

PRINCIPLES OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND REGIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURING

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THE world is undergoing tumultuous changes, presenting challenges to countries such as Turkey that are affected by this tectonic transformation. While there is a serious economic crisis currently affecting the international community at large, the regions surrounding Turkey are undergoing an equally significant process of political transition. Though challenging, we believe these transformations are natural and inevitable processes. As it is unwise to confront these processes, the best course of action is to develop a sound understanding of the causes of this transformation, whilst developing suitable strategies to cope with the change. As it conducts foreign policy in such turbulent regional and international environments, Turkey possesses several advantages, which make it uniquely positioned to respond to the myriad challenges related to political transition.

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TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY STRENGTHS

First, Turkish foreign policy is formulated with reference to a holistic understanding of historical trends and a sense of active agency. Rejecting a reactionary foreign policy approach, Turkey develops its positions on regional and international issues with careful consideration of its own conditions. More than anything else, Turkey's stance reflects its historical depth, geographical positioning and rich legacy in international affairs.

We believe that those who fail to understand the flow of history, and do not position themselves in the world accordingly, will be overtaken by the rapid pace of events and will end up paying a heavy price for it. Therefore, we formulate our policies through a solid and rational judgment of the long-term historical trends and an understanding of where



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we are situated in the greater trajectory of world history. More importantly, we constantly question and self-reflect on our position, and make revisions where necessary. By adopting such a deep-rooted stance on current affairs, we manage to tackle the challenges of the drastic transformations taking place in the global system.

Second, Turkey has achieved progress in establishing a stable and peaceful domestic order on which it can build a proactive foreign policy. In recent years, Turkey has struck a healthy balance between freedoms and security at home. When we embarked on this transformation process, we were motivated by the belief that stability cannot be built on the basis of force alone.

Only those governments that enjoy political legitimacy and respect freedoms can achieve peace and stability.

While Turkish governments in the 1990s lagged behind the wave of democratization and failed to embrace universal human rights, in the last decade Turkey has undergone a major domestic restructuring process, fixing many of its shortcomings in terms of its human rights record.

This fundamental transformation was made possible by the various democratization reforms implemented in a determined manner by strong political authority with a visionary leadership. Today, Turkey has consolidated its econ-

omy and liberalized its political system. In particular, Turkey has abandoned its erroneous habits of the past, which sucked its energy into vicious internal discussions, due to the perception of the society as a potential enemy. No longer driven by fear of internal problems—thanks to the expanded scope of basic freedoms—Turkey is now more self-confident about its international position, and is trusted by its neighbors and the international community. If Turkey had failed to establish the security-freedom balance, today it would be facing enormous difficulties in standing with the pro-democratic transformative wave in the region, compromising its security.

Third, Turkey's reintegration with its neighbors will be yet another asset for its foreign policy in this turbulent era. While it goes through a domestic transformation and reform processes, Turkey has also embarked on the parallel undertaking of moving to consolidate ties to its region. One strength of our foreign policy, thus, is the ongoing process of reconnecting with the people in our region with whom we shared a common history and are poised to have a common destiny.

This objective will continue to shape our foreign policy priorities, and we will not take steps that will alienate us from the hearts and minds of our region's people for short-term political calculations. This objective also means that we will seek to reconcile our differences

with neighboring countries by engaging in a soul-searching effort and moving beyond the disputes that have divided us. Through increasing ties with neighbors, Turkey will be better positioned to play its role as a responsible country at the global level.

FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES

Turkish foreign policy in recent years has been conducted in consideration of several underlying principles. I have elaborated on them at some length previously, explaining terms such as rhythmic diplomacy, multi-dimensional foreign policy, zero problems with neighbors, order instituting actor, international cooperation, and proactive foreign policy. As we conduct our foreign policy in this new era, these and other principles will continue to guide us. They deserve closer scrutiny here.

First, while paying utmost attention to defending our national interests, we will also pursue a value-based foreign policy. We have already expressed our readiness to assume the responsibilities of a global actor, and set ourselves the objective of being recognized as a wise country in the international community. Especially in times of crises—such as the economic one the world is going through or the political transformation in our region—the need for wise countries to deliver such essential functions as conflict prevention, mediation, conflict resolution or development assistance, become

particularly evident. As a wise country—i.e. a responsible member of the international community—we aspire to enhance our capability to shape the course of developments around us and make a valuable contribution to the resolution of regional and international issues.

In the pursuit of our global objectives, we will endeavor to listen to the consciousness and common sense of humanity, and become a firm defender of universal values. While embracing these universal principles, we will enmesh them with local values—we shall advocate in particular, human rights and such norms as democracy, good governance, transparency and rule of law.

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We will extend our assistance to the people who rise up to demand such values because, given our belief in the principles of justice and equality, we are convinced that they also deserve to have the same rights and privileges enjoyed by our own people. As our region experiences democratization, Turkey will continue its quest to maintain a balance between promoting democratic values and defending national interests.

Our emphasis on fundamental freedoms and democratic rights will not be confined to our region. We will also work to advocate the rights of Turks

abroad. We are especially concerned about rising xenophobic views in some Western countries. We will therefore continue to raise awareness about the long-term threats posed by such trends to Europe's democratic and pluralist values, as well as its immediate effect on people who have migrated to that continent from Turkey—especially considering that xenophobic attacks in some cases cost lives. We believe that we

have a stake in helping to answer the question, "Where is Europe heading?" in terms of its core values, and we intend to keep a keen eye on the future of democracy in Europe.

Second, as we position ourselves in the world's great

historic transformation process, we will act with self-confidence in our ability to meet the aforementioned challenges. When we set ourselves the objective of becoming a wise country, we realize it comes with many expectations and requires new instruments which might be missing in Turkey's traditional foreign policy toolkit. We will rely on our ability as individuals, as a nation and a state, to garner the resources necessary to achieve our foreign policy objectives. In areas where we lack specific instruments needed to fulfill the new demands of our objective of becoming a wise country, we will work to develop these instruments with self-confidence.

At the institutional level, we have already initiated a major organizational restructuring of the Foreign Ministry, as well as improvements in the quality of its personnel through new educational programs. At the same time, we have expanded our diplomatic representations abroad. In the last two years, we opened 30 new embassies in different parts of the world, including twenty-two in Africa, five in Latin America, and three in East Asia. We have also become actively involved in new areas, such as international development assistance, peace-making and mediation. In this context, we have assumed responsibilities in several regional and international organizations and hosted events such as an international conference on Africa, the UN Summit on the Least Developed Countries, and a UN Conference on mediation, amongst others. As we continue to prepare ourselves for this challenging global role, we will benefit greatly from the rich history, experience and resources of our nation, which is the basis of our foreign policy.

Third, our foreign policy will be conducted autonomously. We suffer from a perception that other powers design regional policies and we only perform the roles assigned to us. We need to do away with this psychological sense of inferiority, which has permeated in many segments of our society and amongst political elites. Today, we determine our vision, set our objec-

tives, and execute our foreign policy in line with our national priorities. We might succeed or fail in our initiatives, but the crucial point is that we implement our own policies. Turkey does not receive instructions from any other powers, nor are we part of others' grand schemes.

In particular, our policies towards neighbors are devised with careful consideration of our own evaluation of the situation. As has been the case so far, we will continue to coordinate our policies with those of our Western partners as we see fit, but will never let such partnership negatively affect our relations with neighbors.

Fourth, we will pursue a vision-oriented foreign policy. The wise country role requires us to establish a healthy balance between crisis management and vision management. Today, the world is going through a major global economic crisis, whilst our region is experiencing a troublesome political transformation. We have stepped in to play an active role in these transformative processes, putting to work our crisis management services and our multi-dimensional diplomacy. As we struggle to handle conjectural challenges in the Middle East, the Western Balkans, the Caucasus region and Eastern Europe, we will never lose sight of the broader trends, keeping in mind our holistic approach.

Our long-term vision will inspire our crisis management efforts and help shape the course of developments in our regional and global neighborhoods.

At the regional level, our vision is a regional order that is built on representative political systems, reflecting the legitimate demands of the people where regional states are fully integrated to each other around the core values of democracy and true economic interdependence. On the other hand, Turkey—while supporting the popular movements which stem from within the societies—has no agenda to impose a certain political system in the region or to instigate popular movements against the incumbent administrations.

At the global level, we will aspire to build in a participatory manner a new international order that would be inclusive of the international community at large. This global order will have three dimensions: a political order based on dialogue and multilateralism, an economic order based on justice and equality, and a cultural order based on inclusiveness and accommodation.

DEALING WITH UPRISINGS

Turkey's value-based approach and emphasis on democracy and popular legitimacy have underpinned its policy toward the uprisings in the Middle East. Since the revolution in Tunisia, we have pursued a dynamic foreign policy reflecting our basic principles.

First, we decided to support the people who rise to demand such basic rights as freedom of expression and other political freedoms. Our chief concern was to sustain the deep and dear friendship we established with the people and to not trade these ties for temporary balance of power calculations. Second, we emphasized that the transition towards stable and legitimate democratic political structures can only be achieved via a balance between security and freedoms. Third, we believe that there is no contradiction between our emphasis on democratic demands, which in some cases required us to confront repressive regimes, and our foreign policy principle of zero problems with neighbors. Fourth, we expressed our opposition to foreign intervention in principle, because this region's future has to be decided by its people. Fifth, we consider all people of the region as our eternal brothers, irrespective of their background, and see it our duty to dampen sectarian tensions.

With these principles in mind, we believed that the youth demonstrating in the streets represented the future of the region and their aspirations needed to be taken into account. The values demanded by the young Arab generation are the same as what our people enjoy, and we believed that they had a right to claim them: free and fair elections, rule of law, transparency and accountability.

In fact, this was a delayed transformation and was long overdue. All these transitions to democracy should have been achieved in the Middle East in the 1990s, as the Cold War's downfall instigated an international wave of democratization. But unfortunately at the time, the preference of major powers was more for stability than democracy in this region, and the archaic regimes continued existence with their backing.

As the region was undergoing such a political earthquake, we aspired to position ourselves on the right side of history and decided to make our humble contribution to this epic democratic struggle. When the Turkish government debated what our foreign policy should be, we concluded that we should unconditionally support the legitimate demands of the Arab people wherever they are, because it was their right to demand the best for themselves.

By positioning itself on the side of the people demonstrating in the streets, Turkish foreign policy took a courageous but risky decision. We thought it was a prudent and just action—in line with our vision for the region. That vision in fact had shaped our policy in the region even before the Arab Spring, when we established good neighborly relations

with the incumbent regimes. We developed ties with these regimes because at the time they were not at war with their own people. But when they preferred to suppress the demands of their citizens, we sided with the people and still remain committed to the same democratic vision for our region. We stated consistently that we will stand against any oppression in our region, irrespective of the identity of the oppressors, and will not tolerate regimes that see their country as their personal property and want to treat their people with complete disregard of universal values and fundamental human rights, most notably the right to life.

Both privately and publically, we advised the leaders only one thing, to listen to the

voice of their people and do only what they wanted. We advised the regimes to no longer ignore their people's quest for democracy and asked them to establish a balance between freedom and security. Because we had faith in the power of democracy and argued that a government unable to communicate with its own people will not survive. If security is sacrificed for freedom, it will lead to chaos, while if freedom is sacrificed for security, it will result in dictatorial regimes. Our policy was simply to urge the leaders to provide maximum freedom without risking security, and

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maximum security without limiting freedoms.

The instruments we used to conduct our foreign policy in this process reflected our new principles. As our government contemplated how we could assist the Arab peoples' quest for democracy, we firmly agreed that we will pursue an Ankara-based policy and act in line with our value-based evaluation of the developments. We decided to exhaust all means of diplomacy in order to mediate between the regimes and the people. When the regimes chose to use brute force against their citizens, we still endeavored to find diplomatic solutions to end bloodshed and massacres, because we wanted to avoid foreign military intervention in our region in consideration of its devastating effects. While standing against intervention as a matter of principle, we also expressed that we will not keep silent on oppression by autocratic leaders and will act in tandem with the international community to end it.

Since we aspired to achieve limitless cooperation and economic integration in our region, we were also careful to ensure that this transition process will not draw new lines of division. I stated on many occasions that we do not want to see Cold War-like structures emerging in the region, especially in the sense of new tensions and polarizations, erecting walls of separation between the people. In particular, it was incumbent upon us

to work towards preventing divisions across sectarian lines, i.e. Shiite versus Sunni or political regimes.

In all of the cases of transition in the Middle East, Turkey tried to contribute to this process by political and economic means. In the case of political support, Turkey established close relations with the new governments after the transition and also encouraged other countries and international organizations to support their transition. Turkey provided training and education in terms of capacity building and political transformation. In terms of economic support, Turkey provided credits to the transition countries to alleviate some of the difficulties created by the uncertainties of political changes.

While the transition in Tunisia was least problematic, in Syria and Libya, Bashar Al-Assad and Moammar Gaddafi failed to heed their people's calls for political reforms. Turkey made an utmost effort to maintain communication with all sides in these countries, hoping to prevent their descent into a vicious cycle of violence. We made several efforts to reach out to Assad and Gaddafi and proposed a peaceful transition period early on. In Libya, unfortunately, the country had to suffer a destructive conflict and the transition could be accomplished only through an international intervention. Just as we tried ceaselessly to find a diplomatic solution until the very last

moment, we will continue to support the Libyan people as they work to heal the wounds of this conflict and reconcile in a democratic structure. The developments after the transition in Libya proved the validity of our approach of a gradual transition.

In Egypt, the promises of a democratic transformation after Hosni Mubarak's departure was interrupted by a military intervention, which was ensued by a brutal and bloody suppression of opposition groups in the post-revolutionary political process. Currently there is an effort to reintroduce several pre-revolutionary constraints upon the Egyptian public through political and social spheres. Turkey desires to see the Egyptian people's free will fully represented through democratic channels at the end of Egypt's ongoing transformation.

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad promised to deliver reforms, but instead of implementing them he continued to use indiscriminate force against civilian protestors. He failed to follow the roadmap we agreed and unfortunately the people of the country today are experiencing a humanitarian tragedy. We pursued three-stage diplomacy to prevent that outcome. First, we initiated bilateral engagement with the regime and worked hard—around eight months until September 2011—to convince it to introduce reforms. But, unfortunately, we were not able to convince the ad-

ministration to stop the violence and implement reforms. Thus we severed our ties with the Baath regime. After September 2011, however, we launched a regional initiative in concert with the Arab League, and supported all of its plans, including the observer mission. When the Arab League came to a point that this initiative also failed to solve the problem, we moved to the international stage. Along with the Arab League, we supported the resolution presented to the U.N. Security Council, which unfortunately was vetoed. We will continue to strongly support the Syrian people's democratic struggle in various regional and international platforms—including Friends of Syria, which brings together like-minded states from the region and beyond.

Even as the Baath regime's brutality ravaged the country, it has generated repercussions by introducing elements of savagery among the ranks of its opponents, which were encouraged and supported by the regime to be able to divide and discredit the opposition. Close to 200,000 Syrians have lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands more Syrians have taken refuge in Turkey and other neighboring countries, due to the regime's onslaught and the savagery of the aforementioned opposition splinter elements. The level of destruction and the humanitarian crisis requires a concerted effort by the international community.

As recent developments in Iraq attest, further prolongation of the instability in Syria carries the potential to unleash regional turbulence. Turkey continues to support the opposition represented by the Syrian National Coalition, as the sole legitimate representative of Syrian people, and wishes to see a free and democratic Syria founded upon the voluntary participation of all segments of Syrian society.

THE WAY FORWARD

Turkey today faces a challenging international environment and accompanying foreign policy issues, as it endeavors to consolidate its democratic experience at home. There is little doubt that the regional political transformation and global economic restructuring, with all the risks they entail, will continue to occupy Turkey's foreign policy agenda in the years to come. We believe, however, that several factors will aid us in coping with these challenges: our holistic approach to historical trends and sense of active agency, our stable and peaceful domestic order established around the balance between freedoms and security, and the process of reintegration with our neighbors. While we will continue to defend our foreign policy principles by enmeshing local and universal values, and we will also pursue a proactive foreign policy approach by building on those strengths.

We will work towards the establishment of a more peaceful and prosperous regional order and support people's quest for basic

human rights and democracy. We will stand against those regimes that seek to deny and suppress such legitimate demands through coercion. We will use all avenues of diplomacy to address such emergencies, so that a just solution short of a destructive military intervention can be brought to bear. Unfortunately, in Syria we are confronted with such a contingency. Our efforts to find a diplomatic solution, carried out in coordination with regional actors and the international community, have fallen on deaf ears in Damascus. The regime's indiscriminate killings have reached such massive proportions that they constitute crimes against humanity. The international community has to pursue a more resolute course of action to stop the bloodshed and bring those responsible to justice, as we tirelessly continue to make our contribution to those efforts.

With our rational and active diplomacy, we will aspire to realize our values and make a contribution to the resolution of regional and global problems as a responsible member of the international community. In this endeavor, our foreign policy will be based on, among other things, such principles as a value-based approach to international challenges, self-confidence in assuming our global responsibilities, acting autonomously in devising our priorities, and adopting a vision-oriented approach to crisis management. Backed by these solid principles, we will act in tandem with our regional and global partners to materialize our objective of becoming a wise country to which others look for aspiration. ●