by doing damage control in order not to sour its relations with Turkey.<sup>305</sup> Robert M. Gates expressed his frustration with Turkey over its refusal to support a new round of U.N. sanctions on Iran while also underscoring the robustness of the alliance between Washington and Ankara.<sup>306</sup>

The AKP administration assigned a delegation led by Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik to clarify the US officials on this issue. However, the Turkish delegation could not meet with Clinton. Instead, Clinton chose to meet with the President of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Ümit Boyner.<sup>307</sup> AKP Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik stated quite clearly that there was no such thing as a shift of axis.<sup>308</sup> Erdoğan also rejected that Turkey was shifting its axis, laying special emphasis on the new framework of model partnership between the US and Turkey.<sup>309</sup>

Obama-Erdoğan meeting at the G20 summit in Toronto was one of the tensest meetings two leaders ever had. It was one of those rare moments when there was no press release, public statement or photo opportunity of a meeting between Obama and Erdoğan.<sup>310</sup> One former government official indicated that the Turkish officials were trembling after the meeting.<sup>311</sup> US Congress report stressed the cool effect of the

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Zero-Problems Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2010.

<sup>303</sup> “Clinton Blasts Brazil-Turkey Approach to Iran,” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, May 28, 2010.

<sup>304</sup> Colum Lynch and Glenn Kessler, “U.N. imposes another round of sanctions on Iran,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2010.

<sup>305</sup> Tanış, 157-59.

<sup>306</sup> James Kanter, “Gates Criticizes Turkey Vote Against Sanctions,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2010.

<sup>307</sup> Tanış, 184-85.

<sup>308</sup> “Eksen kayması tartışması,” *Sabah*, June 14, 2010; “AK Parti heyeti ABD’ye uçtu,” *Milliyet*, June 14, 2010.

<sup>309</sup> “ABD dostumuz model ortağımızdır,” *Milliyet*, June 15, 2010.

<sup>310</sup> Tanış, 178.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 179.

Toronto meeting by emphasizing that Turkey was not described as a “strategic ally”.<sup>312</sup>

What’s more, Assistant State Secretary Philip H. Gordon stated in no uncertain terms that “Turkey must demonstrate commitment to the West”. He directly questioned Turkey’s orientation: “There is a lot of questioning going on about Turkey’s orientation and its ongoing commitment to strategic partnership with the United States”.<sup>313</sup> Obama made very similar remarks in an Italian newspaper.<sup>314</sup>

On August, Obama personally warned Erdoğan over his stance on Israel and Iran. Obama’s warning was important since Turkey wanted to buy American drone aircraft to use in its fight against the PKK. A senior administration official stated that Turkey needed to show that US could confide in Turkey as an ally.<sup>315</sup>

All things considered, Turkey’s standoff with Israel and rapprochement with Iran became minor sources of friction in the US-Turkish partnership. As Hugh Pope and Ian O. Lesser rightly suggested, Turkey was not considered to forsake the long-term interests of the US. The differences between Washington and Ankara over Israel and Iran were merely tactical and Washington needed to encourage the Turkish government to play a mediating role in the Middle East.<sup>316</sup>

### 3.2.3. Missile Defense Shield

Another crucial reason why Turkey’s relations with Israel and Iran didn’t pose a long-term threat to the US-Turkish alliance, is NATO’s missile defense shield system which Turkey agreed to host in its territory in November 2010 in the NATO Lisbon summit.

Us policy of developing a missile defense system comes from Iran’s capabilities of developing ballistic missiles that could fly over 2500 kilometers. Iran’s ballistic

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<sup>312</sup> Migdalovitz, “Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views”, 47.

<sup>313</sup> Desmond Butler, “US: Turkey must demonstrate commitment to the West,” *The Daily Star*, June 28, 2010.

<sup>314</sup> Migdalovitz, “Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views”, 46.

<sup>315</sup> Daniel Dombey, “US warns Turkey on Iran and Israel,” *Financial Times*, August 16, 2010; “Obama warns Erdoğan over stance on Israel and Iran – report,” *The Daily Star*, August 17, 2010.

<sup>316</sup> Pope, “Pax Ottamana? The Mixed Success of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy”, 171; Taş, 174.

missile capabilities was perceived by the US as a security threat to NATO allies and US was prompted to develop effective defense measures.<sup>317</sup>

The Bush administration original proposal was to deploy a ground-based mid-course defense element in Europe. This plan would have included 10 interceptors in Poland, a radar in Czech Republic and another radar in a country closer to Iran.<sup>318</sup> Russian officials were suspicious of this plan to place missile defense systems in Poland and Czech Republic since they thought it would pose more of a long-term national security threat to Russia than to Iran.<sup>319</sup>

Turkey came out as a potential country to host a missile defense shield system after the G-8 meeting in Germany on June 7, 2007. Putin offered to partner with the US on missile defense and suggested that ground-based missile defense interceptors could be placed in the south, in NATO allies such as Turkey.<sup>320</sup>

During the Obama administration, US missile defense policy shifted. After the meeting between Obama and Medvedev, the US and Russia agreed to conduct joint assessments of missiles challenges and threats in July 2009.<sup>321</sup> Russian officials concurred with the US and NATO threat assessments.<sup>322</sup> Thus, Obama abandoned the plan to establish a missile defense system in Europe in September 2009<sup>323</sup> to convince the Russian officials that missile defense system's primary goal was to confront Iran.<sup>324</sup>

Instead of a ground-based system, the Obama administration shifted to a sea-based system built around Aegis-equipped warships armed with the SM-3 missile. CFR stated that the new proposal might incorporate forward-based radar systems in Turkey

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<sup>317</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Turkey's Place in the 'Missile Shield'," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 15 no. 2 (2013): 225.

<sup>318</sup> Steven A. Hildreth and Carl Ek, "Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe," *Congressional Research Service*, April 26, 2010.

<sup>319</sup> Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russian Gen. Warns on Missile Defense," *Washington Post*, February 19, 2007.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>321</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Press Conference by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia," *The White House*, July 6, 2009.

<sup>322</sup> Richard Weitz, "Illusive Visions and Practical Realities: Russia, NATO and Missile Defence," *Survival* 52 no. 4 (2010): 100.

<sup>323</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Missile Defense Policy A Phased, Adaptive Approach for Missile Defense in Europe," *The White House*, September 17, 2009.

<sup>324</sup> Michael D. Shear and Ann Scott Tyson, "Obama Shifts Focus of Missile Defense," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2009.

in the near future.<sup>325</sup>

Later on, Turkey was more frequently mentioned in terms of the later phases of the missile defense system. For instance, a NATO research paper mentioned Turkey due to its geographic proximity to Iran about a month later Turkey vetoed a US-backed U.N. resolution to impose a new round of sanction on Iran.<sup>326</sup>

US officially started negotiations with Turkey with regard to placing a ground-based missile defense system inside Turkey in October 2010 as Defense Secretary Gates admitted.<sup>327</sup> Erdoğan stated that he was open to participating in US-led plans for a NATO missile defense shield if Ankara was granted control of the project.<sup>328</sup>

The NATO Lisbon summit in November 2010 resulted in Turkey agreeing to host the missile defense system within the Turkish soil. However, the official Summit Declaration did not identify a particular state considering that Turkey wanted to maintain its stable relations with Iran.<sup>329</sup>

In September 2011, as the Arab uprisings unveiled and Turkey's relations with Iran started deteriorating over Syria, the Turkish officials publicly stated that they backed NATO's missile defense shield program against Iran.<sup>330</sup> After two years of talks, Turkey agreed to the operation of a high-powered X-band radar station at Kürecik, Malatya on September 14, 2011, which went live in January 2012.<sup>331</sup>

Before the bilateral meeting between Obama-Erdoğan in New York, Obama thanked Erdoğan personally for agreeing to host a missile defense radar.<sup>332</sup> During his visit to the Middle East in December 2011, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta also underscored the importance of Turkey's hosting a missile defense radar and spoke of

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<sup>325</sup> James M. Goldgeier, "The Future of NATO," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Special Report no. 51, February 2010: 11.

<sup>326</sup> Stephan Frühling and Svenja Sinjen, "Missile Defense: Challenges and Opportunities for NATO," *NATO Defense College*, no. 60, July 2010.

<sup>327</sup> "Füze savunma sistemi için 2 şartımız var," *Habertürk*, October 14, 2010.

<sup>328</sup> "Turkey wants control in NATO missile shield-Erdoğan," *Reuters*, November 16, 2010.

<sup>329</sup> "Lisbon Summit Declaration," *NATO*, November 20, 2010; Steven A. Hildreth & Carl Ek, "Missile Defense and NATO's Lisbon Summit," *Congressional Research Service*, January 11, 2011: 5.

<sup>330</sup> "Turkey backs Nato missile defence shield against Iran," *The Telegraph*, September 2, 2011.

<sup>331</sup> Burcu Ceren Göynü, "Current Ballistic Missile Defense Program and Discussions in Turkey: NATO Missile Defense System and Turkey's Stance," *IFSH, IFAR Fact Sheet*, January 2013; "Turkey agrees to host U.S. radar site," *Washington Post*, September 15, 2011.

<sup>332</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey before Bilateral Meeting," *The White House*, September 20, 2011.

Turkey as “an important influence on the direction in the Middle East”.<sup>333</sup>

All in all, minor frictions between the US and Turkey in 2010 with regard to Iran and Israel dissipated quite swiftly since US-Turkish relations were built on a firm foundation. The disagreements between Turkish government and the Obama administration especially over Iran were resolved with Turkey’s decision to accept a missile defense radar in the Malatya province.

### 3.3. Arab Uprisings and US-Turkey convergence

As the uprisings in the Arab world started unfolding in December 2010, US-Turkish relations entered into a renewed period of partnership as opposed to the previous year. In 2011 and 2012, US-Turkey relations reached a peak point as the interests of US and Turkey converged during the initial phase of the Arab uprisings.

During the uprisings, the AKP government was supportive of regime changes across the Middle East. The AKP government sided with the opposition, with the movements that were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, considering that they had influence over the Muslim Brotherhood due to their common Islamist roots.<sup>334</sup>

On the other hand, the Obama administration was more cautious in its approach to the Arab uprisings especially at the very beginning. This caution stems from the fact that the Tunisian and Egyptian governments were considered US allies especially in its counterterrorism efforts.<sup>335</sup> Over time, the Obama administration became congruent with the Turkish administration, defending the ouster of existing regimes and becoming supportive of opposition movements.<sup>336</sup>

Arab uprisings became one of the major components of bilateral ties between two countries. Phone conversations between Obama and Erdoğan dramatically

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<sup>333</sup> “Part of NATO missile defense system goes live in Turkey,” *CNN*, January 16, 2012.

<sup>334</sup> Define Günay, “The Roles Turkey Played in the Middle East (2002-2016),” in *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach* ed. Pınar Gözen Ercan (Ankara, Palgrave MacMillan, 2017): 207.

<sup>335</sup> Mark L. Haas, *The United States and the Arab Spring: Threats and Opportunities in a Revolutionary Era* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2014): 13.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16.

increased. Increase in ties between US and Turkey in 2011 demonstrates that the US and Turkey were in full coordination in dealing with the upheaval in the Middle East.<sup>337</sup>

Initially, Obama was hesitant to express support for the protests in Tunisia. However, when the former President of Tunisia Ben Ali stepped down, the White House welcomed the outcome of the protests.<sup>338</sup> Likewise, the Turkish government officials also welcomed the shift of power in Tunisia, repeatedly underscoring the significance of implementing democratic reforms.<sup>339</sup>

In respect to the protests in Egypt, both the AKP government and the Obama administration were much more vocal and forthright in their support to the Egyptian protestors. In fact, it was revealed that the US had been secretly backing the rebel leaders behind the Egyptian uprising who had been planning regime change in Egypt for the past three years.<sup>340</sup> The AKP government and the Obama administration concurrently became supportive of regime change in Egypt although Erdoğan was more assertive in his stance compared to Obama's measured approach.<sup>341</sup>

In terms of US policy, Obama welcomed the resignation of Mubarak in Egypt.<sup>342</sup> It was later revealed that US groups that have ties to National Endowment for Democracy helped nurture Arab Uprisings. These groups played a key role in sparking the uprisings by financing and training groups that were involved in the revolts.<sup>343</sup>

In his speech on May 19, Obama spelled out the US policy towards the Arab uprisings, by expressing his outright support for the protestors across the Middle East,

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<sup>337</sup> Ramazan Gözen, "Türkiye'nin ABD Politikası 2011: Eşgüdüm ve Restorasyon Süreci," in *Türk Dış Politikası Yılı 2011*, ed. Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat & Ali Resul Usul (Ankara: SETA, 2011): 432-34.

<sup>338</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Events in Tunisia," *The White House*, January 14, 2011.

<sup>339</sup> Cenap Çakmak, "Türkiye'nin Tunus ve Libya Politikası 2011," in *Ibid.*, 348-49.

<sup>340</sup> Tim Ross, Matthew Moore and Steven Swinford, "Egypt protests: America's secret backing for rebel leaders behind uprising," *The Telegraph*, January 28, 2011.

<sup>341</sup> "Obama: I told Mubarak he must deliver on his promises," *CNN*, January 29, 2011; US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Egypt," *The White House*, February 1, 2011; Joshua Keating, "Erdoğan's Cairo Speech," *Foreign Policy*, February 2, 2011.

<sup>342</sup> "Obama's Remarks on the Resignation of Mubarak," *New York Times*, February 11, 2011.

<sup>343</sup> Ron Nixon, "U.S. Groups Helped Nurture Arab Uprisings," *New York Times*, April 14, 2011.

drifting away from the conventional US policy predicated upon counterterrorism, standing up for Israel's security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>344</sup>

On the other hand, the AKP's increasingly assertive stance in light of the uprisings in the Arab world caught the attention of the West and particularly the US media. For instance, *Foreign Policy* magazine regarded the AKP leadership, especially Erdoğan as a manifestation of "the Turks as Middle East kingmaker".<sup>345</sup>

As a result, the idea of Turkey as being a model was revived in the US in the sense that it could set an example, particularly for Egypt with its "robust democracy" and growing economy.<sup>346</sup> The AKP administration was put forward as a model to inspire the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.<sup>347</sup>

After Mubarak's resignation in Egypt on February 11, 2011, the idea of applying the Turkish model to the Arab world became even more prevalent.<sup>348</sup> According to this view, Turkey could provide a model of "how to reconcile a powerful military establishment with democracy, and a secular system with a religious orientation", while it could also be a model of economic success.<sup>349</sup> Not to mention, Turkish intellectuals in the West such as Elif Şafak also helped strengthen this notion of Turkey as a model to the Middle East.<sup>350</sup>

### 3.3.1. Erdoğan's "Arab Spring" Tour and The "Turkish Model" Revisited

In September 2011, PM Erdoğan's rising influence across the Arab world was consolidated with his "Arab Spring tour" to Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, where he was

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<sup>344</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa," *The White House*, May 19, 2011.

<sup>345</sup> Joshua Walker, "Return of the Turks as Middle East Kingmaker," *Foreign Policy*, February 3, 2011.

<sup>346</sup> Landon Thomas Jr., "In Turkey's Example, Some See Map for Egypt," *New York Times*, February 5, 2011; Ömer Taşpınar, "Egypt and the Turkish Model," *Brookings Institute*, February 7, 2011.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*; Tariq Ramadan, "Democratic Turkey Is the Template for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Huffington Post*, February 8, 2011; Sean Daly, "The Brotherhood's Big Brother?" *World Policy*, March 15, 2011.

<sup>348</sup> Frankie Martin, "Turkey can model democracy for the Arab world," *CNN*, February 16, 2011.

<sup>349</sup> Rashid Khalidi, "The Arab Spring," *The Nation*, March 3, 2011.

<sup>350</sup> Elif Şafak, "Finally, Turkey Looks East," *New York Times*, February 22, 2011.

warmly welcomed.<sup>351</sup> Erdoğan's growing influence across the region was portrayed in the US as Turkey's rising regional role and as an attempt to "bolster Turkey's standing as a potential role model for Arab states across the region".<sup>352</sup>

During his visit to Cairo, Erdoğan addressed the Egyptian people and laid special emphasis on his support for a secular Egypt in the post-Mubarak era.<sup>353</sup> Erdoğan's emphasis on secularism and democratic reforms was praised in the US.<sup>354</sup> He was not only named as the Person of the Year by TIME, but was also interviewed and appeared in the cover of TIME, which elaborated on his political success and Turkey's appeal to the Arab world by calling Turkey a "regional powerhouse".<sup>355</sup>

In April 2012, TIME named Foreign Minister Davutoğlu and Deputy PM Babacan among the most influential people in 2012, singling out Davutoğlu for his foreign policy initiatives and Babacan for his handling the economy. The article put forward Turkey as a model for economic growth and democratization.<sup>356</sup>

Then, Obama-Erdoğan meeting in New York to at the UNGA was particularly striking since Erdoğan indicated that the US and Turkey had been working together in dealing with the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and also underlined the importance of model partnership between the US and Turkey.<sup>357</sup> After that, two leaders met again in the G20 summit in the beginning of November.<sup>358</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, there were numerous reports about the robust relationship between the leaders Obama and Erdoğan.<sup>359</sup> David Ignatius reported that Obama and

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<sup>351</sup> Rania Abouzeid, "Why Turkey's Erdoğan Is Greeted Like a Rock Star in Egypt," *TIME*, September 13, 2011; "Erdoğan Tunus'ta sloganlarla karşılandı," *Al Jazeera Türk*, September 20, 2011; "Turkey PM hails 'sacrifice' of Libyan people," *Al Jazeera*, September 16, 2011.

<sup>352</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, "Premier of Turkey Takes Role in Region," *New York Times*, September 12, 2011; Gönül Tol, "Erdoğan's Arab Spring Tour," *Middle East Institute*, September 21, 2011.

<sup>353</sup> "Laiklik ateizm değil, korkmayın!" *Gazete Vatan*, September 14, 2011.

<sup>354</sup> Owen Matthews, "Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Pushes Democracy in Mideast," *The Daily Beast*, September 20, 2011; Bobby Ghosh, "Erdogan's moment," *TIME*, November 28, 2011.

<sup>355</sup> Nick Carbone, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: People's Choice for TIME's 2011 Person of the Year," *TIME*, December 12, 2011; Ishaan Tharoor, "Exclusive: TIME Meets Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *TIME*, September 26, 2011; Erdoğan's Way," *TIME*, November 28, 2011.

<sup>356</sup> Ayman Mohyeldin, "Ali Babacan and Ahmet Davutoğlu: Neo-Ottomans," *TIME*, April 18, 2012.

<sup>357</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey before Bilateral Meeting," *The White House*, September 20, 2011.

<sup>358</sup> Gözen, "Türkiye'nin ABD Politikası 2011: Eşgüdüm ve Restorasyon Süreci", 431.

<sup>359</sup> Soner Çağaptay, "Obama and Erdoğan find shared interests," *Washington Post*, November 11, 2011; David Ignatius, "Obama's friend in Turkey," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2012.

Erdoğan had 13 phone conversations in 2011, most of which was about the Arab uprisings.<sup>360</sup> Obama named Erdoğan among top five leaders that he was able to forge a relationship based on trust and confidence in early 2012.<sup>361</sup>

Apart from State Secretary Clinton's visit to Turkey to discuss the revolts in Syria, Vice President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta paid additional visits to Turkey in December 2011,<sup>362</sup> which marks the strong relationship between the US and Turkey with increased bilateral ties.

The Obama administration pursued a low profile while still having an influence on the events in the Middle East by supporting Turkey as its main regional ally. Erdoğan and the AKP was the perfect cut-out for the US as he and his party embodied the "Turkish model", "a strong Islamist governing party that is committed to the free market and backed by a solid pro-American military".<sup>363</sup>

Arab uprisings provided a big opportunity to realize the proposed model partnership between US and Turkey. Therefore, the concept was embraced in pro-AKP circles.<sup>364</sup> In that sense, Turkish model came to be at the core of the growing US-Turkish cooperation during the Arab uprisings especially in 2011 and 2012.<sup>365</sup>

### 3.3.2. Libyan intervention

Compared to Tunisia and Egypt, revolts in Libya did not bring about a smooth transition of power in the country. At some point, foreign intervention took place in order to put regime change into practice. In that sense, Libya was the first test case in the US-Turkey relationship during the Arab uprisings.

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<sup>360</sup> David Ignatius, "U.S. and Turkey find a relationship that works," *Washington Post*, December 7, 2011.

<sup>361</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "Inside Obama's World: The President talks to TIME About the Changing Nature of American Power," *TIME*, January 19, 2012.

<sup>362</sup> Gözen, "Türkiye'nin ABD Politikası 2011: Eşgüdüm ve Restorasyon Süreci", 431.

<sup>363</sup> Ignatius, "U.S. and Turkey find a relationship that works", 2011.

<sup>364</sup> Kadir Üstün, "US-Turkey Relations: Arab Spring and the Search for Model Partnership," *SETA*, May 2012.

<sup>365</sup> Bülent Alırza and Bülent Aras, "US-Turkish Relations: A Review at the Beginning of the Third Decade of the Post-Cold War Era," *Center for Strategic Research and Center for Strategic and International Studies*, November 2012: 8-9.

The protests in Libya began on February 17, 2011. What distinguished the uprisings in Libya from Tunisian and Egyptian experiences was that the events took a violent turn more quickly. From the beginning, the Gaddafi regime met the uprising with an extreme violence as the security forces treated the protestors as combatants.<sup>366</sup>

Obama was much fiercer in his response to the events in Libya. He condemned the ruling regime on February 23.<sup>367</sup> Then, two days later, he issued an executive order, imposing broad sanctions on Libya.<sup>368</sup> On February 27, Obama sharpened his stance further by calling on Gaddafi to step down from power.<sup>369</sup>

After the UNSC adopted a unanimous resolution that imposed arms embargo on Libya, targeted financial institutions and imposed travel bans against Gaddafi, calls for NATO to intervene in Libya became quite loud in the US especially with the urge of neo-conservative groups.<sup>370</sup> However, Erdoğan lashed out against these calls for NATO action.<sup>371</sup>

US policy-makers started weighing the possibility of US-led NATO action in Libya although the public was wary of intervention.<sup>372</sup> Obama was reluctant to discuss a no-flight zone in Libya in fear of “thrusting the US into a volatile situation in a region where foreign intervention was usually viewed as cynical neo-colonialism”.<sup>373</sup> The Turkish government continued its opposition to an interventionist approach.<sup>374</sup>

On March 17, UNSC approved “no-fly zone” over Libya and authorized “all necessary measures” to protect civilians, which paved the way for military action.<sup>375</sup> First, France and Britain took the lead in the military action in Libya.<sup>376</sup> Then, the

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<sup>366</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015):100-101.

<sup>367</sup> Ewen MacAskill, “Barack Obama tells Gaddafi: Libya violence must stop,” *Guardian*, February 24, 2011.

<sup>368</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order 13566 --Libya,” *The White House*, February 25, 2011.

<sup>369</sup> “Obama: Gaddafi must leave Libya now,” *Al Jazeera*, February 27, 2011.

<sup>370</sup> Jim Lobe, “US neo-cons urge Libya intervention,” *Al Jazeera*, February 27, 2011; Irwin Cotler and Jared Genser, “Libya and the Responsibility to Protect,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2011.

<sup>371</sup> “NATO’nun Libya’da ne işi var,” *NTV*, February 28, 2011.

<sup>372</sup> “Public Wary of Military Intervention in Libya,” *Pew Research Center*, March 14, 2011.

<sup>373</sup> Mark Landler, “Obama’s Choice: To Intervene or Not in Libya,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2011.

<sup>374</sup> Ayla Jean Yackley, “Turkey opposes any NATO operation in Libya,” *Reuters*, March 14, 2011.

<sup>375</sup> “Security Council Approves ‘No-Fly Zone’ Over Syria, Authorizing ‘All Necessary Measures’ to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favor with 5 Abstentions,” *UN Security Council*, 6498<sup>th</sup> Meeting, March 17, 2011.

<sup>376</sup> Michael Elliot, “Viewpoint: How Libya Became a French and British War,” *TIME*, March 19, 2011; Colin Freeman and Sean Rayment, “Libya: British forces fire missiles at Gaddafi,” *The Telegraph*, March 19, 2011.

Obama administration joined the military operations in Libya after Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice and Samantha Power advocated military action.<sup>377</sup>

Obama always underscored the limited nature of the US role in the Libyan intervention, distinguishing it from previous interventionist actions, for instance, in Iraq.<sup>378</sup> In that sense, US role in the Libyan intervention is widely viewed as an “humanitarian intervention” bound to the UN principle of “responsibility to protect”.<sup>379</sup>

US intervention in Libya also paved the way for the creation of the Obama Doctrine, which is deemed as “leading from behind”.<sup>380</sup> The phrase “leading from behind” is used to point out the limited nature of the US military intervention in Libya. The Libyan military intervention is defined as one of the pillars of the Obama administration’s foreign policy trajectory as it marked a peculiar moment for an administration that previously promised to reduce interventionist adventures.<sup>381</sup>

Despite its initial opposition, the Turkish government decided to join the coalition forces in Libya. Turkish government joined the NATO-led intervention with a deal struck between the US, Britain, France and Turkey.<sup>382</sup> The AKP government became fiercer in its stance as Erdoğan urged Gaddafi to quit in May.<sup>383</sup> Also, Libyan rebels were officially recognized by the Turkish government and Turkey offered \$ 200 million in aid to Libyan rebels in July.<sup>384</sup> In his speech at 66<sup>th</sup> UNGA, Erdoğan expressed his support for the National Transition Council in Libya.<sup>385</sup>

For the pro-government circles in Turkey, this back and forth in the Turkish administration’s stance towards Libya was rooted in the fact that Libya was one of the

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<sup>377</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Letter from the President regarding the commencement of operations in Libya,” *The White House*, March 21, 2011; John Avlon, “Libya Airstrikes: Hillary Clinton and the Women Who Called for War,” *The Daily Beast*, March 20, 2011.

<sup>378</sup> “Libya: Obama says US intervention will be limited,” *BBC News*, March 29, 2011.

<sup>379</sup> Simon Chesterman, “Leading from Behind: The Responsibility to Protect, the Obama Doctrine, and Humanitarian Intervention After Libya,” *New York University Public Law and Legal Theory Working Papers*, Paper 282 (2011).

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> Ryan Lizza, “Leading from Behind,” *The New Yorker*, April 26, 2011; Ryan Lizza, “The Consequentialist,” *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2011; Michael O’Hanlon, “Libya and the Obama Doctrine,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 31, 2011

<sup>382</sup> Ian Traynor and Nicholas Watt, “Libya: Nato to control no-fly zone after France gives way to Turkey,” *Guardian*, March 25, 2011.

<sup>383</sup> “Turkey’s PM Erdoğan urges Col Muammar Gaddafi to quit,” *BBC News*, May 3, 2011.

<sup>384</sup> “Turkey recognizes Libya rebels,” *Al Jazeera*, July 4, 2011.

<sup>385</sup> “Statement by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at 66<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly,” *Voltaire Network*, September 22, 2011.

major economic partners of Turkey and there were about 25.000 Turkish citizens, residing in Libya.<sup>386</sup> After all, the Turkish administration's evolving policy from being against a NATO intervention to becoming a partner in the NATO-led operation especially with its navy, strengthened its relations with the US.<sup>387</sup>

Upon the death of Gaddafi on October 20, 2011, Obama welcomed the fall of the Gaddafi regime.<sup>388</sup> However after the death of Gaddafi, Libyan descended into a prolonged civil war. Towards the end of his second term as President, Obama spoke of Libya as his worst mistake during his presidency since the US did not prepare for the aftermath of the Gaddafi regime.<sup>389</sup> Obama marking Libya as one of his worst mistakes is particularly important since the Obama administration took a different approach when it came to the uprisings in Syria.

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<sup>386</sup> Mustafa Akyol, "Turkey's Maturing foreign policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 2011.

<sup>387</sup> Sedat Ergin, "Erdoğan'ın Libya seyir defteri," *Hürriyet*, August 25, 2011.

<sup>388</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on the Death of Muammar Qaddafi," *The White House*, October 20, 2011.

<sup>389</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015; Nicholas Kristof, "Obama's Worst Mistake," *New York Times*, August 11, 2016.

#### 4. CHAPTER 4: SYRIAN CRISIS AND US-TURKISH RELATIONS: FROM CONVERGENCE TO DIVERGENCE (2011-2016)

The last chapter will expand on the Syrian crisis and its impacts on US-Turkish relations from 2011 to mid-2016. It will explain how Syria, formerly a secondary issue for bilateral ties between the countries, rose to prominence to determine the trajectory of US-Turkish relations in 2010s.

First of all, this chapter will enunciate the areas of convergence between the countries during the first phase of the uprising in Syria. In that sense, I will argue that the Turkish officials' negotiations with the Syrian officials took place with close US coordination. Moreover, the fourth chapter will discuss that the US and Turkey actively pursued a regime change policy that could have brought a shift of power in Syria by providing support for the Syrian opposition through non-lethal aid, arms support and diplomatic backing. During this phase, the US and Turkey also weighed options for military action but failed to come up with a joint viable plan because both sides were reluctant to take the lead in a military action that would lack international legitimacy.

On the other hand, the chapter will also touch on the growing divergence between the US and Turkey. As jihadists dominated the Syrian crisis, the US priorities changed while Turkey's regime change policy remained unchanged. US shifted focus in Syria after the Benghazi attack by designating Jabhat al-Nusra as a terrorist entity in December 2012. In regard to the Ghouta chemical attack in August 2013, US-Russian disarmament deal made it clear that US no longer pursued regime change in Syria.

Later on, with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014, the US focused exclusively on defeating the group. Kobane siege by ISIS fighters in October 2014 was a watershed moment because US started providing support for the PKK affiliate YPG (People's Protection Units). For the AKP government, YPG and the Assad regime were more important threats, so Turkey did not join the international coalition against ISIS until July 2015. The AKP government criticized US support for

the Syrian Kurdish militants whereas the US officials were increasingly skeptical of Turkey's role in the rise of ISIS.

Lastly, the Russian intervention in late-September 2015 reversed the course of the Syrian crisis to the benefit of the Syrian government as Russia air bombed extremist-held positions and opposition strongholds. The downing of the Russian jet on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 created tensions between Turkey and Russia while the US and NATO distanced itself from the spat between two countries.

Meanwhile, there were signs of increasing cooperation between the US and Russia since both countries prioritized combatting jihadist extremists, which dragged the Turkish administration into international isolation. At that point, the Turkish administration became fierce in its stance against the US policy of supporting the YPG while the US officials and media were not only in opposition to the AKP's Syria policy, but in its domestic policies in Turkey as well.

All in all, as of mid-2016, the AKP government gradually became anti-US during the course of the Syrian crisis whereas the US withdrew its entire support that it once gave to the Turkish government and regarded the AKP leadership as a failure in fulfilling its role in the Middle East as a "model".

#### 4.1. The Syrian Uprising and US-Turkish Convergence

Historically, Turkish-Syrian relations was contentious due to various factors such as the PKK, water dispute and the province of Hatay. Nevertheless, AKP's Syria policy was shaped in the light of its foreign policy vision of zero-problems with neighbors. Therefore, bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria considerably improved in the 2000s. For example, Turkish exports to Syria quadrupled between 2006-2010, visa requirements were dropped, and joint cabinet meetings were held.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> İmran Demir, *Overconfidence and Risk Taking in Foreign Policy Decision Making* (İstanbul: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 44.

US-Syrian relations were mostly divergent throughout history with rapprochements from time to time. Syria's close ties with Iran was a primary source of concern for the US. Furthermore, US State Department has designated Syria as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" since December 1979 and has repeatedly imposed sanctions on Syria.<sup>391</sup> In 2000s, the Bush administration identified Syria as a part of "Axis of Evil" after the assassination of Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri in 2005. Hence, the AKP's rapprochement with Syria was viewed with suspicion in the US.<sup>392</sup>

Before the uprising in Syria, the shift of power in the US in 2009 created an important opportunity for renewing US-Syrian relations. The Obama administration made significant efforts to revitalize US ties with Syria in the hopes of fostering an Israeli-Syrian peace deal over the Golan Heights and improving the US image in the Muslim world by holding mid-level diplomatic talks with their Syrian counterparts.<sup>393</sup>

Apart from that, the new US administration's efforts to normalize relations with Syria gave way to the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to give an interview to Wall Street Journal at the end of January 2011, where he promised political reforms in his country, one and a half month ahead of the Syrian uprising.<sup>394</sup>

However, when the uprisings spread all across Syria, the US and Syria were once again, butting heads. In general, Syria became a major area of convergence between the US and Turkey at least until the end of 2012. Syrian uprising was first viewed by the US and Turkish administrations through the lenses of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Washington and Ankara saw Syria as the next domino to fall. However, with the longevity of the Syrian conflict, US-Turkey convergence deteriorated rapidly from late-2012 onwards.<sup>395</sup>

During the first months of the uprising in Syria, the Turkish government took a mild stance, counting on the improved state of Turkish-Syrian relations that developed in the past decade. Turkish officials had talks with the Syrian government, believing

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<sup>391</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, March 3, 2010.

<sup>392</sup> Migdalovitz, "Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and U.S. Views," 2010.

<sup>393</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, September 14, 2009: 3-4.

<sup>394</sup> "Interview with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad," *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2011.

<sup>395</sup> Aliriza and Aras, "US-Turkish Relations", 9.

that they could convince Assad to implement democratic reforms or give way to a peaceful transition. As the unrest lingered on in Syria, the Turkish government became more vocal in its stance especially from August 2011 onwards.<sup>396</sup>

From the US perspective, the Obama administration left room for the Assad regime to remain in power if it implemented necessary democratic reforms. Like Turkey, the US became increasingly vocal in its stance against the Syrian regime as the unrest in Syria became more violent.<sup>397</sup> In general, US government counted on the Turkish administration to lead the events in Syria.<sup>398</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Turkish-Syrian Negotiations and US Coordination

US-Turkey cooperation over Syria began with the CIA Director Leon Panetta's secret visit to Ankara to discuss the events in Syria. During his visit, he met with MİT Undersecretary Hakan Fidan and officials from the General Staff.<sup>399</sup> At that time, Turkey started playing a mediating role in the Syrian uprising. Hakan Fidan met with Syrian President Assad in March and Davutoğlu met with him in early April.<sup>400</sup>

As the violence in the Syrian uprising escalated, the US gave its first concrete response to the increasing crackdown on Syrian protestors by imposing sanctions on Syria's intelligence agency and two of the relatives of the Syrian leader towards the end of April 2011.<sup>401</sup> In May, US imposed additional sanctions on the Syrian regime.<sup>402</sup>

The AKP government continued with its mediating endeavors. Davutoğlu called on the Syrian regime to deliver "shock therapy" reforms.<sup>403</sup> In addition, Erdoğan

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<sup>396</sup> Demir, *Overconfidence and Risk Taking in Foreign Policy Decision Making*, 45-46.

<sup>397</sup> Haas, 20.

<sup>398</sup> Tanış, "POTUS ve Beyefendi", 198-9.

<sup>399</sup> "CIA Director pays 'very secret' visit," *Daily Sabah*, April 26, 2011.

<sup>400</sup> "Herkesle konuşan adam: Davutoğlu," *En Son Haber*, April 6, 2011.

<sup>401</sup> Mark Hosenball & Matt Spetalnick, "U.S. slaps new sanctions on Syria over crackdown," *Reuters*, April 29, 2011.

<sup>402</sup> Steven Lee Myers and Anthony Shadid, "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Syrian Leader and 6 Aides," *New York Times*, May 18, 2011.

<sup>403</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Turkey Calls for Syrian Reforms on Order of 'Shock Therapy,'" *New York Times*, May 25, 2011.

had a phone conversation with Assad just after the AKP won a third term in the Turkish general elections on June 12, 2011.<sup>404</sup>

Meanwhile, the Turkish administration started playing an active role in the Syrian unrest through its tacit support to the Syrian opposition groups, increasingly critical stance against the Syrian regime and open-border policy.<sup>405</sup> It was clear in June that the AKP government started backing the Syrian opposition. For instance, Turkey hosted opposition meetings first in June 2011 in Antalya, and then in July in İstanbul.<sup>406</sup> The Obama administration's Syria policy was very much in line with the Turkish government. In that regard, US Ambassador to Syria played a decisive role in consolidating the US stance against the Syrian regime and rallying support for the Syrian opposition groups as he was greeted with roses in Hama.<sup>407</sup>

Even though there was a gradual rise in US opposition to the Syrian regime and support for the Syrian opposition, it was also reportedly said by the US policy-makers just before Clinton's Turkey visit that the US had no strategic policy towards Syria and it was not considered a major priority for the US.<sup>408</sup> On July 16, during her visit to Turkey, Clinton met with Davutoğlu in İstanbul to discuss the situation in Syria and in their public statement, they reassured that US and Turkey were in full coordination in Syria. Clinton warmly welcomed the Turkish role in giving a voice to the Syrian opposition by hosting events in Turkey.<sup>409</sup>

Further on, Erdoğan claimed that the turmoil in Syria became a domestic issue in early August 2011. Davutoğlu went to Damascus to meet with the Syrian leader Assad on August 9 to convince him to end the Syrian crackdown on protestors. The

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<sup>404</sup> "Erdiğan Esad'la telefonda görüşti," *En Son Haber*, June 14, 2011.

<sup>405</sup> "Turkish PM: Syria crackdown inhumane," *Al Jazeera*, June 10, 2011; Ian Black, "Turkey tells Bashar al-Assad to cease Syria repression," *Guardian*, June 23, 2011.

<sup>406</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syrian Opposition Meeting in Antalya: Day Two," *Syria Comment*, June 2, 2011; Joshua Landis, "Syrian 'National Salvation' Opposition Meeting in İstanbul: Opening Remarks and Mr Maleh," *Syria Comment*, July 16, 2011.

<sup>407</sup> Martin Chulov, "Syrian rebel city welcomes US ambassador with roses," *Guardian*, July 9, 2011; Mary Beth Sheridan, "Low-key U.S. diplomat transforms Syria policy," *Washington Post*, July 12, 2011.

<sup>408</sup> Tolga Tanış, "Şam santrancı," *Hürriyet*, July 15, 2011.

<sup>409</sup> US Department of State, "Joint Press Availability with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu," July 16, 2011.

meeting lasted more than 6 hours and resulted in failure as the Syrian leader emphasized that they were going to “press ahead its fight against militant Islamists”.<sup>410</sup>

This meeting was coordinated by US officials. They were in direct talks with Ankara as Clinton had a phone conversation with Davutoğlu just before the Davutoğlu-Assad meeting.<sup>411</sup> Davutoğlu-Assad meeting on August 9 marked the end of Turkey’s efforts in convincing the Syrian regime to stop the violence in Syria. On August 18, Obama called on Assad to step aside, along with other leaders in the West.<sup>412</sup>

#### 4.1.2. US-Turkish Support for the Syrian Opposition

From that point forward, US and Turkey reinforced their policies against the Assad regime and boosted their support for the Syrian opposition. In September, Syrian National Council was formed in İstanbul.<sup>413</sup> After the emergence of the Free Syrian Army (FSA),<sup>414</sup> which is an umbrella term for a myriad of opposition fighters and defectors from the Syrian Army, Turkey started sheltering opposition fighters in its own territory, including Riad al-Asaad, the commander of the FSA.<sup>415</sup>

US policy towards Syria was also getting more assertive. For instance, after a Syrian crowd stoned US envoy’s convoy, US withdrew its ambassador from Syria.<sup>416</sup> By September 2011, the US was convinced that President Assad’s removal from power in Syria was inevitable and it was getting ready for the post-Assad Syria.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Nada Bakri, “Turkish Prime Minister and Other Envoys Press Syrian Leader,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2011.

<sup>411</sup> “6 saatlik kritik görüşmeden ilk detaylar,” *Hürriyet*, August 9, 2011.

<sup>412</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria,” *The White House*, August 18, 2011; Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. and Allies Say Syria Leader Must Step Down,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2011.

<sup>413</sup> Şebnem Arsu, “Syrian Opposition Council Forms in İstanbul,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2011.

<sup>414</sup> Liz Sly, “In Syria, defectors form dissident army in sign uprising may be entering new phase,” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2011.

<sup>415</sup> Liam Stack, “In Slap at Syria, Turkey Shelters Anti-Assad Fighters,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2011.

<sup>416</sup> Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Syrian crowd stones U.S. envoy’s convoy,” *Reuters*, September 29, 2011; Ewan MacAskill, “Syria and US withdraw ambassadors,” *Guardian*, October 24, 2011.

<sup>417</sup> Helene Cooper, “U.S. Is Quietly Getting Ready for Syria Without Assad,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2011.

The failure of the UNSC to pass a resolution condemning human rights violations by the Syrian regime due to vetoes of China and Russia on October 4, 2011 meant that there wouldn't be any sanctions imposed by the UN, also hampering any future military action against the Assad regime.<sup>418</sup> This was a huge obstacle for the US and Turkey since any military action in Syria would lack international legitimacy.

Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes' endorsed Turkey's Syria policy in a statement where he warmly welcomed Turkey's firm stance against the Syrian regime's crackdown on protestors.<sup>419</sup> Then, Erdoğan urged Assad to quit in Syria towards the end of November.<sup>420</sup> Turkey also imposed sanctions on the Assad regime, which was praised by NSC Tommy Vietor.<sup>421</sup>

After the UNSC had failed to adopt another resolution condemning the Syrian regime for its violent repression, Clinton called for "friends of democratic Syria" to unite and rally against President Assad.<sup>422</sup> The first Friends of Syria meeting was on February 24, 2012 in Tunisia.<sup>423</sup> Then, Obama praised Turkey for hosting the next Friends of Syria meeting in Turkey after the meeting between Obama and Erdoğan in the nuclear security summit in Seoul on March 25, 2012.<sup>424</sup>

Further on, the White House Deputy National Security Advisor Dennis McDonough announced that the US and Turkey came up with a plan to provide "nonlethal" assistance like communications equipment and medical supplies, to Syrian opposition groups in March 2012.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> "Russia and China veto draft Security Council resolution on Syria," *UN News*, October 4, 2011.

<sup>419</sup> Palash Ghosh, "Turkey's War of Words Against Syria Intensifies," *International Business Time*, November 15, 2011; Jay Carney, "Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Jay Carney and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes," *American Presidency Project*, November 15, 2011.

<sup>420</sup> Şebnem Arsu, "Turkish Premier Urges Assad to Quit in Syria," *New York Times*, November 22, 2011.

<sup>421</sup> Tony Karon, "Syria Escapes U.N. Sanctions, But Not Turkey's," *TIME*, October 5, 2011; US Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by NSC Spokesman Tommy Vietor on Turkish Sanctions Against Syria," *The White House*, November 30, 2011.

<sup>422</sup> "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Syria as Russian Federation, China Veto Text Supporting Arab League's Proposed Peace Plan," *United Nations Meetings Coverage*, February 4, 2012; "Clinton: Friends of Syria unite," *Politico*, February 5, 2012.

<sup>423</sup> "Diplomats seek ways to end Syria bloodshed," *Al Jazeera*, February 24, 2012.

<sup>424</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey after Bilateral Meeting," *The White House*, March 25, 2012.

<sup>425</sup> Anne Barnard, "U.S. and Turkey to Step Up 'Nonlethal' Aid to Rebels in Syria," *New York Times*, March 25, 2012; Steven Lee Myers, "U.S. Joins Effort to Equip and Pay Rebels in Syria," *New York Times*, April 1, 2012.

Moreover, the Gulf states, Turkey and the US had created a joint initiative to funnel arms to the Syrian armed insurgency by establishing an arms pipeline to the Syrian opposition fighters.<sup>426</sup> CIA operated in southern Turkey in coordinating the arms transfer to Syrian rebels while Gulf states especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar directly funded and armed them.<sup>427</sup> New York Times reported in March 2013 that flights of arms cargo planes from Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Croatia to Turkey carried arms to Syria rebels throughout 2012 and 2013.<sup>428</sup>

Then, the Syrian government's downing of the Turkish fighter jet F-4 Phantom on June 22, 2012, was a stark reminder of the Syrian military's defense capabilities.<sup>429</sup> In response, the Turkish government called for a NATO meeting over Article 4 of the NATO charter.<sup>430</sup> NATO decided not to act, citing fears that it might get involved in a full-fledged war.<sup>431</sup> Also, the US was suspicious of the Turkish government's account as the US intelligence's findings were more in tune with Syria's official accounts.<sup>432</sup>

After that, the Turkish government found itself even more drawn into the Syrian crisis. The southern Turkish border served as a network for activists to smuggle supplies across the border, including weapons, communications gear and field hospitals and salaries for defected soldiers.<sup>433</sup> Turkey sent convoys of arms to its Syrian border almost a week after Syria downed the Turkish fighter jet.<sup>434</sup> By and large, parts of southern Turkey became buffer zones for Syrian rebels as they transported arms freely and brought their wounded people into the Turkish territory without any restrictions.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Karen DeYoung & Liz Sily, "Syrian rebels get influx of arms with gulf neighbors' money, U.S. coordination," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2012; Jay Solomon & Nour Malas, "U.S. Bolsters Ties to Fighters in Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2012.

<sup>427</sup>Eric Schmitt, "C.I.A. Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition," *New York Times*, June 21, 2012;

<sup>428</sup> C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Saudis Step Up Help for Rebels in Syria with Croatian Arms," *New York Times*, February 25, 2013; Richard Spencer, "US and Europe in major airlift of arms to Syrian rebels through Zagreb," *The Telegraph*, March 8, 2013; C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid from C.I.A.," *New York Times*, March 24, 2013.

<sup>429</sup> Greg Jaffe, "Syrian downing of Turkish jet serves as warning," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2012.

<sup>430</sup> "Turkey seeking NATO meeting after Syria shoots down military plane," *The Journal*, June 24, 2012.

<sup>431</sup> "NATO meets under Article 4 to discuss Turkey-Syria crisis," *NATO Watch Media Briefing*, June 26, 2012.

<sup>432</sup> "Doubts Cast on Turkey's Story of Jet," *Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 2012.

<sup>433</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "Turkish Border Is Crucial Link in Syria Conflict," *New York Times*, June 25, 2012.

<sup>434</sup> "Turkey sends convoys of arms to its Syrian border," *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 29, 2012.

<sup>435</sup> Deborah Amos, "Syrian Rebels Carve Buffer Zone Near Turkish Border," *NPR*, July 10, 2012.

More specifically, according to various reports published both in Turkish and international media, Apaydın camp in Hatay became one of the breeding grounds for Syrian rebels, where they were able to receive salaries, military equipment, training and medical treatment.<sup>436</sup> Also, a nerve center in Adana set up by Turkey with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, became a center for funneling aids and arms for the opposition.<sup>437</sup>

Meanwhile, peace talks over Syria led by UN peace envoy to Syria Kofi Annan ended in failure as Geneva Action Group failed to bring a consensus among the major world powers to implement a short-term ceasefire on June 30, 2012.<sup>438</sup> At that point, US doubled down on its efforts to provide aid to the rebels and rally a coalition of like-minded countries to forcibly bring down the Assad regime.<sup>439</sup> Thus, with the pressure of the Syrian Support Group, the Obama administration authorized clandestine financial and intelligence support for Syria rebels, especially the FSA.<sup>440</sup>

Obama and Erdoğan had a phone conversation in late-July 2012, where they decided to increase the level of contacts between the countries to ensure a democratic transition in Syria.<sup>441</sup> However, a photo released by the White House, showed that Obama was holding a baseball bat while talking with Erdoğan, which caused speculations that it might be interpreted as a warning to Erdoğan over Syria.<sup>442</sup>

Later on, the Syrian opposition formed a new umbrella organization called National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in the hopes of being more representative of the opposition fighters in Syria, which was granted recognition by US, Turkey and Friends of Syria.<sup>443</sup> The emergence of this new coalition

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<sup>436</sup> Ceyda Karaaslan, "Firari askerlerin harçlığı bizden," *Sabah*, February 19, 2012; Erdal Güven, "10 soruda Apaydın," *Hürriyet*, September 1, 2012; "Sınırdaki 30 generalli esrarengiz kamp," *Milliyet*, August 28, 2012; Richard Galpin, "Syria crisis: Turkey training rebels, says FSA fighter," *BBC News*, August 4, 2012.

<sup>437</sup> Regan Doherty and Amena Bakr, "Exclusive: Secret Turkish nerve center leads aid to Syria rebels," *Reuters*, July 27, 2012.

<sup>438</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce and Rod Nordland, "Talks Come Up With Plan for Syria, but Not For Assad's Exit," *New York Times*, June 30, 2012; John Hudson, "Why Did Kofi Anan Fail?" *The Atlantic*, August 2, 2012.

<sup>439</sup> Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper, "Stymied at U.N., U.S. Refines Plan to Remove Assad," *New York Times*, July 21, 2012.

<sup>440</sup> Mark Hosenball, "Obama authorizes secret support for Syrian rebels," *Reuters*, August 1, 2012.

<sup>441</sup> "Erdoğan ve Obama'nın Suriye kararı," *İnternet Haber*, July 31, 2012.

<sup>442</sup> "Telefondaki Erdoğan, elinde sopa!" *Posta*, August 1, 2012; "Masa altından sopa göstermek," *Hürriyet*, August 3, 2012.

<sup>443</sup> Neil MacFarquhar and Hala Droubi, "With Eye on Aid, Syrian Opposition Signs Unity Deal," *New York Times*, November 11, 2012; Şebnem Arsu & Tim Arango, "Turks Grant Recognition to Coalition of Syrians,"

was mostly sparked by State Secretary Clinton who sought to build a more effective broad opposition coalition against the Syrian government.<sup>444</sup>

#### 4.1.3. US-Turkish Bilateral Talks Over Syria Action

At the same time, the US and Turkey tried to come up with a viable military option to deal with the crisis in Syria as US-Turkish bilateral meetings and talks took place. US officials offered plans to their Turkish counterparts that projected a primarily Turkish military action in Syria. However, the US and Turkey could not agree on a plan as sides shifted the burden of a possible Syrian intervention to one another.

On February 13, 2012 Davutoğlu met with Clinton in Washington, where they promised to work together to increase pressure on Syria.<sup>445</sup> At the meeting, Clinton offered Davutoğlu a plan to form buffer zones in Syria that required the participation of seventy thousand Turkish military personnel. Turkish officials rejected the plan since they were not eager to participate in a military action without the US in the lead.<sup>446</sup>

The military option was off the table for the US from early 2012 onwards as the US Army General Martin Dempsey explained that establishing a no-fly zone would require 70 thousand military personnel in a presentation that he made to Cabinet members, which would engulf the US in another complicated war in the Middle East.<sup>447</sup> At that point, the US scratched out the military option in Syria.

As battles between rebels and Assad's forces shook Aleppo and Damascus in mid-2012, the US and Turkey started studying a variety of measures over Syria, including a no-fly zone. Establishing a no-fly zone, buffer zone or safe zone in northern

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*New York Times*, November 15, 2012; Jill Dougherty, "Obama recognizes Syrian opposition coalition," *CNN*, December 12, 2012; "Friends of Syria recognize opposition," *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2012.

<sup>444</sup> Mike Giglio, "Why Hillary Clinton Snubbed the Syrian National Council on İstanbul Visit," *The Daily Beast*, August 14, 2012; Neil MacFarquhar and Michael R. Gordon, "As Fighting Rages, Clinton Seeks New Syrian Opposition," *New York Times*, October 31, 2012.

<sup>445</sup> "Joint Press Conference by Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State of the US, 13 February 2012, Washington," *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

<sup>446</sup> Tolga Tanış, "Geçen sene Hillary Ankara'ya tampon bölge de önerdi," *Hürriyet*, April 8, 2013.

<sup>447</sup> Mark Mazzetti, Robert F. Worth and Michael R. Gordon, "Obama's Uncertain Path Amid Syria Bloodshed," *New York Times*, October 22, 2013.

Syria would become a fixation of the Turkish government's ambitious Syria policy as it would be brought up numerous times before the US officials in the coming years.

After the bilateral meeting between Davutoğlu and Clinton in İstanbul on August 2012, 2012, Clinton said that US and Turkey were developing an operational mechanism on ways to assist Syria rebels.<sup>448</sup> As the first step, a meeting was held in Ankara between the Turkish committee and the US committee. During this meeting the central focus was the Syrian regime's chemical weapons arsenal after Obama threatened force against Syria in August 2012 if chemical weapons were used.<sup>449</sup>

On September 18, 2012, Dempsey met with his Turkish counterpart Necdet Özel to discuss the cooperation between the US and Turkey, emphasizing the similar approaches of two countries in Syria.<sup>450</sup> Under this operational mechanism, a US committee comprised of a group of 20 military personnel was sent to Turkey and Diyarbakır was chosen as the epicenter of possible military operations in Syria.<sup>451</sup>

To be clear, the US never considered engaging in a military action against the Syrian regime and was only interested in helping Turkey to carry out a military operation in Syria. However, the Turkish side was cool on a Turkish-led military action. Instead, they tried to get the US on board to lead a military operation in Syria.<sup>452</sup>

Davutoğlu and Clinton spoke on the phone after the Syrian shelling inside in Akçakale that killed five civilians in October.<sup>453</sup> After this incident, Turkey stroke back and the Turkish parliament passed a motion that allowed the government to carry out cross-border military operations in Syria.<sup>454</sup>

Then, Turkey asked NATO for missile defense against Syria and NATO Ambassadors met in late-October to consider a Turkish request for the deployment of

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<sup>448</sup> "Clinton ve Davutoğlu'ndan Esad'ı kızdıracak açıklama," *Hürriyet*, August 11, 2012; Hadeel Al Shalchi, "U.S., Turkey to study Syria no-fly zone," *Reuters*, August 11, 2012.

<sup>449</sup> Mark Landler, "Obama Threatens Force Against Syria," *New York Times*, August 20, 2012; "Operasyonel Mekanizma işlemeye başladı," *Akşam*, August 24, 2012.

<sup>450</sup> American Forces Press Service, "U.S., Turkish Leaders Discuss Syrian War, Region," *US Department of Defense*, September 18, 2012.

<sup>451</sup> "Operasyonel mekanizmada ilk adım," *Hürriyet*, October 31, 2012.

<sup>452</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 212.

<sup>453</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "Clinton and Davutoğlu discuss Turkey-Syria cross-border violence," *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2012.

<sup>454</sup> Tim Arango and Anne Barnard, "Turkey Strikes Back After Syrian Shelling Kills 5 Civilians," *New York Times*, October 3, 2012; "Suriye tezkeresi meclisten geçti," *NTV*, October 4, 2012.

Patriot missiles near Turkey's border with Syria.<sup>455</sup> In December 2012, the US authorized the deployment of 400 troops for two Patriot missile-defense batteries along Turkey's border with Syria.<sup>456</sup>

Nevertheless, the US was becoming warier of Turkish ambitions in Syria as the Turkish administration became increasingly fixated on forcibly removing the Assad regime from power. In that regard, the AKP government officials repeatedly miscalculated the downfall of the Assad regime.<sup>457</sup>

The AKP government made major strategic errors by persistently misreading the US policy towards Syria. Erdoğan claimed that the US presidential election in November 2012 hampered US action in Syria.<sup>458</sup> Also, the AKP administration became critical of US stance towards Syria due to US inaction.<sup>459</sup>

#### 4.2. The Syrian Crisis and US-Turkish Divergence

Even though Syria policies of the US and Turkey converged throughout most of 2011 and 2012, the prolongation of the Syrian crisis gradually turned out to be a wedge between the countries in late-2012.<sup>460</sup> The AKP administration was very much fixated on toppling the Assad regime while the US policy's major focus gradually shifted towards tackling the jihadist groups in Syria.<sup>461</sup>

From 2012 onwards, global jihadist elements have infiltrated the ranks of the Syrian armed insurgency with the militarization of the conflict. For instance, AQ affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra (JAN) announced its formation on January 24, 2012.<sup>462</sup> Right

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<sup>455</sup> Sebastian Moffett and Nick Tattersall, "Turkey asks NATO for missile defense against Syria," *Reuters*, November 21, 2012.

<sup>456</sup> Ernesto Londono, "U.S. troops will man Patriot batteries along Turkey's border with Syria," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2012.

<sup>457</sup> Tolga Tanış, "6 haftada gider," *Hürriyet*, November 17, 2011; "Davutoğlu Esad'a ömür biçti," *NTV*, August 24, 2012; "Erdoğan'dan önemli mesajlar," *Hürriyet*, September 5, 2012; Tolga Tanış, "6 ayda düşecek," *Hürriyet*, January 17, 2013.

<sup>458</sup> "Turkey PM: U.S. lacks initiative on Syria," *CNN*, September 5, 2012.

<sup>459</sup> Semih İdiz, "ABD Suriye'ye niçin müdahale etmiyor," *Milliyet*, August 9, 2012.

<sup>460</sup> Soner Çağaptay, "Syria is a wedge between U.S. and Turkey," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2012.

<sup>461</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 195-235.

<sup>462</sup> Elizabeth O'Bagy, "Jihad in Syria," Middle East Security Report 6 (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2012): 31.

from the beginning, US officials were wary of the jihadist presence in Syria as US National Intelligence Director James R. Clapper laid emphasis on AQ infiltrating the Syrian opposition in late-January 2012.<sup>463</sup>

Right from the beginning, the US officials were hesitant about directly arming the Syrian opposition. Apparently, this hesitant US approach was rooted in concerns about jihadist presence in Syria. For instance, State Secretary Clinton expressed these worries by claiming that arming Syria rebels could help AQ in Syria.<sup>464</sup>

Besides, Human Rights Watch reported in March 2012 that the Syrian armed opposition groups were committing human rights abuses including kidnappings, forced confessions and executions.<sup>465</sup> By mid-2012, media outlets in the US started raising suspicions about the integrity of the Syrian opposition, especially the FSA and ringing the alarm bells about the new deadly role of AQ affiliate JAN in Syria.<sup>466</sup> An article published in BI indicates a growing consensus in the US that AQ affiliates were increasingly influential in the Syrian conflict.<sup>467</sup>

Later in July 2012, New York Times revealed that the Obama administration was very much reluctant to arm Syria rebels due to the US inability to fill in intelligence gaps about the activities of the Syrian opposition. An administration official explicitly stated that “there could be a number of extremist elements” in Syria.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> James R. Clapper, “Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, January 31, 2012; Greg Miller, “Al-Qaeda infiltrating Syrian opposition, U.S. officials say,” *Washington Post*, February 16, 2012.

<sup>464</sup> Wyatt Andrews, “Clinton: Arming Syrian rebels could help al Qaeda,” *CBS News*, February 27, 2012.

<sup>465</sup> “Syria: Armed Opposition Groups Committing Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 20, 2012.

<sup>466</sup> John Hudson, “The Rogue Terrorist Group Tearing Syria Apart,” *The Atlantic*, May 11, 2012; Tyler Golson, “The Civil War in the Syrian Opposition: How Long Can the Free Syrian Army Hold Off Its Islamist Rivals,” *The New Republic*, June 25, 2012; Rod Nordland, “Al Qaeda Taking Deadly New Role in Syria’s Conflict,” *New York Times*, July 24, 2012.

<sup>467</sup> Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda in Syria: Jihadists Use Chaos in Arab Awakening,” *Brookings Institute*, August 28, 2012.

<sup>468</sup> Greg Miller and Joby Warrick, “In Syria conflict, U.S. struggles to fill intelligence gaps,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2012.

#### 4.2.1. Benghazi Attack, the Jihadist Surge in Syria and Changing US Priorities

What sparked the major shift in US policy towards Syria and the Arab uprisings, was the Benghazi attack in Libya on September 11, 2012, where 4 US officials, including the US ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens were killed as a result of Islamist militants' attacks in the US embassy.<sup>469</sup>

The underlying importance of the Benghazi attack was that it sparked a huge debate around the pillars of US policy towards the Arab uprisings. There were growing suspicions about CIA operating in the US embassy in Benghazi with regard to arms shipments from Libya to Syrian rebels, in which the former US ambassador Stevens was personally involved.<sup>470</sup>

As a consequence, the major concern of the US officials with regard to the Arab uprisings became whether military aid to Libya and Syria fell into jihadists' hands. For example, Pentagon officials expressed their fear about the dangers of arms proliferation in Syria's conflict by saying that arms "could fall into wrong hands".<sup>471</sup> Similarly, New York Times reported that the US officials concluded that arms flow from Saudi Arabia and Qatar to Syrian rebels benefited hardline jihadists.<sup>472</sup>

After reports of alarming growth within the ranks of AQ linked fighters, US State Department blacklisted JAN as a terrorist organization, a major shift in US policy in Syria.<sup>473</sup> This was also the first time when Syria policies of the US and Turkey started

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<sup>469</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Myers, "Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.," *New York Times*, September 12, 2012.

<sup>470</sup> Michael B. Kelley, "How US Ambassador Chris Stevens May Have Been Linked to Jihadist Rebels in Syria," *Business Insider*, October 19, 2012; Pamela K. Browne and Catherine Herridge, "Was Syrian weapons shipment factor in ambassador's Benghazi visit," *Fox News*, October 25, 2012; Michael B. Kelley, "There's a Reason Why All of the Reports about Benghazi Are So Confusing," *Business Insider*, November 3, 2012; Rania Abouzeid, "Arming Syria's Rebellion: How Libyan Weapons and Know-How Reach Anti-Assad Fighters," *TIME*, May 29, 2013; Damien McElroy, "CIA running arms smuggling team in Benghazi when consulate was attacked," *The Telegraph*, August 2, 2013.

<sup>471</sup> Spencer Ackerman, "Pentagon Fears Syrian Rebel Weapons Pose Proliferation Risk," *Wired*, October 15, 2012.

<sup>472</sup> David E. Sanger, "Rebel Arms Flow Is Said to Benefit Jihadists in Syria," *New York Times*, October 14, 2012.

<sup>473</sup> Tim Arango, Anne Barnard and Hwaida Saad, "Syrian Rebels Tied to Al Qaeda Play Key Role in War," *New York Times*, December 8, 2012; US Department of State, "Terrorist Designation of the al-Nusra Front as an Alias for al-Qa'ida in Iraq," *Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism*, December 11, 2012.

diverging as the Turkish administration openly objected to the US decision to designate JAN as a terrorist group.<sup>474</sup>

It can be claimed that CIA and the director of the agency David Petraeus were held responsible for the killing of 4 US officials. Wall Street Journal asserted that the US embassy in Benghazi was operating as a covert CIA unit that functioned as a center for funneling aids to Syria.<sup>475</sup> Not to mention, as a result of the resignation of CIA director David Petraeus over extramarital affair, it was reported that Petraeus did not have to testify before a congressional hearing on the Benghazi attack.<sup>476</sup>

In addition, four US State Department officials resigned owing to an investigation into the Benghazi attack.<sup>477</sup> Hillary Clinton also stepped down as State Secretary on February 1, 2013 after she vigorously defended her actions before and after Libya attack during a day of testimony before Senate and House committees.<sup>478</sup> It was argued that her resignation was tied to her role in the Benghazi attack.<sup>479</sup>

Resignations following the Benghazi attack revealed the rift in Syria policy of the US. In summer 2012, CIA director Petraeus and State Secretary Clinton came up with a plan to arm Syrian rebels by vetting and training rebel groups. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta admitted that he and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey supported this plan, but it was rejected by the White House.<sup>480</sup>

From 2013 onwards, US approach to the Arab uprisings gradually shifted from democracy promotion and regime change in 2011 and 2012 to a narrower sense of preserving US national interests in the Middle East by primarily focusing on combatting violent extremists in the region.

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<sup>474</sup> Nihal Bengisu Karaca, "El Kaide'nin Suriye'de esamisi okunmaz," *Habertürk*, November 30, 2012.

<sup>475</sup> Adam Entous, "CIA Takes Heat for Role in Libya," *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2012.

<sup>476</sup> Ewen MacAskill, "CIA director David Petraeus resigns over unacceptable extramarital affair," *Guardian*, November 9, 2012.

<sup>477</sup> Chris McGreal, "Benghazi report forces resignation of four US state department officials," *Guardian*, December 20, 2012.

<sup>478</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "Facing Congress, Clinton Defends Her Actions Before and After Libya Attack," *New York Times*, January 23, 2013.

<sup>479</sup> Larry Bell, "More Evidence of Deadly Benghazi Screw-Up Found Under Oval Office Rug," *Forbes*, April 28, 2013.

<sup>480</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler, "Backstage Glimpses of Clinton as Dogged Diplomat, Win or Lose," *New York Times*, February 2, 2013; Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler, "Senate Hearing Draws Out a Rift in U.S. Policy on Syria," *New York Times*, February 7, 2013; Adam Entous, "Inside Obama's Syria Debate," *Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2013.

Besides, Syria started losing its significance for the US policy in the Middle East. This dramatic shift can be seen in Obama's speech in the UNGA on September 24, 2013, where he named Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the Arab-Israeli peace process as pillars of the US policy in the region. It is particularly striking that he did not name Syria as a priority. Obama also underlined the rising influence of AQ affiliated extremist groups in the region as a growing threat.<sup>481</sup>

This dramatic change can also be attributed to the new national security team in Obama's second term comprised of national security advisors Denis R. McDonough, who was regarded as one of the closest US officials to President Obama, and Tom Donilon as they were both very skeptical of further US involvement in Syria.<sup>482</sup>

National Security Advisor Susan Rice further elaborated on changing US Middle East policy by emphasizing that "Obama's goal was to avoid having events in the Middle East swallow his foreign policy agenda as it had those of presidents before him".<sup>483</sup> It is appropriate to claim that Middle East was no longer the major focus of the US foreign policy agenda from 2013 onwards owing to the increasing instability of the region, which would also negatively affect its relations with Turkey.

#### 4.2.2. Chemical Weapons Conundrum

Throughout 2013, the chemical weapons controversy considerably shaped the trajectory of the Syrian crisis. Although the US and Turkey appeared to be on the same page on this issue, chemical attacks in Syria ultimately sparked a major divergence between the US and Turkey.

After President Obama warned the Syrian regime against the use of chemical weapons in August 2012, chemical weapons debate started dominating the agenda in

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<sup>481</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly," *The White House*, September 24, 2013.

<sup>482</sup> Mazzetti, Worth and Gordon, "Obama's Uncertain Path Amid Syria Bloodshed," October 22, 2013.

<sup>483</sup> Mark Landler, "Rice Offers a More Modest Strategy for Mideast," *New York Times*, October 26, 2013.

the Syrian conflict. Obama reiterated a similar sentiment in December 2012.<sup>484</sup> In January 2013, according to a secret US State Department cable, US diplomats in Turkey conducted an investigation into the allegations on use of chemical weapons in Syria whose conclusion was that the Syrian military used chemical weapons against its own people in Homs on December 23, 2012.<sup>485</sup>

Another chemical weapons attack speculation struck the news on March 19, 2013, where the Syrian government and Syrian rebels traded accusations over the allegations about the chemical weapons attack in Khan al-Assal region, north of Aleppo.<sup>486</sup> US officials' preliminary conclusion indicated that there was no substantial evidence that indicated chemical weapons use by either side in Khan al-Assal region.<sup>487</sup>

With false allegations about chemical attacks, the murky nature of chemical attacks sparked suspicions on the part of the US officials. The White House letter to Congressional leaders, signed by the legislative director Miguel E. Rodriguez, revealed this suspicious outlook since it underscored that "intelligence assessments alone were not sufficient to guide their decision-making".<sup>488</sup> Obama made a similar remark by asserting that the evidence of chemical weapons use was still preliminary.<sup>489</sup>

Meanwhile, the Turkish administration devised its strategy to pressure the US over Syrian chemical attacks. Turkey started calling on the US administration to act on Syria on the grounds that the Syrian government violated Obama's red line. Erdoğan stated that his administration would back a US-led no-fly zone in Syria and he told the US media that he had evidence that the Syrian regime employed chemical weapons.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Mary Bruce, "Obama Warns Syria Use of Chemical Weapons Totally Unacceptable," *ABC News*, December 3, 2012; "Syria Poised to Use Chemical Weapons; US Officials," *CNBC News*, December 5, 2012.

<sup>485</sup> Josh Rogin, "Exclusive: Secret State Department cable: Chemical weapons used in Syria," *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2013.

<sup>486</sup> "Syrians trade Khan al-Assal chemical weapons claims," *BBC News*, March 19, 2013.

<sup>487</sup> Barbara Starr, Chelsea J. Carter and Amir Ahmed, "Official, 'Something went down in Syria, but it was short of chemical weapons,'" *CNN*, March 22, 2013.

<sup>488</sup> "A Letter from Miguel E. Rodriguez to Senator Carl Levin," *The White House*, April 25, 2013, Washington DC.

<sup>489</sup> Matt Spetalnick and Jeff Mason, "Obama talks tough, shows no rush to act on Syria chemical arms evidence," *Reuters*, April 27, 2013.

<sup>490</sup> "Turkey would support U.S.-led no-fly zone in Syria: NBC," *Reuters*, May 9, 2013; "Turkey claims evidence of Syrian chemical weapons use," *BBC News*, May 11, 2013.

In the meantime, the Syrian conflict started having spillover effects in Turkey with the Reyhanlı bombings on May 11, 2013. First, the AKP government blamed the Syrian government.<sup>491</sup> However, after the Reyhanlı bombings, Turkish authorities commenced an operation against JAN, who was preparing for an attack in Adana, and they captured 2 kgs. of sarin gas in Adana.<sup>492</sup> It was later admitted by the Turkish diplomat Tacan İldem that AQ was behind the Reyhanlı bombings.<sup>493</sup>

Before the Obama-Erdoğan meeting in Washington on May 16, 2013, Tolga Tanış from *Hürriyet* claimed that the Turkish administration's agenda for the meeting was to persuade the US government to set up a no-fly zone or a buffer zone; and give military aid to Syria rebels. However, the US officials were cool on all of these suggestions.<sup>494</sup> Furthermore, former US Ambassadors to Turkey, Morton Abramowitz and Eric Edelman expressed the rising US concerns over the Turkish government's policy of pursuing a sectarian religious agenda in Syria.<sup>495</sup>

The meeting between Obama and Erdoğan was one of the most comprehensive bilateral meetings between two countries as high-level officials from both sides attended the meeting. On the surface, meeting between the US administration and the Turkish administration went well as Obama and Erdoğan stated that the US and Turkey were working together in Syria in their joint press briefing.<sup>496</sup>

Nevertheless, there were also wide-spread speculations that it was one of the tensest meetings between Obama and Erdoğan. The fact that it was the last bilateral meeting Obama and Erdoğan in Washington in and of itself had a lot to say about how the meeting actually went. The major focus of the meeting was the use of chemical

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<sup>491</sup> Kareem Fahim and Şebnem Arsu, "Car Bombings Kill Dozens in Center of Turkish Town Near the Syrian Border," *New York Times*, May 11, 2013; Liz Sly, "Turkey says bombing suspects are linked to Syria," *Washington Post*, May 12, 2013.

<sup>492</sup> "Adana'da El Nusra Operasyonu," *Radikal*, May 30, 2013; "Turkey arrests 12 in raids on terrorist organization," *Reuters*, May 30, 2013; "Reyhanlı patlamasından 300 kat daha büyük olacaktı," *Hürriyet*, June 1, 2013; Karen Hodgson, "The Al Qaeda Threat in Turkey," *Long War Journal*, July 8, 2013.

<sup>493</sup> Tülin Daloğlu, "Turkey admits Reyhanlı was attacked by al-Qaeda," *Al Monitor*, April 4, 2014.

<sup>494</sup> Tolga Tanış, "Kıran kırana Suriye pazarlığı," *Hürriyet*, May 12, 2013; Tolga Tanış, "Erdoğan'ın Washington ziyaretinin şifreleri," *Hürriyet*, May 14, 2013.

<sup>495</sup> Morton Abramowitz and Eric Edelman, "Needed: A Turkish-American Plan for Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 2013.

<sup>496</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Joint Press Conference by President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan of Turkey," *The White House*, May 16, 2013.

weapons in Syria and Erdoğan with the help of MIT undersecretary Hakan Fidan tried to make the case for a US-led no-fly zone or safe zone or providing military aid to the Syrian opposition.<sup>497</sup> Seymour M. Hersh claimed that during the meeting, after Erdoğan insisted that Obama's red line was crossed, Obama pointed at Hakan Fidan and said, "We know what you're doing with the radicals in Syria".<sup>498</sup>

From then on, bilateral contacts between the US and Turkey significantly diminished. In fact, there were clear signs in the US that Turkey's increasingly ambitious Syria policy started posing a security threat for the US, who started seeing jihadists' rising influence in the Syrian crisis as a bigger threat than the Assad regime.

For example, Wall Street Journal published an article which was highly critical of the Turkish intelligence undersecretary Hakan Fidan's role in shaping Turkey's Syria policy, criticizing the Turkish administration's ambitious policy of arming the Syrian opposition. The article laid special emphasis on the fact that the US sent a clear message to the AKP government during the Obama-Erdoğan meeting on May 16, 2013 about its concerns of Turkey's role in the strengthening of radical jihadists in Syria.<sup>499</sup>

On the other hand, there was increasing pressure on the US administration to arm the Syrian rebels. As Obama's red line put him on tough spot over Syria action, he was leaning on the direction to arm Syrian rebels, a policy that he formerly rejected. White House officials were more open to the idea of arming Syrian rebels since they said that they were confident of General Salim İdris, the commander of the rebels' Supreme Military Council in Syria, who rejected ties to groups linked to AQ.<sup>500</sup>

Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes announced that US intelligence community had a high-confidence assessment that chemical weapons have been used on a small scale by the Assad regime in Syria on June 13, 2013 and therefore, US

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<sup>497</sup> Tolga Tanış, "Kimyasalı dosya ile anlattılar," *Hürriyet*, May 18, 2015.

<sup>498</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "The Red Line and the Rat Line," *London Review of Books*, April 17, 2014.

<sup>499</sup> Adam Entous and Joe Parkinson, "Turkey's Spymaster Plots Own Course on Syria," *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2013.

<sup>500</sup> Peter Baker, Mark Landler David E. Sanger and Anne Barnard, "Off-the-Cuff Obama Line Put U.S. in Bind on Syria," *New York Times*, May 4, 2013; Liz Sly, "Defected Syrian general will be conduit for U.S. military aid to rebels," *Washington Post*, June 16, 2013.

approved a CIA-led operation to arm Syria rebels through Turkey and Jordan.<sup>501</sup> It was later revealed by New York Times that Obama had secretly approved arming Syrian rebels earlier in April 2013, but they chose not to make the plan public until they were confident that the Assad regime used chemical weapons against its own people.

Another underlying reason behind this reverse decision to arm Syrian rebels was due to the US spy agencies' assessments about the Syrian government gaining the grounds with the increasing support of Hezbollah and the Iranian regime. After intense lobbying in favor of arming Syria rebels from Israel and Jordan, former skeptics of arming Syrian rebels, national security advisors Tom Donilon, Denis R. McDonough and Susan Rice changed course and backed a plan to arm Syrian rebels in order to push back against the gains of Hezbollah and Iran in Syria.<sup>502</sup>

One of the biggest challenges for the US policy in Syria emerged with Ghouta chemical attack on August 21, 2013. In response, the Obama administration started considering the option for limited strikes against Syria. However, the Turkish administration was skeptical of this option, finding limited strikes insufficient.<sup>503</sup> However, the option for limited air strikes against the Syrian regime reached a stalemate when Obama sought congressional approval for the operation as US Congress was skeptical of strikes on Syria.<sup>504</sup>

Further on, State Secretary John Kerry made a statement that Syrian surrender of chemical arms could stop US strikes against Syria, which gave way to a US-Russia deal to destroy Syria's chemical arms arsenal.<sup>505</sup> However, the Turkish administration was critical of the US-Russia deal as Erdoğan claimed that Assad was buying time with

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<sup>501</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syrian Chemical Weapons Use," *The White House*, June 13, 2013; Greg Miller and Joby Warrick, "CIA preparing to deliver rebels arms through Jordan and Turkey," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2013.

<sup>502</sup> Mazzetti, Worth and Gordon, "Obama's Uncertain Path Amid Syria Bloodshed," October 22, 2013.

<sup>503</sup> Thomas Shanker, C. J. Chivers and Michael R. Gordon, "Obama Weighs 'Limited' Strikes Against Syrian Forces," *New York Times*, August 27, 2013; "Erdoğan: Sınırlı müdahale bize yetmez," *Radikal*, August 30, 2013.

<sup>504</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on Syria," *The White House*, August 31, 2013; Patrick Reis, "Obama Says He Doesn't Need Congress' Permission to Strike Syria, So Why is He Asking for It?" *The Atlantic*, August 31, 2013; Matt Spetalnick and Patricia Zengerle, "Obama and aides confront skeptical Congress on Syria strike," *Reuters*, September 1, 2013.

<sup>505</sup> Harriet Alexander, "Syria: If Bashar al-Assad hands over chemical weapons we will not attack, says John Kerry," *The Telegraph*, September 9, 2013; Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. and Russia Reach Deal to Destroy Syria's Chemical Arms," *New York Times*, September 14, 2013.

this chemical disarmament deal.<sup>506</sup> Erdoğan also criticized the remarks of State Secretary Kerry giving credit to the Syrian leader for his compliance in the deal.<sup>507</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Trilateral Issues in US-Turkish Ties: The Fall of the “Turkish Model”

Domestic and regional political developments increasingly came out as manifestations of the growing estrangement between the US and Turkey. In that sense, Gezi Park protests, the Egyptian coup d'état, the corruption scandal in Turkey and Turkey's regime change policy in Syria created a rupture in US-Turkish ties in 2013. US officials gradually stopped seeing the AKP as a credible regional actor, giving up on the idea of Turkey as a model whereas the AKP government adopted a conspiratorial viewpoint, blaming foreign powers, especially the US for political developments that undermined its authority both at home and abroad.

Shortly after the Obama-Erdoğan meeting in Washington, Gezi Park protests erupted in late-May 2013, a series of protests to contest the urban development plan for İstanbul's Taksim Gezi Park. Protests sparked a major rift between the US and Turkey as US officials started seeing the AKP government as a liability rather than an asset.<sup>508</sup> US officials expressed their concerns over the Turkish security forces' harsh response to protestors, supporting the protestors' freedom of expression.<sup>509</sup> Gezi Park protests also dragged the AKP government into a conspiratorial mindset, blaming foreign conspirators for the unrest in the country.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> “Turkey's Erdoğan says Assad buying time on chemical weapons,” *Reuters*, September 12, 2013; “Canada, Turkey criticize US-Russia deal on Syria,” *The Times of Israel*, September 14, 2013.

<sup>507</sup> US Department of State, “Joint Press Availability with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov After Their Meeting,” October 7, 2013; “Erdoğan: Kerry'nin böyle bir açıklama yaptığını zannetmiyorum,” *Hürriyet*, October 7, 2013.

<sup>508</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 59-66.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.; “ABD Dışişleri Bakanı'ndan Gezi Parkı açıklaması,” *Hürriyet*, June 3, 2013; Tom McCarthy and Matthew Weaver, “US on Turkey protests: vast majority of the protesters have been peaceful,” *Guardian*, June 3, 2013; Tim Arango, Şebnem Arsu and Ceylan Yeğinsu, “Turkish Police and Protestors Clash in Square,” *New York Times*, June 11, 2013.

<sup>510</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 72-73; Semih İdiz, “Erdoğan Blames International Conspiracy for Protests,” *Al Monitor*, June 14, 2013; Marc Champion, “Does Erdoğan Really Believe in an Interest-Rate Lobby,” *Bloomberg*, June 29, 2013.

Besides the Gezi Park protests, the Egyptian coup d'état on July 3, 2013, which ousted the Muslim Brotherhood from power, substantially undermined the regional influence of the AKP who backed the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East during the Arab uprisings.<sup>511</sup> The AKP leadership consolidated its anti-Western, anti-US narrative by blaming Israel for the Egyptian coup, which was condemned by the US officials.<sup>512</sup> In the eyes of the US officials, the Turkish administration was rapidly losing its leverage in the international arena.<sup>513</sup>

In December 2013, another domestic political development in Turkey, the corruption scandal, emerged as another platform for the growing estrangement between the US and Turkey. The AKP and pro-government circles publicly blamed the US for plotting against the Turkish government while the US grew more skeptical of the AKP administration's credibility.<sup>514</sup> For the US, the Turkish corruption case posed a security challenge owing to accusations over the evasion of US sanctions on Iran.<sup>515</sup> Former terrorism finance analyst at the US Department of the Treasury Dr. Jonathan Schanzer laid out the fact that Turkey was almost blacklisted in 2013 by the Financial Action Task Force, which was an international terror finance regulatory body.<sup>516</sup>

After the Gezi Park protests and the Egyptian coup d'état, the corruption scandal undermined Erdoğan and his party's image in the West, and therefore crumbled Turkey's image as a model of democracy and economic development for the Arab

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<sup>511</sup> Serkan Demirtaş, "Türkiye, Mursi sonrası Orta Doğu'da yalnızlaşıyor mu?" *BBC Türkçe*, July 5, 2013; James E. Baldwin, "The Egyptian coup is a warning to Turkey –but will Erdoğan listen?" *Guardian*, July 16, 2013; "Support for Muslim Brotherhood isolates Turkey," *Deutsche Welle*, August 21, 2013.

<sup>512</sup> "Erdoğan'dan Batı'ya Mısır darbesi eleştirisi," *BBC Türkçe*, July 5, 2013; Abdullah Karakuş, "Mısır'daki olayların arkasında İsrail var," *Milliyet*, August 21, 2013; "Erdoğan'ın sözlerine ABD, İsrail ve Mısır'dan tepki," *Hürriyet*, August 21, 2013.

<sup>513</sup> Steven A. Cook, "Nice-Guy Obama Fails Turkey's Democracy," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2, 2013; Piotr Zalewski, "How Turkey Went from Zero Problems to Zero Friends," *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2013; "ABD ve Fransa Erdoğan'a gülüyor," *İnternet Haber*, August 24, 2013.

<sup>514</sup> Tanış, *POTUS ve Beyefendi*, 100-112; "CIA-Gladyo Obama'ya Erdoğan yönetimini devirtirmek için siyonist faaliyetlerde bulunuyor," *Yeni Şafak*, January 26, 2014.

<sup>515</sup> Jamie Dettmer, "Turkey and Iran Accused of Oil-For-Cash Sanctions Scheme," *The Daily Beast*, December 28, 2013.

<sup>516</sup> Michael B. Kelley, "Turkey Has Much Bigger Problems That Could Derail Its Alliance With America," *Business Insider*, January 7, 2014.

world. There was a rising perception in the US from 2013 onwards that the idea of Turkey as a model was no longer tenable.<sup>517</sup>

More specifically, former US ambassadors to Turkey Morton Abramowitz and Eric Edelman's piece, which was published in *Washington Post*, namely, "The United States needs to tell Turkey to change course", can be regarded as an embodiment of this growing negative perception of Turkey in the US:

Turkey's democratic decline creates a pressing dilemma for the United States. Erdogan's current course would take Turkey from an imperfect democracy to an autocracy. Such a fate for a close ally and NATO member would have profound implications for our partnership, the United States' beleaguered credibility and the prospects for democracy in the region.<sup>518</sup>

Lastly, Turkey's ambitious regime change policy in Syria also contributed to the deterioration of Turkey's credibility in the eyes of the US officials who thought that it played a role in the rise of jihadists in Syria. The Turkish government's outright support for the Syrian opposition drew extremely negative international attention. For example, news articles exposed the extent of jihadist recruitment from Turkey and Turkey's tacit role in bolstering fighters that were linked to AQ in Syria.<sup>519</sup>

As a result, international pressure on the Turkish government increased dramatically over radical groups operating in Syria while the Turkish government repeatedly denied the claims that they were supporting extremist elements in Syria.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Ivan Watson and Josh Levs, "Turkey's Erdoğan: Successful leader or 'dictator'?" *CNN*, June 4, 2013; Tim Arango, "Turkish Liberals Turn Their Backs on Erdoğan," *New York Times*, June 19, 2013; James F. Jeffrey, "Where Is Turkey Headed? Gezi Park, Taksim Square, and the Future of the Turkish Model," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 31, 2013; Kemal Kirişçi, "The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model for the Arab World," *Brookings Institute*, August 15, 2013; Jean-Loup Samaan, "The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model in the Arab World," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Fall 2013.

<sup>518</sup> Morton Abramowitz and Eric Edelman, "The United States needs to tell Turkey to change course," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2014.

<sup>519</sup> "Al Qaeda's Turkish base?" *Deutsche Welle*, September 18, 2013; İdris Emen, "Adıyaman – Suriye cihat hattı," *Radikal*, September 29, 2013; Fehim Taştekin, "Radical Groups Operate on Turkey's Border," *Al Monitor*, October 17, 2013; Liz Sly, "Turkey confronts policy missteps on Syria with rise of Al-Qaeda across the border," *Washington Post*, November 16, 2013; Jim Zanotti, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, March 27, 2014, 34.

<sup>520</sup> Semih İdiz, "Pressure Mounts on Turkey Over Radical Groups in Syria," *Al Monitor*, October 15, 2013.

US officials believed that there were safe houses in Turkey near the Syrian border that functioned as secret recruiting centers for jihadist fighters.<sup>521</sup>

There were rising concerns in the US about numerous issues in Syria including the jihadist domination in the Syrian opposition, alarming increase in the number of foreign jihadist fighters flowing to Syria from Turkey, which reached a total of five thousand by summer 2013, and Turkey's tacit role in the rise of jihadists.<sup>522</sup>

At the very beginning of 2014, a national scandal erupted in Hatay and Adana, where a number of lorries of Turkish National Intelligence got stopped by the Turkish security forces near the Syrian border. According to the claims, the lorries were on their way to Syria, carrying communication and medical equipment and arms.<sup>523</sup> The Interior Minister Efkan Ala and Erdoğan defended this move by claiming that the lorries were carrying aid to Turkmens in Syria.<sup>524</sup>

In March 2014, leak of an audio recording revealed the ambitious nature of the Syria policy of the Turkish administration who were accused of using Suleiman Shah tomb as a pretext to get more involved in Syria.<sup>525</sup> After the leak, the AKP government banned access to Twitter and YouTube. US State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf stated that “the US opposes any action that encroaches on the right of free speech or free expression” and Douglas Frantz, who was the assistant secretary of public affairs at the State Department equated the ban to “21<sup>st</sup> century book burning”.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Ruth Sherlock, “Al-Qaeda recruits entering Syria from Turkey safehouses,” *The Telegraph*, October 30, 2013; Nick Paton Walsh, “The secret jihadi smuggling route through Turkey,” *CNN*, November 5, 2013; Tolga Tanış, “ABD’de çekilen Reyhanlı fotoğrafı,” *Hürriyet*, November 26, 2013.

<sup>522</sup> Ben Hubbard and Karam Shoumali, “Extremists Take Syrian Town Near Turkish Border,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2013; Christoph Reuter, “Syria’s Disneyland for Jihadists,” *Der Spiegel*, September 27, 2013; Liz Sly, “Foreign extremists dominate Syria fight,” *Washington Post*, October 1, 2013; Richard Engel, Jim Miklaszewski, Ghazi Balkiz and Robert Windrem, “Extremist element among Syrian rebels as growing worry,” *NBC News*, September 10, 2013.

<sup>523</sup> Akın Bodur, “İşte Vali’nin TIR talimatı!” *Cumhuriyet*, January 2, 2014; Arzu Yıldız, “Adana’da durdurulan 3 TIR’da silah araması yapıldı, yine MİT krizi yaşandı,” *T24*, January 19, 2014.

<sup>524</sup> “Erdoğan’dan MİT tırları açıklaması: Türkmenler silah olarak zayıf düşmüşlerdi,” *T24*, March 26, 2014.

<sup>525</sup> Terrence McCoy, “Here’s the video that got Youtube banned in Turkey,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 2014.

<sup>526</sup> Şebnem Arsu and Dan Bilefsky, “Journalists Group and Internet Lawyers Challenge Turkey’s Ban on Twitter,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2014; Nick Tattersall, “Turkey calls Syria security leak ‘villainous,’ blocks YouTube,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2014.

#### 4.2.4. The Emergence of ISIS and the Deepening of US-Turkish Divergence

With the sudden rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014, the power of dynamics of the Syrian conflict shifted and divergence of US and Turkey over Syria deepened. US officials openly accused the Turkish government for the rise of ISIS while the Turkish government did not join the coalition against ISIS in 2014 since it saw the Assad regime and the Syrian Kurdish militants as bigger threats.

ISIS was officially established in April 2013 as the Islamic State of Iraq's leader Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi claimed Syria's JAN as its own subsidiary.<sup>527</sup> However, JAN rejected this move and asserted his allegiance to AQ.<sup>528</sup> Hence, JAN and ISIS operated as separate jihadist entities in Syria from 2013 onwards. Later, in February 2014, AQ officially disavowed ISIS.<sup>529</sup>

ISIS' primary aim was to establish an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. In that regard, it started gaining grounds in Syria in late-2013.<sup>530</sup> For instance, ISIS seized control of a gateway town, Azaz, near Syria's northern border with Turkey in September 2013.<sup>531</sup> ISIS also gained the control of Raqqa.<sup>532</sup> By 2014, ISIS took the control of large swaths of territory in Raqqa, Aleppo and Idlib by taking advantage of disorganized Syrian rebels, kidnapping and killing them.<sup>533</sup>

In the US, there was a confusion about threat assessments of JAN and ISIS. For instance, there was a widespread misconception that the JAN posed a bigger threat than ISIS. It was believed that the rising influence of ISIS boosted support for its rival JAN

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<sup>527</sup> Cole Bunzel, "Introducing the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria," *Jihadica*, April 9, 2013; Hania Mourtada and Rick Gladstone, "Iraq's Branch of Al Qaeda Merges With Syria Jihadists," *New York Times*, April 9, 2013.

<sup>528</sup> "Guide to the Syrian rebels," *BBC News*, December 13, 2013.

<sup>529</sup> Aryn Baker, "Why Al-Qaeda Kicked Out Its Deadly Syria Franchise," *TIME*, February 3, 2014.

<sup>530</sup> "James Traub, "Everyone Is Scared of ISIS," *Foreign Policy*, October 4, 2013.

<sup>531</sup> Hubbard and Shoumali, "Extremists Take Syrian Town Near Turkey Border," *New York Times*, September 18, 2013.

<sup>532</sup> Alison Tahmizian Meuse, "In Raqqa, Islamist Rebels Form a New Regime," *News Deeply*, August 16, 2013; Nick Paton Walsh, Raja Razek and Gül Tüysüz, "Inside Syrian town living under al Qaeda reign of fear," *CNN*, November 6, 2013.

<sup>533</sup> Christopher Reuter, "Jihadist Group Expands Rapidly in Syria," *Der Spiegel*, December 18, 2013; Jamie Dettmer, "Al-Qaeda Linked Jihadists Are Hunting and Killing Moderate Syrian Rebels," *The Daily Beast*, December 18, 2013.

in Syria's local population as ISIS alienated local Syrians with its violent practices to govern under a puritanical version of sharia law.<sup>534</sup>

At the same time, US started readjusting its strategy of intermittent support to the Syrian opposition. Citing fears about the rise of extremist groups, the US suspended non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels in December 2013. By the end of 2013, with the emergence of ISIS, it became clear that extremists had changed the policy of the US.<sup>535</sup>

Nevertheless, in January 2014, the US administration was still unsure about the rising influence of ISIS in Syria. Obama downplayed ISIS in an interview: "I think there is a distinction between the capacity and reach of a bin Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus jihadists who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian".<sup>536</sup> For the US, compared to AQ affiliate JAN, ISIS was much more disorganized and lacked the capacity and reach of AQ.

For Turkey, ISIS started posing a security threat from early 2014 onwards. The Turkish armed forces attacked ISIS positions in northern Syria after a mortar shell from Syria landed in Turkish territory during clashes between ISIS and the FSA.<sup>537</sup> In mid-March 2014, ISIS threatened Turkey over Suleyman Shah tomb in Syria since ISIS gained most of the control in the area that surrounded the tomb.<sup>538</sup> Also, three ISIS fighters killed one police officer, one gendarmerie personnel and one civilian in the extremist group's first attack in Niğde, Turkey in March 2014.<sup>539</sup>

In June 2014, ISIS made sweeping territorial gains in northern and western Iraq. ISIS gained a foothold in Mosul, Iraq by driving Iraqi army out of the city and thus

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<sup>534</sup> Loveday Morris, Joby Warrick and Souad Mekhennet, "Rival al-Qaeda-linked groups fortifying in Syria with mix of pragmatism and militancy," *Washington Post*, October 13, 2013; Loveday Morris, "In Syrian civil war, emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria boosts rival Jabhat al-Nusra," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2013; Nathaniel Rosenblatt, "ISIS' Plan to Govern Syria –What the US Should Do About It," *War on the Rocks*, October 31, 2013.

<sup>535</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler and Anne Barnard, "U.S. Suspends Nonlethal Aid to Syrian Rebels," *New York Times*, December 11, 2013; Sarah Birke, "How al-Qaeda Changed the Syrian War," *New York Review of Books*, December 27, 2013.

<sup>536</sup> David Remnick, "Going the Distance: On and off the road with Barack Obama," *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2014.

<sup>537</sup> "Turkish forces strike ISIL convoy in Syria," *Al Jazeera*, January 30, 2014.

<sup>538</sup> Hasan Kırmızıtaş, "İŞİD, Süleyman Şah tehdidini 15 Mart'ta yapmış," *Hürriyet*, March 23, 2014.

<sup>539</sup> Alican Uludağ, "Jandarmayı öldürerek sevap işledim," *Cumhuriyet*, March 25, 2014.

taking control of the second largest city of Iraq while also storming the Turkish consulate in Mosul, taking 49 people as hostages one day later in captured Mosul.<sup>540</sup>

The AKP administration blamed the West, particularly the US for failing to adequately support moderate rebel groups in Syria, which allegedly created a power vacuum in the region that was filled by ISIS. Columnist Murat Sabuncu from T24 claimed that failure to evacuate the Turkish consulate in Mosul before the ISIS attack resulted from a disagreement within the Turkish government, where MİT undersecretary pushed for the evacuation of the consulate, but Davutoğlu rejected.<sup>541</sup>

International pressure on the Turkish government mounted as pro-Kurdish politicians in Turkey and the PKK affiliate in Syria YPG's leadership criticized the AKP administration for supporting ISIS.<sup>542</sup> Then, as a member of the main opposition party CHP, Ali Ediboğlu claimed that ISIS smuggled Syrian oil to Turkey.<sup>543</sup> In that respect, pressure on Turkey to close its borders to ISIS skyrocketed as there were articles published in the international media criticizing Turkey's open border policy due to increasing flow of jihadist from Turkey to Syria.<sup>544</sup>

Previously being a strong supporter of the AKP administration's foreign policy in the Middle East, ex-CIA official Fuller criticized the administration's Syria policy for underestimating the Assad regime's ability to remain in power.<sup>545</sup> Furthermore, an article in an American conservative think tank, Middle East Forum, directly blamed Turkey for "supporting ISIS Islamist terrorists".<sup>546</sup> What's more, US-Turkish bilateral ties were on a declining trend in 2014 with the rise of ISIS. Erdoğan openly stated that he no longer talked to Obama on the phone.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Suadad Al-Salhy and Tim Arango, "Sunni Militants Drive Iraq Army Out of Mosul," *New York Times*, June 10, 2014; Ceylan Yeğinsu, "Militants Storm Turkish Consulate in Iraqi City, Taking 49 People as Hostages," *New York Times*, June 11, 2014.

<sup>541</sup> Murat Sabuncu, "Fidan: Konsolosluğu boşaltmalıyız, Davutoğlu: Hayır doğru olmaz!" *T24*, July 7, 2014.

<sup>542</sup> "DTK: Türkiye, Suudi Arabistan ve Katar IŞİD'e destek vermekten vazgeçsin," *T24*, May 30, 2014; Amberin Zaman, "Syrian Kurds continue to blame Turkey for backing ISIS militants," *Al Monitor*, June 10, 2014.

<sup>543</sup> Güler Vilmaz, Opposition MP says ISIS is selling oil to Turkey," *Al Monitor*, June 13, 2014.

<sup>544</sup> Ben Hubbard and Ceylan Yeğinsu, "After Opening Way to Rebels, Turkey Is Paying Heavy Price," *New York Times*, June 24, 2014.

<sup>545</sup> Çağıl Kasapoğlu, "Graham Fuller: Türkiye, Suriye politikasında hata yaptı," *BBC Türkçe*, June 20, 2014.

<sup>546</sup> Daniel Pipes, "Turkey's Support for ISIS Islamist Terrorists," *Middle East Forum*, June 17, 2014.

<sup>547</sup> "Turkey's Erdoğan: I no longer talk to Obama," *The Times of Israel*, July 22, 2014.

Instead of President Obama, Vice President Biden started talking with Erdoğan on the phone to discuss bilateral issues.<sup>548</sup> Meanwhile, the Obama administration's candidate for being the US ambassador to Turkey John Bass was given a hard time by the Republican senator John McCain when he asked if John Bass agreed that there was a growing authoritarian trend in Turkey, which he eventually admitted.<sup>549</sup>

On June 29, 2014, ISIS leader al-Baghdadi declared a worldwide Islamic caliphate to claim dominion over Muslims across the globe on the territories it held both in Iraq and Syria.<sup>550</sup> In early August 2014, Obama authorized airstrikes on ISIS and a humanitarian aid mission in Iraq.<sup>551</sup> In mid-August, UNSC adopted a resolution condemning widespread human rights abuses by extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.<sup>552</sup>

Yet, what sparked the major shift in US strategy towards ISIS was beheadings of American journalists James Foley and then Steven Sotloff. Obama pledged to punish ISIS militants for murdering US citizens.<sup>553</sup> On September 5, US formed the anti-ISIS coalition at NATO summit. Obama spelled out the US strategy as “degrading and ultimately destroying” ISIS.<sup>554</sup> During the NATO summit, Obama and Erdoğan had a bilateral meeting, first time in more than a year, in which Obama seemed serious, as opposed to the former meetings between the leaders.<sup>555</sup>

The Turkish leadership stated that they intended to avoid being proactive in the fight against ISIS, citing fears of future attacks in the Turkish border by ISIS and the

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<sup>548</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Readout of the Vice President’s Call with Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan,” *The White House*, June 13, 2014.

<sup>549</sup> “ABD Ankara Büyükelçisi Adayını Terleten Soru,” *Amerikanın Sesi*, July 16, 2014.

<sup>550</sup> Karl Vick, “ISIS Militants Declare Islamist Caliphate,” *TIME*, June 29, 2014.

<sup>551</sup> “Obama Authorizes Airstrikes, Humanitarian Aid Mission in Iraq,” *ABC News*, August 7, 2014.

<sup>552</sup> “Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria,” *UN Security Council*, August 15, 2014.

<sup>553</sup> Jethro Mullen, “Beheading of American journalist James Foley recalls past horrors,” *CNN*, August 20, 2014; John Bacon, “Islamic State releases video depicting another beheading,” *USA Today*, September 2, 2014; Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “After Beheading of Steven Sotloff, Obama Pledges to Punish ISIS,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2014.

<sup>554</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by the President Obama at NATO Summit Press Conference,” *The White House*, September 5, 2014.

<sup>555</sup> “President Erdoğan Meets with President Obama,” *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, September 5, 2014; Ece Göksedef, “Liderler Erdoğan’la ilk kez bir arada,” *Al Jazeera Türk*, September 6, 2014.

critical state of the 49 Turkish hostages.<sup>556</sup> ISIS released the hostages on September 20, 2014, after a series of negotiations between ISIS and the Turkish intelligence.<sup>557</sup>

The Turkish administration's ambivalent response towards ISIS brought questions about Turkey's role in the international coalition against ISIS.<sup>558</sup> Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel visited Turkey to make sure that they got the support of Turkey.<sup>559</sup> But, Kerry's subsequent visit to Turkey made it clear that the US failed to sign up Turkey to the final communique that established a coordinated military campaign against ISIS.<sup>560</sup>

The questions over Turkey's measured approach to ISIS were also predicated upon growing suspicions over supposed ties between Turkey and ISIS. There were numerous articles that manifest the notorious nature of Turkey's Syria policy, blaming the Turkish government's open border policy and support for the Syrian opposition for playing a crucial role in the rise of ISIS.<sup>561</sup>

There were also reports that claimed ISIS was smuggling oil to Turkey and Turkey created instability in the region by allowing its borders to be a transit route for the flow of foreign jihadists from Turkey to Syria.<sup>562</sup> Other articles appeared both in the Turkish media and international media, depicting the Turkish foreign fighters that joined the ranks of ISIS from various cities.<sup>563</sup>

According to Ricciardone, "Turkey has directly supported AQ's wing in Syria in defiance of the US" and "the Turkish authorities thought they could work with

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Chris Johnson, "Isis militants release 49 hostages taken at Turkish consulate in Mosul," *Guardian*, September 20, 2014.

<sup>558</sup> Thomas Seibert, "Why Turkey Is Sitting Out the ISIS War," *The Daily Beast*, September 11, 2014.

<sup>559</sup> Cheryl Pellerin, "Hagel Reaffirms Turkey's Pledge to Help Defeat ISIL," *US Department of Defense*, September 9, 2014.

<sup>560</sup> "Turkish reluctance shows difficulty building US alliance against Islamic State," *Reuters*, September 12, 2014.

<sup>561</sup> Anthony Faiola and Souad Mekhennet, "In Turkey, a late crackdown on Islamist fighters," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2014; Nick Tattersall and Mariam Karouny, "Turkey's Open Door Policy with Syria Has Backfired as ISIS Recruitment Continues," *Business Insider*, August 26, 2014.

<sup>562</sup> Thomas Seibert, "Is NATO Ally Turkey Tacitly Fueling the ISIS War Machine?" *The Daily Beast*, September 8, 2014; David E. Sanger and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Struggling to Starve ISIS of Oil Revenue, U.S. Seeks Assistance from Turkey," *New York Times*, September 13, 2014; Piotr Zalewski, "Islamic State Smuggles Oil into Turkey – With Hostages as Insurance," *Bloomberg*, September 12, 2014.

<sup>563</sup> Alev Scott and Alexander Christie-Miller, "Exclusive: ISIS Starts Recruiting in İstanbul's Vulnerable Suburbs," *Newsweek*, September 12, 2014; Ceylan Yeğinsu, "ISIS Draws a Steady Stream of Recruits from Turkey," *New York Times*, September 16, 2014; İpek İzci, "Türkün cihatla imtihanı: 7 Hürriyet muhabiri IŞİD'in izini sürdü," *Hürriyet*, September 22, 2014.

extremist Islamist groups in the Syrian civil war and at the same time push them to become more moderate”.<sup>564</sup> Vice President’s comments on Turkey’s tacit role in the emergence of ISIS further exacerbated this growing rift between the US and Turkey.<sup>565</sup>

US and Turkey’s threat assessments completely diverged with the rise of ISIS as the Turkish government’s reluctance to join the anti-ISIS coalition started being a part of the broader strategy for containing the rise of the Kurdish militants in Syria. In that regard, the US and Turkey’s strategies in Syria started being completely at odds with one another with the siege of Kobane by ISIS.

#### 4.2.5. US-Turkish Rift Over US Support of Kurdish Militants against ISIS

From late-2014 onwards, the Kurdish dimension of the Syrian crisis gradually rose to prominence after ISIS’ rapid advances in Syria. Newly emerging strategic alliance between the US and the PKK’s Syrian affiliate PYD (Democratic Union Party)/YPG against ISIS, was another blow to relations between the US and Turkey.

Growing PYD/YPG presence in Syria was always a major source of concern for the Turkish policy-makers. For instance, as early as 2012, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu expressed his concerns about PYD taking over control of 5 Syrian cities by mid-2012 in a meeting with the KRG’s leader Barzani.<sup>566</sup> Turkish officials argued that the Syrian regime was using the PKK affiliate PYD/YPG against Turkey. Also, Turkish officials were worried that northern Syria would turn into a safe haven for the PKK.<sup>567</sup>

In that sense, ISIS’ Kobane siege that intensified in October 2014 created a policy dilemma for the Turkish officials while ultimately giving way to a strategic alliance between the US and PYD/YPG. As ISIS seized three districts in Kobane, US-led coalition air strikes hit ISIS targets in October 2014.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Richard Spencer and Raf Sanchez, “Turkish government co-operated with al-Qaeda in Syria, says former US ambassador,” *The Telegraph*, September 12, 2014.

<sup>565</sup> Chelsea J. Carter, Ben Brumfield and Sara Mazloumsaki, “Vice President Joe Biden apologizes to Turkey, UAE,” *CNN*, October 6, 2014.

<sup>566</sup> Namık Durukan, “Davutoğlu’ndan PYD’ye ayar,” *Milliyet*, August 2, 2012.

<sup>567</sup> Ali Hüseyin Bakır, “Türkiye’nin Suriye krizi hesapları ve Kürtler,” *Al Jazeera Türk*, October 3, 2012.

<sup>568</sup> “Coalition air attacks hit ISIL in Kobane,” *Al Jazeera*, October 7, 2014.

US turned out to be extremely frustrated over Turkey's abstaining policy in Kobane.<sup>569</sup> Besides, the Turkish parliamentary motion that authorized cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq was seen as a broader Turkish strategy of containing the Syrian Kurdish militants.<sup>570</sup> In fact, these concerns by the US were confirmed when Turkey decided to hit Kurdish militants in Syria instead of ISIS in mid-October 2014.<sup>571</sup>

The Turkish administration was persistent in its regime change policy, whereas the US policy was concentrated on battling ISIS. The AKP government lobbied with the US officials in favor of creating buffer zones in northern Syria. Defense Department and the White House officials was skeptical of this, but State Secretary said the creation of buffer zone "was worth looking at very closely".<sup>572</sup>

Another contentious issue between the US and Turkey was opening of air bases for US strikes on ISIS. For example, the Turkish leaders denied the claims that US and Turkey reached a deal to open Turkish air bases.<sup>573</sup> İncirlik would not be open to US use until next year.

In the meantime, the US support for the Kurdish militia in Syria became more palpable as the US military conducted aerial resupply of Kurdish forces fighting ISIS. Hence, the Turkish administration's criticism of the US policy intensified. President Erdoğan dismissed the Syrian Kurdish militants as terrorists.<sup>574</sup>

Despite all that, there were also minor maneuvers in Turkey's policy towards PYD. For instance, PYD leader Salih Muslim came to Ankara to meet with the Turkish officials in early October 2014.<sup>575</sup> On October 20, Turkey changed course, allowing

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<sup>569</sup> "Erdoğan: Şu an Kobani düştü düşüyor," *Cumhuriyet*, October 7, 2014; Mark Landler, Anne Barnard and Eric Schmitt, "Turkish Inaction Dismays the U.S.," *New York Times*, October 7, 2014; The Editorial Board, "Mr Erdoğan's Dangerous Game," *New York Times*, October 8, 2014.

<sup>570</sup> Liz Sly, "Turkey to approve a bigger military role in Iraq and Syria — but not on American terms," *New York Times*, October 1, 2014.

<sup>571</sup> Piotr Zalewski, "Turkey Decides to Hit Kurdish Rebels Instead of ISIS," *TIME*, October 14, 2014.

<sup>572</sup> Aaron Stein, "For Turkey, it's all about regime change in Syria," *Al Jazeera*, October 8, 2014; Nour Malas, "U.S. Sends Mixed Signals on Buffer Zone," *Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2014; "Başbakan Davutoğlu, Türkiye'nin istediği güvenli bölgelerin sınırlarını açıkladı," *Hürriyet*, October 16, 2014.

<sup>573</sup> Constanze Letsch, "Turkey denies new deal reached to open airbases to US in fight against Isis," *Guardian*, October 13, 2014.

<sup>574</sup> "U.S. Military Conducts Aerial Resupply of Kurdish Forces Fighting ISIL," *U.S. Central Command*, October 19, 2014; Jonny Hogg, "Turkey's U.S. relations show strain as Washington's patience wears thin," *Reuters*, October 23, 2014.

<sup>575</sup> "PYD lideri Ankara'da," *Al Jazeera Türk*, October 4, 2014.

the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga to help the fight against ISIS.<sup>576</sup> In spite of that, the US perception of Turkey's Syria policy remained unchanged as New York Times published an article by a YPG leader Meysa Abdo, namely, "Turkey's Obstruction of Kobani's Battle Against ISIS".<sup>577</sup> ISIS suffered a major setback in Kobane as the Kurdish forces drew ISIS out of the town in late-January 2015 with US air strikes.<sup>578</sup>

At the same time, the US was also interested in building a local Arab army to fight ISIS since the onset of the establishment of the anti-ISIS coalition. Upon the approval of the Congress, Obama signed the bill to train and equip Syrian rebels in order to bolster the fight against ISIS.<sup>579</sup> The train and equip program was viewed with skepticism in the US given the limited scale of the program that aimed to train 5,000 rebels per year. Many congressional lawyers argued that the plan was deeply flawed.<sup>580</sup>

Later, in November, the US military and Turkish military reached a deal to train and equip 2,000 moderate Syrian rebels in the Turkish soil.<sup>581</sup> US and Turkey reached another deal in February 2015, which was brokered by the US ambassador to Turkey John Bass and Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu.<sup>582</sup> Nevertheless, US-backed train and equip program's primary focus was ISIS while the AKP administration also wanted it to focus on ousting the Assad regime.<sup>583</sup>

In the last quarter of 2015, it became self-evident that the train and equip program for Syria rebels resulted in complete failure. Obama acknowledged the failure of the \$500 million worth plan to build up an anti-ISIS rebel force and abandoned the plan as there were only 4 to 5 US-trained Syrians fighting ISIS by September 2015, and US-trained rebels gave equipment to AQ affiliate JAN.<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Liz Sly and Karen DeYoung, "Turkey clears way for Iraqi Kurdish troops to battle Islamic State in Kobane, Syria," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2014.

<sup>577</sup> Meysa Abdo, "A Town Shouldn't Fight the Islamic State Alone," *New York Times*, October 28, 2014.

<sup>578</sup> Harvey Morris, "ISIS Still Strong Despite Major Defeat in Kobani," *TIME*, January 27, 2015.

<sup>579</sup> Stephanie Condon, "Obama signs bill to arm and train Syrian rebels," *CBS News*, September 19, 2014.

<sup>580</sup> Eli Lake and Josh Rogin, "Obama Taps Star General to Build Syrian Rebel Army to Fight ISIS," *The Daily Beast*, September 21, 2014.

<sup>581</sup> Uğur Ergan, "2,000 Syrian rebels to be trained in Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 15, 2014.

<sup>582</sup> "Turkey, US sign deal to train Syria rebels," *Deutsche Welle*, February 19, 2015.

<sup>583</sup> Jamie Dettmer, "US, Turkey Differ on Aims of Training Syrian Rebels," *Voice of America*, March 2, 2015.

<sup>584</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Only 4 to 5 American-trained Syrians fighting against the Islamic State," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2015; "US-trained Division 30 betray US and hand weapons over to al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria," *The Telegraph*, September 22, 2015; Michael D. Shear, Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, "Obama Administration Ends Effort to Train Syrians to Combat ISIS," *New York Times*, October 9, 2015.

In late-February 2015, Turkish troops entered Syria in a rescue mission for the Turkish soldiers guarding Suleyman Shah tomb. Even though the Turkish government repeatedly denied the claims, the YPG leadership took credit for the rescue mission as they claimed that they provided support for the mission.<sup>585</sup>

Turkey's regime change policy in Syria entered a new phase with the Saudi-Turkish deal in March 2015 to boost their joint support for the Syrian opposition. According to Huffington Post, the Turkish and Saudi leaders agreed to bolster their efforts to topple the Assad regime.<sup>586</sup> This Turkish-Saudi deal to ramp up support for opposition groups in Syria was viewed with skepticism in the US.<sup>587</sup>

In June 2015, US officials celebrated the advances made by the Kurdish forces in Tell Abyad since ISIS' major supply lines were cut off while the Turkish leadership became uneasy over the growing support of the US to YPG.<sup>588</sup> In that sense, Syrian Kurdish forces passing to the west of the Euphrates river was deemed as a red line by the Turkish government officials.<sup>589</sup> The crumbling of the solution process in Turkey in July 2015 further exasperated Turkey's policy towards Syrian Kurdish forces.<sup>590</sup>

Meanwhile, during this period, ISIS increased its attacks within the Turkish soil. In January 2015, ISIS carried out its first attack in a major touristic center, Sultanahmet district in İstanbul. A major shift in the Turkish administration's ISIS policy came about when 34 people were killed in a suicide attack on July 20, 2015.

In response, the AKP government opened the İncirlik air base for US strikes on ISIS on July 23, 2015.<sup>591</sup> The breakthrough came after talks between Obama's special

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<sup>585</sup> Constanze Letsch, "Turkish troops enter Syria to rescue soldiers guarding tomb," *Guardian*, February 22, 2015; Uğur Ergan, "YPG: Şah Fırat Operasyonuna destek verdik," *Hürriyet*, February 23, 2015.

<sup>586</sup> "İşte Esad'ı devirme planı," *Cumhuriyet*, April 13, 2015.

<sup>587</sup> Kim Sengupta, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia alarm the West by backing Islamist extremists the Americans had bombed in Syria," *Independent*, May 12, 2015; David Ignatius, "A new cooperation on Syria," *Washington Post*, May 12, 2015.

<sup>588</sup> Julian E. Barnes, "U.S. Allies in Syria Cut Islamic State Supply Line," *Wall Street Journal*, June 16, 2015; Hümeýra Pamuk and Ümit Bektaş, "Turkey sees signs of ethnic cleansing by Kurdish fighters in Syria," *Reuters*, June 16, 2015; Ahmet Topal, "PYD, DAEŞ'ten çok daha tehlikeli," *Sabah*, June 19, 2015; "Turkey will never allow Kurdish state in Syria: Erdoğan," *Middle East Eye*, June 27, 2015; Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, "Turkey Uneasy as U.S. Support of Syria's Kurds Grows," *New York Times*, June 29, 2015.

<sup>589</sup> "Fırat'ın batısı kırmızı çizgi," *Milliyet*, July 1, 2015; "Türkiye için o bölge neden bu kadar önemli," *Akşam*, November 12, 2015; "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Fırat'ın batısına kimse geçemez," *Hürriyet*, November 10, 2015.

<sup>590</sup> Mesut Yeğen, "Çatışmasızlığa kim, niye son verdi," *Al Jazeera Türk*, August 7, 2015; Sarah Almukhtar, "Why Turkey Is Fighting the Kurds Who Are Fighting ISIS," *New York Times*, August 12, 2015.

<sup>591</sup> Patrick Tucker, "Turkey Opens Key Air Bases for US Strikes on ISIS," *Defense One*, July 23, 2015.

envoy General John R. Allen and his Turkish counterparts.<sup>592</sup> Turkish planes bombed ISIS targets in Syria for the first time and US began air strikes on ISIS from Turkey.<sup>593</sup>

Not to mention, the Turkish authorities began taking tougher measures in Turkey's border, therefore curtailing the jihadist flow to Syria.<sup>594</sup> After the bilateral meeting between Obama and Erdoğan in mid-November 2015 during the G20 summit in Antalya, Obama laid out the importance of fortifying the borders between Syria and Turkey that allowed ISIS to operate.<sup>595</sup>

Establishing a de-facto safe zone along the Turkey-Syria border remained to be a core issue in bilateral talks between the US and Turkey over Syria as the US and Turkey agreed on the outlines of a safe zone in northwest Syria.<sup>596</sup> Despite the Turkish officials' willingness to create safe zones for displaced Syrians in northern Syria, the US officials were unwilling to officially designate such areas as safe zones.<sup>597</sup> Over time, US officials became more open in its opposition to creating safe zones in Syria.<sup>598</sup>

At the same time, the Turkish administration's Syria policy was also focused on forming a Syrian Turkmen brigade after Turkey joined the international coalition against ISIS. During a meeting organized by Turkish National Intelligence, twenty Turkmen brigades met and decided to form a Syrian Turkmen Brigade in Syria.<sup>599</sup>

After constant domestic political challenges to its authority from 2013 to 2015, the AKP government adopted a unilateral approach in its war on terrorism. Especially after the renewal of the Turkish-PKK conflict and increasing number of attacks by ISIS in Turkey, the Turkish leadership's narrative started deeming all non-state actors such

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<sup>592</sup> Ceylan Yeğinsu and Helene Cooper, "U.S. Jets to Use Turkish Bases in the War on ISIS," *New York Times*, July 23, 2015.

<sup>593</sup> Gül Tüysüz, "Turkish planes bomb ISIS targets in Syria for 1st time," *CNN*, July 25, 2015; Jason Hanna, Greg Botelho and Nick Paton Walsh, "U.S. begins manned airstrikes on ISIS from Turkey," *CNN*, August 13, 2015.

<sup>594</sup> Erin Cunningham, "The flow of jihadists to Syria dries up as Turkey cracks down on the border," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2015.

<sup>595</sup> US Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama and President Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey after Bilateral Meeting," *The White House*, November 15, 2015.

<sup>596</sup> Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly, "U.S.-Turkey deal aims to create de facto 'safe zone' in northwest Syria," *Washington Post*, July 26, 2015.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>598</sup> "Pentagon: Not Right Time for Safe Zone Along Turkish Border in Syria," *Sputnik International*, November 13, 2015.

<sup>599</sup> Cihat Arpacık, "Türkmen sürprizi," *Yeni Şafak*, July 28, 2015.

as the YPG/PYD, PKK and ISIS as one and the same.<sup>600</sup> However, US officials stated that they did not see YPG as a terrorist entity, but Erdoğan opposed these statements.<sup>601</sup>

With significant backing of the US, a new Syrian alliance was formed, namely Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whose backbone was the PKK affiliate YPG. SDF was created as a US strategy of supplying military aid to Arab forces within the SDF.<sup>602</sup> To be specific, direct US support for the YPG would be illegal due to YPG's intrinsic ties to the PKK. US officials later admitted that the creation of SDF was a branding exercise, aimed at bringing the YPG under an umbrella name, separating YPG from PKK and legitimizing the US support.<sup>603</sup>

With the creation of SDF, Syrian Kurdish forces was largely deemed as the most reliable ally of the US in the fight against ISIS.<sup>604</sup> Therefore, US military delivered more than 45 tones of ammunition to militants fighting ISIS in Hassakeh in October 2015 and military aid continued in November overland.<sup>605</sup> Turkish officials warned the US military to cease support for YPG and Davutoğlu stated that Turkey would destroy the ammunition supplied by the US if deemed necessary.<sup>606</sup> In response, US officials stressed that they were not directly providing military aid to YPG, instead they were focused on supplying military aid to Arab forces within the SDF.<sup>607</sup>

In December 2015, SDF took the control of a strategic location, Tishreen Dam, which was in the west of the Euphrates river, which posed a major challenge for the AKP government as it was a violation of its red line.<sup>608</sup> Yet, in response, the AKP

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<sup>600</sup> Ümit Kozan, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: PYD bizim PKK ile eşitir," *Hürriyet*, October 19, 2014; "PKK, IŞİD VE DHKP-C'yi aynı anda vürmek zorundayız," *BBC Türkçe*, July 27, 2015; "Erdoğan: PKK, PYD, YPG, DHKP/C VE DEAŞ'ın hiçbir farkı yok," *Radikal*, October 14, 2015.

<sup>601</sup> Nafiz Albayrak, "ABD: YPG'yi terör örgütü olarak görmüyoruz," *Hürriyet*, September 22, 2015; "Erdoğan: YPG ve PYD, bunların hepsi terör örgütü ABD'nin açıklaması yanlış," *T24*, September 24, 2015.

<sup>602</sup> Suleiman Al-Khalidi and Tom Perry, "New Syrian rebel alliance formed, says weapons on the way," *Reuters*, October 12, 2015.

<sup>603</sup> Aron Lund, "Syria's Kurds at the Center of America's Anti-Jihadi Strategy," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 2, 2015; "U.S. general told Syria's YPG: You have got to change your brand," *Reuters*, July 22, 2017.

<sup>604</sup> Joe Parkinson, "America's Marxist Allies Against ISIS," *Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 2015; David Ignatius, "The United States' surprise allies in Syria," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2015.

<sup>605</sup> "Syria conflict: US air drop for anti-IS forces in Hassakeh," *BBC News*, October 13, 2015; "ABD, Suriye'ye silah yardımını bu kez karadan yaptı," *Hürriyet*, November 16, 2015.

<sup>606</sup> Deniz Zeyrek, "ABD ile PYD'ye silah krizi," *Hürriyet*, October 14, 2015; "Erdoğan: Tüm dünyayı felakete sürüklüyorlar," *Al Jazeera Türk*, October 15, 2015.

<sup>607</sup> Nafiz Albayrak, "ABD Savunma Bakanlığında YPG açıklaması," *Hürriyet*, October 5, 2015.

<sup>608</sup> "Syrian Kurds take strategic dam from Islamic State," *Deutsche Welle*, December 26, 2015.

government softened its narrative. President spokesman İbrahim Kalın stated that ISIS losing grounds in Syria was a positive development for Turkey, but they would not allow a de facto Kurdish settlement in the region.<sup>609</sup>

#### 4.2.6. Russia's Syria Intervention and Turkish Isolation

Russian intervention in the Syrian crisis which began on September 30, 2015 can be regarded as a breakthrough in the Syrian conflict since it altered the power dynamics of the conflict as the Syrian regime took the upper hand. Russia's Syria intervention dragged Turkey into an isolated position, further deteriorating its relations with the US.

Since the onset of the Syrian conflict, Russia backed the Syrian government in the international arena and remained as the main supplier of military equipment to the regime. Since October 2011, Russia hindered every chance to grant international legitimacy to a possible military action against the Syrian regime by vetoing UNSC's resolutions condemning the Syrian regime.<sup>610</sup>

On September 30, the Russian government intervened in Syria in order to boost its support for the Syrian government by striking jihadist groups and other opposition footholds. According to Gencer Özcan, Turkey's maneuvers in Aleppo through its growing support for the opposition and efforts to form a safe zone laid the groundwork for Russia's intervention.<sup>611</sup>

According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), in contrast to the assertions of Russia and Syria, Russian air strikes targeted broader opposition groups in Homs city, two towns in Hama province and northwestern Latakia on the first day

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<sup>609</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanlığı'ndan Fırat'ın batısı açıklaması," *En Son Haber*, December 28, 2015.

<sup>610</sup> Gencer Özcan, "Rusya'nın Suriye Bunalımına Müdahalesi ve Türkiye," in *Türkiye ve Rusya İlişkilerinde Değişen Dinamikler: Kuşku ile Komşuluk* Gencer Özcan, Evren Balta and Burç Beşgül (İstanbul: İletişim, 2017): 282.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-3.

of the Russian intervention.<sup>612</sup> ISW's comprehensive assessment on Russia's air strikes in Syria within a month affirms that Russia mostly targeted opposition strongholds.<sup>613</sup>

Therefore, the White House and Pentagon officials charged Moscow for targeting areas with few ISIS presence. Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter blamed Russia for "pouring gasoline on the fire". Russian officials rejected these accusations and they asserted that they were targeting terrorist groups.<sup>614</sup> Erdoğan and Davutoğlu also blamed Russia for targeting opposition-held areas rather than ISIS.<sup>615</sup>

In early October 2015, Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that a Russian war plane violated Turkish air space and Russian ambassador to Turkey was immediately summoned to the Turkish Foreign Ministry to express Turkish concerns. Erdoğan also said that Turkey could not tolerate violations of Turkish air space.<sup>616</sup> NATO and US officials condemned the Russian violation of Turkey's air space.<sup>617</sup>

Then, a Turkish F-16 fighter jet shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M aircraft near the Syria-Turkey border on November 24, 2015, which strained Turkish-Russian ties. US and NATO officials stressed that they did not have a role in the downing incident while mildly expressing support for Turkey in its right to defend itself.<sup>618</sup>

Davutoğlu defended the decision to down the Russian jet by emphasizing that he personally gave the order to down the warplane.<sup>619</sup> President Erdoğan stated that

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<sup>612</sup> ISW Research Team, "Russia's First Reported Air Strikes in Syria Assist Regime with Targeting Broader Opposition," *Institute for the Study of War*, September 30, 2015.

<sup>613</sup> Genevieve Casagrande and Jodi Brignola, "Russian Airstrikes in Syria: September 30 - October 30, 2015," *Institute for the Study of War*, October 31, 2015.

<sup>614</sup> Andrew Roth, Brian Murphy and Missy Ryan, "Russia begins airstrikes in Syria; U.S. warns of new concerns in conflict," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2015.

<sup>615</sup> "Rusya Suriye'yle niye bu kadar ilgileniyor," *Hürriyet*, October 3, 2015; "Davutoğlu: Hayatımın terörle mücadele dersini 6-7 Ekim'de aldım," *Al Jazeera Türk*, October 3, 2015; "Davutoğlu: Rusya Suriye'de IŞİD'i vurmuyor," *BBC Türkçe*, October 7, 2015.

<sup>616</sup> "Rus uçakları Türk havasına girdi," *CNN Türk*, October 5, 2015; Karem Shaheen, "Turkey cannot endure Russian violations of its airspace, president says," *Guardian*, October 6, 2015.

<sup>617</sup> Karem Shaheen, "Nato condemns Russia over violation of Turkey's airspace," *Guardian*, October 6, 2015; Kristina Wong, "Pentagon chief: Russian violation of Turkish airspace no accident," *The Hill*, October 6, 2015; "NATO'dan Rusya'ya mesaj: Türkiye'yi savunmaya hazırız," *BBC Türkçe*, October 8, 2015.

<sup>618</sup> "Türkiye sınırında düşürülen Rus savaş uçağıyla ilgili ABD'den açıklama," *Hürriyet*, November 24, 2015; Christi Parsons, "Obama on downing of Russian jet: Turkey has a right to defend its airspace," *L.A. Times*, November 24, 2015; "Statement by the NATO Secretary General after the extraordinary NAC meeting," *NATO*, November 24, 2015; "Not Us! Pentagon Not Involved in Downing of Russian Su-24 Aircraft," *Sputnik International*, November 24, 2015.

<sup>619</sup> "Davutoğlu: Uçağın vurulması emrini bizzat ben verdim," *Cumhuriyet*, November 25, 2015.

Turkey wouldn't apologize for the incident.<sup>620</sup> Russian response was mostly focused on stressing Turkey's role in the escalation of the Syrian crisis, damaging Turkey's international image in the process while also taking certain economic measures.

For instance, the Russian PM Dmitry Medvedev harshly criticized Turkey's Syria policy by accusing Turkey of protecting ISIS militants.<sup>621</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov blamed Turkey for allowing jihadist extremists to operate within its borders.<sup>622</sup> Lavrov and Putin also called for Russian tourists not to visit Turkey.<sup>623</sup> Then, Putin announced economic sanctions against Turkey, putting restrictions on imports of Turkish goods and on Turkish staff working in Russia or Turkish companies in Russia. Russia also put an end to Russian tour operators selling trips to Turkey.<sup>624</sup>

Russia's accusations of Turkey over its Syria policy intensified in December 2015 as the Russian Defense Ministry officials blamed Turkey for buying oil from ISIS. Russian officials disclosed evidence comprised of satellite images that showed three oil trade routes from ISIS in Syria to Turkey. They specifically blamed President Erdoğan and his family for being involved in the oil trade between ISIS and Turkey.<sup>625</sup>

Although the US officials did not believe the original Russian claim on a link between Erdoğan, his family and ISIS, the US and Russia were very much on the same page over oil trade from ISIS to Turkey. These revelations by the Russian government exacerbated increasingly negative image of Turkey in the US.<sup>626</sup>

On the other hand, there were also some prospects for cooperation between US and Russia due to common priorities such as defeating extremist groups in Syria.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Elliot C. McLaughlin, Don Melvin and Jethro Mullen, "Turkey won't apologize for downing Russian warplane, Erdoğan says," *CNN*, November 26, 2015.

<sup>621</sup> "Rus başbakan Medvedev'den sert mesajlar," *Hürriyet*, November 25, 2015.

<sup>622</sup> "Rusya'dan Türkiye'ye şok suçlama," *Hürriyet*, November 25, 2015.

<sup>623</sup> Burak Coşan, "Rus bakanın, 'Türkiye'ye gitmeyin' çağrısı turizmcileri şoke etti," *Hürriyet*, November 24, 2015; "Putin'den Lavrov'un 'Türkiye'ye gitmeyin' uyarısında destek: Bu, alınması gereken bir önlem," *Hürriyet*, November 25, 2015.

<sup>624</sup> Lin Jenkins, "Vladimir Putin announces Russian sanctions against Turkey," *Guardian*, November 28, 2015.

<sup>625</sup> Greg Botelho, "Russia, Turkey trade charges," *CNN*, December 2, 2015; "İŞİD petrolü üç güzergahtan Türkiye'ye gidiyor," *Cumhuriyet*, December 2, 2015.

<sup>626</sup> Ben Taub, "The ISIS Oil Trade, From the Ground Up," *The New Yorker*, December 4, 2015; Guy Faulconbridge, "Islamic State oil is going to Assad, some to Turkey, U.S. official says," *Reuters*, December 10, 2015.

<sup>627</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "Why Russia's Syria war is bad news for the U.S. (and why it isn't)," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2015.

Firstly, US and Russia agreed on rules to avoid collisions in the skies over Syria since both sides carried out bombing raids.<sup>628</sup> Later on, during a meeting between top US, Turkish, Russian and Saudi diplomats in Vienna, Kerry underscored defeating ISIS as a common goal for the US and Russia in October 2015.<sup>629</sup> Later, in June 2016, the Obama administration made a proposal to Russia on Syria that laid the groundwork for military cooperation between US and Russia in the fight against JAN.<sup>630</sup>

Another area where the Syria policies of US and Russia converged is related to two countries' support for the Syrian Kurdish militants against extremist groups.<sup>631</sup> As the US military support for the newly formed SDF became more palpable from October 2015 onwards, Russian support for the PYD gradually increased as well.<sup>632</sup> In response, the Turkish administration started warning both the US and Russia at the same time against backing Kurdish militants in Syria.<sup>633</sup> Pro-government television channel A Haber portrayed the US and Russian support for the Syrian Kurdish forces as a conspiratorial US-Russian alliance against Turkey.<sup>634</sup>

In early February 2016, Syrian troops launched a major offensive in Aleppo with the assistance of Russian air strikes against Syrian rebels and made significant gains in northern Aleppo by cutting one of the main supply routes of Syrian rebels.<sup>635</sup> This was one of the major signs, demonstrating that the opposition was losing ground in Syria while also manifesting Turkey's failed regime change policy in Syria.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> Dan De Luce, "U.S. and Russia Agree on Rules to Avoid Mid-Air Collisions over Syria," *Foreign Policy*, October 20, 2015.

<sup>629</sup> Matthew Rosenberg and Neil MacFarquhar, "U.S. and Russia Find Common Goals on Syria, if Not on Assad," *New York Times*, October 23, 2015.

<sup>630</sup> Josh Rogin, "Obama's Syria plan teams up American and Russian forces," *Washington Post*, July 13, 2016.

<sup>631</sup> Alexey Khlebnikov, "The Kurds could bring Russia and the US together in Syria," *Russia Direct*, October 29, 2015.

<sup>632</sup> "Rusya PYD'ye 5 ton silah verdi," *Milliyet*, December 2, 2015; Uğur Ergan, "O füzeyle PYD'ye eğitim," *Hürriyet*, January 29, 2016; "PYD'nin Fırat'ın batısı için beklediği Rus desteği geldi," *Anadolu Ajansı*, February 1, 2016; "Syrian Kurdistan mission opens in Moscow," *Russia Today*, February 10, 2016.

<sup>633</sup> Orhan Coşkun, "Turkey warns U.S., Russia against backing Kurdish militia in Syria," *Reuters*, October 13, 2015.

<sup>634</sup> "ABD-Rusya kirlî ittifakı deşifre oldu! Hedef Türkiye," *A Haber*, February 11, 2016.

<sup>635</sup> Liz Sly and Zakaria Zakaria, "Syrian rebels are losing Aleppo and perhaps also the war," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2016; Alison Meuse, "Backed by Russia, Syrian Troops Advance In A Major Battle For Aleppo," *National Public Radio*, February 6, 2016.

<sup>636</sup> Gönül Tol, "Turkey's Syria strategy in ruins as Aleppo teeters," *CNN*, February 10, 2016.

Meanwhile, the rift between the US and Turkey continued to build up as the Kurdish forces made advances in northern Syria, backed by both the US and Russia.<sup>637</sup> For instance, Kurdish forces took Menagh air base, which lies near the road between Aleppo and Gaziantep.<sup>638</sup> Kurdish forces gravitating towards Azaz was problematic for Turkey due to the town's location in the west of the Euphrates and the Turkmen presence. Therefore, the Turkish military carried out strikes on YPG targets in Azaz.<sup>639</sup>

During the Northern Aleppo offensive in February 2016, Turkish officials' rhetoric against Russia, the Syrian government, the US and YPG became more aggressive. PM Davutoğlu accused Russia of acting as a terrorist entity by bombing a hospital in Azaz.<sup>640</sup> Also, the AKP's deputy chairman Yasin Aktay blamed the PKK for carrying out ethnic cleansing in northern Syria.<sup>641</sup>

US-Turkish tensions escalated after US State Department spokesperson John Kirby's remarks on US not seeing PYD as a terrorist organization.<sup>642</sup> Foreign Ministry officials expressed their concerns to US ambassador John Bass over Kirby's remarks. Erdoğan accused the US for supporting terrorists in Syria.<sup>643</sup>

Turkish government's increasing fierceness in its rhetoric against the PKK was also rooted in the intensifying conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state. For instance, Ankara blamed the PKK and YPG for carrying out a bomb attack in Ankara in mid-February 2016 and criticized US support for the PYD/YPG.<sup>644</sup>

Erdoğan's visit in Washington to attend the Nuclear Security summit in late-March 2016 was representative of US-Turkish tensions. Erdoğan met with Vice President Biden as Obama refused to hold an official meeting with him despite Turkish

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<sup>637</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Syrian Kurds use Russian and US support to make rapid advances," *Middle East Eye*, February 17, 2016; Daren Butler, "Kurds' advance in Syria divides U.S. and Turkey as Russia bombs," *Reuters*, February 17, 2016; Rick Gladstone, "Dispute Over Kurds Threatens U.S.-Turkey Alliance," *New York Times*, February 19, 2016.

<sup>638</sup> "YPG kritik Miniğ Hava Üssü'nü ele geçirdi, Azez'e yöneldi," *Hürriyet*, February 11, 2016.

<sup>639</sup> "Türkiye Azez'i neden vuruyor?" *Habertürk*, February 17, 2016; Selin Girit, "Azez Türkiye için neden bu kadar önemli?" *BBC Türkçe*, February 17, 2016.

<sup>640</sup> "Davutoğlu: Rusya terör örgütü gibi davranıyor," *BBC Türkçe*, February 15, 2016.

<sup>641</sup> Umut Aras, "Kurdish fighters carry out ethnic cleansing in Syria," *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2016.

<sup>642</sup> "ABD: YPG'yi terör örgütü olarak görmüyoruz, desteklemeyi sürdüreceğiz," *Sputnik Türkiye*, February 8, 2016.

<sup>643</sup> "Ey Amerika... Bizimle misin yoksa terör örgütüyle mi?" *Gazete Vatan*, February 11, 2016.

<sup>644</sup> Marina Koren, "The Political Aftermath of Ankara's Terrorist Attack," *The Atlantic*, February 18, 2016.

officials' efforts.<sup>645</sup> Erdoğan also criticized the Obama administration for backing the Syrian Kurdish militants during his speech in BI.<sup>646</sup>

At the same time, the Turkish government's increasing crackdown on dissidents in Turkey started posing a major challenge for US-Turkish ties. For example, Biden criticized Erdoğan's crackdown on journalists, political opponents and academics, who opposed the AKP government's Kurdish policy when he made visit to Turkey in late-January 2016.<sup>647</sup> Also, former ambassadors to Turkey, Abramowitz and Edelman wrote an article, urging Erdoğan to either reform or resign, claiming that Erdoğan steered Turkey toward authoritarianism, economic slowdown and civil war.<sup>648</sup>

During Erdoğan's Washington visit, Erdoğan's security detail clashed with reporters and protestors outside the BI, which was a further blow to Turkey's international image. The Atlantic reads "Turkey's Media Crackdown Knows No Borders".<sup>649</sup> Then, Obama publicly raised his concerns over the direction Erdoğan was taking his country with regard to freedom of the press.<sup>650</sup> In response, Erdoğan said that he was saddened by the statement that Obama made behind his back.<sup>651</sup>

In late-May 2016, Kurdish-led SDF launched a military offensive against ISIS in northern Raqqa. Continuing US support for SDF sparked an uproar in Turkey as first images of the US-led operation in northern Raqqa appeared, showing US Special Operations forces wearing YPG patches during the northern Raqqa offensive.<sup>652</sup> In response, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu accused the US of being hypocritical.<sup>653</sup> President Erdoğan responded by condemning the US support for YPG.<sup>654</sup> US military

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<sup>645</sup> Carol E. Lee, "Turkish President Faces a Cool Reception in U.S. Visit," *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2016.

<sup>646</sup> John Hudson, "Erdoğan Uses Closed-Door Meeting to Blast Obama Administration," *Foreign Policy*, March 30, 2016.

<sup>647</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Vice President Biden criticizes crackdown on dissent in Turkey," *Washington Post*, January 22, 2016.

<sup>648</sup> Mort Abramowitz and Eric Edelman, "Turkey's Erdoğan must reform or resign," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2016.

<sup>649</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, "Turkey's Media Crackdown Knows No Borders," *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2016.

<sup>650</sup> Nahal Toosi, "Obama troubled by Turkish leader's crackdowns," *Politico*, April 4, 2016.

<sup>651</sup> Will Worley, "Turkey's President Erdoğan attacks Barack Obama for criticizing press crackdown behind my back," *The Independent*, April 3, 2016.

<sup>652</sup> Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Liz Sly, "First images emerge of U.S. Special Operations forces in the fight to retake Raqqa," *Washington Post*, May 26, 2016; "YPG'nin ABD askerleri," *Yeni Şafak*, May 26, 2016.

<sup>653</sup> Mehmet Çınar, "Türkiye'den ABD'ye YPG tepkisi: İkiyüzlülük," *Hürriyet*, May 28, 2015.

<sup>654</sup> "Amerika'nın PYD ve YPG'ye Verdiği Desteği Kınıyorum," *T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı*, May 28, 2016.

ignored Turkey's furious reaction and backed the Kurdish-led SDF operation, which was launched on May 31, 2016 to take Manbij from ISIS.<sup>655</sup>

US support for the Syrian Kurdish fighters against ISIS, US-Russian cooperation against extremist groups in Syria, Turkey's rift with Russia over downing of a Russian jet and the fact that the Syrian government gained the upper hand against Syrian rebels with Russian backing from early 2016 onwards have huge blows to the AKP's Syria policy. Apart from that, as mentioned earlier, Turkey's continuing drift towards authoritarianism with increasing restrictions on freedom of speech from 2013 to 2016 exacerbated Turkey's international standing.<sup>656</sup>

As a consequence, failure of Turkish government's persistent regime change policy throughout the Arab uprisings, especially in Syria and its failure to grapple with domestic political challenges with democratic means laid the groundwork for Turkey, being gradually isolated at the world stage.<sup>657</sup> By the end of 2015, Turkey went from Davutoğlu's policy of "zero problems with neighbors" in 2009-2010 to "precious loneliness" as Turkey's relations with foreign countries, including major powers such as Russia and the US, seemed very grim.<sup>658</sup>

The Turkish government started a rapprochement process in late-June 2016 with Russia and Israel to take the country out of international isolation.<sup>659</sup> Hence, President Erdoğan apologized for the downing of Russian jet.<sup>660</sup> On the other hand, there were no signs of rapprochement between the US and Turkey. As Turkey descended further towards authoritarianism, the US officials, as well as media in the US became fiercer in its stance against the Turkish government.

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<sup>655</sup> Liz Sly and Karen DeYoung, "Ignoring Turkey, U.S. backs Kurds in drive against ISIS in Syria," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2016.

<sup>656</sup> Erin Cunningham, "U.N. slams Turkey for alarming reports of human rights abuses," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2016.

<sup>657</sup> "Turkey not lonely but dares to do so for its values and principles, says PM adviser," *Hürriyet Daily News*, August 26, 2013; Mark Lowen, "Erdoğan's 'New Turkey' drifts toward isolation," *BBC News*, November 20, 2014.

<sup>658</sup> David Gardner, "Turkey's foreign policy of precious loneliness," *Financial Times*, November 16, 2015.

<sup>659</sup> "Turkey seeks a way out of international isolation," *Financial Times*, June 28, 2016.

<sup>660</sup> Andrew Roth and Erin Cunningham, "Turkish president apologizes for downing of Russian warplane last year," *Washington Post*, June 27, 2016.

All in all, the ultimate failure of Turkey's ambitious Syria policy and declining democracy from 2011 to 2016 obliterated the idea of the Turkish model for the Arab world, therefore causing permanent damages to the US-Turkey relationship, which was mentioned within the framework of "model partnership" back in 2009.<sup>661</sup> In the meantime, the AKP administration gradually became anti-US in its foreign policy orientation, blaming the US for both domestic and foreign challenges it faced.

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<sup>661</sup> Mustafa Akyol, "Whatever Happened to the Turkish Model?" *New York Times*, May 5, 2016.

## CONCLUSION

All things considered, this study's primary goal was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the inner dynamics that drove the US-Turkish relationship in a contemporary context. In doing so, it aimed at determining the areas of significant convergence between the US and Turkey but also intended to illustrate the areas of deepening divergence that complicated the US-Turkish alliance especially in the 2010s.

In the first chapter, this study tried to cover the major elements of US-Turkish ties between 1945 and 2001. I first expanded on the institutionalization of US-Turkish security alliance under the framework that NATO provided. By and large, the first chapter pointed out that the US officials saw Turkey as a bulwark against the Soviet Union while the Turkish officials pursued a western leaning policy to preserve its national interests against foreign threats especially coming from the Soviet Union. The first chapter also depicted the early sources of disintegration between the US and Turkey as the Cyprus dispute created a period of friction between the countries.

Lastly, I also briefly touched upon the newly emerging elements in the US-Turkey relationship after the end of the Cold War. The essential argument of this section was that with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US-Turkish relations entered into a new phase, where Turkey's direction in its domestic politics and new political developments in the Middle East became increasingly crucial for driving the US-Turkey relationship forward. The Gulf War, the emergence of a new Kurdish autonomous entity in northern Iraq, Turkey's conflict with the PKK and Turkey's growing relations with the EU came out as predominant issues in US-Turkish relations.

The second chapter delved deeper into the issues that shaped the trajectory of US-Turkish ties after September 11 attacks. For the most part, US-led global war on terrorism, US policy of democracy promotion and Turkey's political transformation emerged as crucial areas of increasing cooperation between the US and Turkey in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Second chapter of the study argued that the US Turkey policy was framed

within the context of Turkey's political transformation in the post-Cold War era with its rapidly growing economy, growing relations with the EU and its democratic consolidation, as opposed to the Cold War years, where Turkey was merely seen within a geostrategic context.<sup>662</sup>

More specifically, the second chapter dwelled on Turkey's crucial role in US-led global war on terrorism and US policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East. At that point, I argued that Turkey was upheld by the US officials as a model for the Middle East as Turkey's political transformation was vital for the US interests in the Middle East.<sup>663</sup> Therefore, Turkey's EU process, transformation in Turkish civil-military relations, new openings in Turkish foreign policy and Turkey's changing Kurdish policy turned out to be key platforms for growing cooperation between the US and Turkey under the AKP administration.<sup>664</sup>

Further on, in the third chapter, the study tried to spell out the underlying reasons behind the US efforts to invigorate relations with Turkey towards the end of the Bush administration. In this regard, I argued that the convergence of interests between the US and Turkey in 2009 was rooted in transformation in Turkish politics under the AKP administration as the relationship was defined within a new framework of "model partnership".

It also touched upon pressing foreign policy issues, which was in line with the new activism in Turkish foreign policy, such as Turkey's rapprochement with Iran and the AKP administration's growing rift with Israel and their ramifications for US-Turkish bilateral ties. More importantly, the study aimed at the enunciating the convergence between the countries when the uprisings swept through the Arab world from late-2010 onwards. When the uprisings struck countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, the US policy was formulated within the boundaries of democracy

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<sup>662</sup> After the Cold War, US Turkey policy went through a vital change, where many US officials and Turkey experts in the US started describing Turkey within the context of its democratic transformation. For more information on US Turkey policy see, Morton Abramowitz, *Türkiye'nin Dönüşümü ve Amerikan Politikası* trans. Faruk Çakır and Nasuh Uslu (Liberte: İstanbul, 2001).

<sup>663</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27 no. 1/2 (2005).

<sup>664</sup> Madeleine K. Albright, Stephen J. Hadley and Steven A. Cook, "US-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership," *Council on Foreign Relations* no. 69 (2012): 6-20.

promotion. Turkey's policy was very much in line with the US regarding the Arab uprisings since the AKP administration pushed for the ouster of the existing regimes in order to bolster its influence in the Middle East by backing the Muslim Brotherhood.

As a consequence, I made the case in the third chapter that the AKP administration and PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in particular, was upheld as exemplary political actors and Turkey was put forward as a model, a source of inspiration, for economic growth, democratization and co-existence of a Muslim religious political elite and a traditionally secular state.<sup>665</sup>

In the last chapter, the study laid special emphasis on the Syrian crisis as the quagmire in Syria slowly became a central issue in driving US-Turkish relations. I tried to explain why the US and Turkey largely cooperated during the first phase of the Syrian uprising in 2011 and 2012 and clarify why the interests of two countries gradually diverged from one another from 2013 onwards.

The fourth chapter focused on the shifting US priorities in Syria owing to the rising influence of jihadist groups in the country. I put forward that the AKP administration's persistent regime change policy created a divergence between the US and Turkey as major US officials deemed Turkey's policy as sectarian and undermining US interests from 2013 onwards. In fact, the perception of Turkey's Syria policy in the US was to blame Turkey for bolstering jihadists in Syria and playing a key role in the rise of ISIS in 2014.

In the meantime, this study also aimed to underscore the effects of the decline of democracy in Turkey on US-Turkish ties owing to internal power struggles within the country. After the Gezi park protests erupted in May 2013, the US stopped seeing Turkey as a credible regional actor. From then on, the "Turkish model" became untannable for the US.<sup>666</sup>

The fourth chapter centered on US policy of supporting the Kurdish militants in northern Syria against ISIS and the deepening of the divergence between the US and

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<sup>665</sup> Gönül Tol, "The 'Turkish Model' in the Middle East," *Middle East Institute*, December 12, 2012; Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey: The New Model?" *Brookings Institute*, April 25, 2012; Oğuzhan Göksel, "Assessing the Turkish Model as a Guide to the Emerging Democracies in the Middle East," *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4 no. 1 (2012).

<sup>666</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, "The End of the Turkish Model," *Survival*, 56 no. 2 (2014): 50-2;

Turkey. Strategic priorities of US and Turkey became completely divergent in Syria after the rise of ISIS. The Turkish administration saw the Syrian government and the Kurdish militants in Syria as primary threats while the US largely prioritized fighting ISIS. With the Russian intervention in September 2015, Turkey was isolated in the international arena as its influence in Syria substantially diminished and its relations with the US further deteriorated due to continuing US support for the Kurdish militants.

Overall, this study's central argument was that the Arab uprisings and the Syrian crisis in particular created such an irreversible rift in the US-Turkey relationship that it demolished the "Turkish model" for the Middle East,<sup>667</sup> which had been constructed as a building block for bilateral ties between the countries under the framework of "model partnership" in 2009.

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<sup>667</sup> Tugal, *The Fall of the Turkish Model*, 2016.

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