



Ideological dimensions in Turkey's foreign policy under the justice and development party-AKP

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Abstract

The role of ideology in a country's foreign policy has been an attention-grabbing subject of study for international relations specialists for a long time. Ideology, in one form or another, remains one of the parameters of foreign policy making and implementation. In contemporary times, when rational theories are dominant themes in international relations, studying the role of ideology in a country's foreign policy analysis can be both important and exciting. During the Cold War, the role of ideology in foreign policy was mainly studied in relation to communist countries. After the end of the Cold War, as Francis Fukuyama argues in his book "The End of History", the study of ideology has remained relevant in the contemporary period. From this standpoint, the present study has been mooted. As the title exhibits, this study intends to explore the role of ideology in Turkish foreign policy, particularly of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), in the past one and a half decades. During this period, the present ruling party of Turkey, Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi or A.K. Party, ruled the country and brought tremendous transformations in its domestic and external fronts.

Keywords: Ideology, Turkey, foreign policy, AKP/JDP

Introduction

It has been widely debated whether Turkey's current political system has drastically changed after the 9/11 event or whether Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (In Turkish, Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi-AKP) and mainly its leaders are ideologically driven. In this context, much has been written about how the writings of then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and the speeches of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and former President Abdullah Gul prove Turkey's Islamic orientation and its leaders' distinct perception of the West. Thus, although the AKP officially calls itself "conservative democrat," many authors try either to prove the party's ideological Islamist roots or support its democratic character. To discuss this debate, this chapter attempts to answer two fundamental questions: what is the ideology of the AKP? To what extent does the AKP ideology influence Turkish foreign policy (TFP)? In answering the first question, we first address the origins and main currents of this ideology of AKP. The second part discusses Turkey's efforts to implement this ideology in its foreign policy, especially towards the Middle East and the West, but also globally. The chapter discusses the new ideological dimensions in A.K. Party's Turkey's foreign policy and its sources from Ahmet Davutoglu's "Strategic Depth: International Position of Turkey". Furthermore, the chapter deals with Turkish foreign policy in various regions and issues. Then, we look at transformation while a distinction is made between the ideology of the AKP as a whole and the ideology of the policymakers and officials, as expressed publicly. To examine the impact of ideology on policymaking, we briefly look at the continuity and change in the AKP's ideological expressions over the past decade regarding Turkish foreign policy.

"Turkish foreign policy today is undoubtedly far more proactive and multi-dimensional than ever in the republic's history." This statement aptly captures the essence of Turkey's current foreign policy under the AKP government. It underscores the government's proactive and multi-

dimensional approach, a significant departure from the past and undoubtedly impressive in its scope and ambition. This statement accurately characterises Turkey's actual foreign policy under the AKP government. This remark, explicitly or implicitly, emphasises the linkage between internal development and external approaches that purposely strive to achieve their foreign policy goals.

Ideological transformation: The political origins of AKP, the Ideological successor of Milli Gorus

Certain factors need to be considered to understand the ideological background of the AKP and its ascendance to power, which signified – for many – an ideological transformation in politics. These factors include the political and ideological roots of the party, the political and ideological background of the party's members, the content of political Islam as ideology, and the Kemalist ideology as a traditional obstacle to political Islam's organised expression in politics.

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the top-down social engineering project, Kemal made great efforts to dissociate the newly born state from its Ottoman and Islamic past. This process created, on the one hand, a centre-periphery distinction in terms of the dominant secular and conservative socio-political tendencies, respectively, and clothed the Turkish state with a veil of secularism even though the oppressed Islamic element and identity were still influential within the society. Necmettin Erbakan was the one to lead the first coherent political Islamic movement – known as Milli Gorus (National Outlook) – in the 1970s. After 1970, political parties with Islamist ideas came to the Turkish political arena. The first party of political Islam was the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi- MNP), which was closed by the Constitutional Court. Then, the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi-MSP-) was established, and it became the coalition partner of the People's Republic Party in 1974. Since then, Islamic parties in Turkey have faced many challenges and have very often

been banned from politics. Yet, political changes throughout the 20th century allowed political Islam to acquire more prominence gradually; a particularly significant period for political Islam was the 1980s and the governance of Turgut Ozal and his Motherland Party (ANAP). During that period, the Kemalist military elites, paradoxically, favoured the inclusion of political Islam in politics as they saw it as a means of combating the threat of the communist ideology within the country—and thus developed the so-called “Turkish-Islamic” synthesis, a complicated mixture of nationalism and political Islamism.

Within this relatively benign political environment, Ozal managed to strengthen the role of political Islam. At the same time, his reforms largely liberalised the economy, thus allowing the capitalists of the Anatolian periphery – also known as *Anatolian Tigers* – to enter the picture and play a decisive role in Turkey’s economic development and capital accumulation. In the 1990s, after many Islamic parties had been banned and new ones were formulated, the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi-RP) made a strong return. After the 1995 national elections, a coalition government was formed with the Truth Path Party (Ogru Yol Partisi-DYP), with Erbakan as Prime Minister. Erbakan had a clear Islamist agenda, and though he also paid attention to social issues, his domestic and foreign policies brought him at odds with the military establishment. This fact led to his overthrow via a so-called “post-modern coup” after the military issued a memorandum in February 1997. After that, the military initiated a campaign against everything Islamic. At the same time, the “post-modern coup” became a reference point through which the Islamist movement learned how to adapt to the political reality and adopt a more indirect approach to politics, which could save it from another confrontation with the Kemalist Generals.

The latter realisation created a politico-ideological schism within the Islamic movement: on the one hand, led by Necmettin Erbakan, there were the “traditionalists” who did not favour a change in the movement’s political orientation, while on the other hand, the “reformists”, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul (the AKP’s current leaders), advocated “that the party needed to rethink its approach to several fundamental issues, particularly democracy, human rights, and relations with the West.” An ideological change was expressed in the RP’s successor, the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi-FP), which was banned in 2001. After that, the movement formally split up. Two new parties emerged: the reformists’ Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkilma Partisi-AKP) and the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi-SP) of the traditionalists.

The traditionalists’ version of political Islam was based on a particular worldview. It was thus characterised by certain ideological features: an Islam-based society, anti-secularism, an essentialist incompatibility between East and West, anti-globalisation, anti-Westernism, anti-European Union (EU), anti-Semitism, and a pro-Muslim world foreign policy attitude. In terms of the nature of political Islam, Samir Amin, although referring mainly to the Arab world and the origins of modern political Islam, states that it is about submission rather than emancipation. Moreover, he argues that political Islam has little to nothing to do with theology. Instead, he sees it as defining a community and constructing a collective identity, not a “personal conviction.” Additionally, Amin maintains that political Islam does not accept the separation between state and

religion. At the same time, it also “disapproves of the very principle of democracy – the right of society to build its future through its freedom to legislate.” Although stemming from the same SP movement and ideological background, the AKP employed a more moderate stance. It abolished the label “Islamic” and promoted itself as a conservative-democratic party. It adopted a positive approach to democratic and Western values, thus transforming its public image and discourse. At the same time, it shifted its rhetoric and policies in favour of the EU and openly supported Turkey’s accession to it.

It is important to remember the turning point of the AKP’s ideological transformation, which was the 1997 “post-modern coup,” because it bears great significance as to why these changes emerged and the extent to which they are genuine. Admittedly, these are issues challenging to determine with certainty, but, in retrospect, it seems that it was a rational political act of tactical and strategic importance by the AKP, a manoeuvre similar to the one that led to the “Turkish-Islamic” synthesis of the 1980s, as it stemmed from political anxieties, akin – yet reverse – to the ones that the Kemalist establishment faced back then. In other words, the AKP’s reformist and modernist orientation towards political Islam led to the latter’s integration into the dominant Kemalist ideology out of the party’s necessity to defeat it, survive in the political conditions of the time and ultimately ascend to and consolidate its power. In this context, for example, the reform and democratisation of EU-backed packages were seen by the AKP as a means of weakening the power and state control of the Kemalist military bureaucratic establishment. In contrast, maintaining pro-Western rhetoric could be seen as populism directed both domestically and abroad as that would appeal to the pro-Kemalist masses and the Western allies alike.

The AKP and its transformation

While the process of ideological transformation is essential, it is also important to determine whether that transformation is genuine or not. That is because a particular ideology may influence policymaking, as described above, by translating or filtering domestic and external political changes or developments in specific ways. If the AKP had demonstrated only superficial ideological change, which was meant to win the struggle over the state power against the Kemalist establishment, then the ideological shift might not be permanent; this would mean that the traditional tenets of political Islam have not been abolished but rather temporarily hidden or covered up until the political conditions allow for their re-emergence. However, in trying to identify ideological change and ideologically – or not–driven policymaking, we first need to address the issue of whose ideology we are talking about. The AKP is our reference object, but is the AKP ideologically homogenous? Is any political party ideologically homogenous? The truth is that most of the indicators of the AKP’s ideology point to the worldviews of the elite as the most vocal ones and not of the party.

The AKP ideology

In a chapter of their book titled “The AKP’s Ideology,” Hale and Ozbudum argue that the ideology of the AKP is conservative democracy, which agrees with the AKP’s ideological self-definition. However, their findings are based on “the stature, programme, and other official

documents” of the party, and they acknowledge that one might argue against them. The authors go further to say that critiques that claim that the AKP is working towards establishing a Sharia-based Islamic Republic are not substantiated by “The AKP government’s performance.” Importantly, Hale and Ozbudum refer to the ideology of the AKP. As noted, they only look at the official documents and declarations of the party, while their analysis of the party’s ideology and its historical roots focuses on domestic politics. Yet, when it comes to analysing Turkish foreign policy under the AKP, mentioning Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and the President and Prime Minister becomes inevitable. The reference to Davutoglu’s ideas and world views in the book resembles other texts, such as the abovementioned ones by Cornell and Cagaptay, which examine writings and speeches to identify the ideology and then base their foreign policy analysis on it. Indeed, Hale and Ozbudum adopt a more critical approach without simply basing their argument on Davutoglu or adopting an East-West distinction in their analysis. In short, although the authors clarify that Ahmet Davutoglu’s ideas are not new and exaggerate Turkey’s role, they admit that they “influenced the practice of foreign policy under the AKP.”

In this light, if the declared ideology of a party is not necessarily the only one within it, or if world views of the elite, policymaking, and personalities of a (ruling) party can influence (foreign) policy outcomes, then it can be said that the ideology of the policy-making elites can be studied separately from the ideology of the party. Significantly enough, in a 2013 interview, Abdullatif Sener, one of the founding members of the AKP, former Minister of State, Deputy Prime Minister in the AKP government, and the party’s deputy AK Party deputy (2002-2007) stated, among other things, that “The AK Party’s party programme was a democratic programme. The Prime Minister has never adopted the party programme.” Further, he said, “The Prime Minister is not a person that internalised the idea of democracy... He thinks he can do whatever he wants since he won the elections.” These statements make clear the importance of ideological and political divergence between the elites –specifically the leaders – and the rest of the party. It is also clear that this fact is unpleasant to many and subject to debate, although it is evidence of Erdogan’s more traditionalist ideas. These are the primary reasons we focus on “the AKP ideology” rather than “the AKP general will,” which refers to foreign policymaking.

The ideology of the AKP leaders has been called, among other things, “Muslim nationalism,” “democratic conservatism,” “Islamism”, “Democratic Islamism,” etc. This dissertation suggests that the ideology of the AKP is political Islamism (informed by traditional Turkish political Islam). Yet, its impact on policymaking has been limited and constrained by domestic and external factors. On the other hand, the more the AKP consolidates its power, gains control over the state, and faces less ideological, political and bureaucratic opposition, its ideology becomes apparent through its rhetoric and policies.

The vision: “Strategic Depth”

The Milli Gorus (National Vision or Outlook) ideology penetrates the general worldview of the AKP. The AKP foreign policy is based on a conceptual (or ideological) foundation developed by Ahmet Davutoglu. Davutoglu was a professor of International Relations at various Turkish

universities. However, he is the leading architect of Turkey’s foreign policy, to explain the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of Turkey’s policy in more detail. Davutoglu became the principal foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdogan in 2002. He served as the minister of foreign affairs (2009–2013) and became the Prime Minister of Turkey in August 2014. However, Davutoglu has developed a comprehensive international policy concept and formulated a new vision for Turkey’s foreign policy. His theoretical thinking is strongly informed by classical geopolitics. In his recent works, he emphasised cultural-historical analyses in developing the concept of ‘Strategic Depth’ as the conceptual basis for a contemporary Turkish foreign policy that stands up to the challenges of the 21st century.

“Strategic Depth” is a somewhat elusive analysis-based concept. Instead, it is a perspective and policy-oriented concept based on a comprehensive historical-cultural reading of Turkey’s position in international politics. It serves to justify a more diversified and active Turkish foreign policy by opening the conceptual horizon to the whole realm of modern Turkey’s Ottoman past. In a way, it positively brings history back into contemporary thinking about modern Turkish foreign policy. This approach, therefore, contrasts with the established Kemalist belief that Ottoman history is irrelevant to contemporary Turkey and, if at all, only in a negative sense. The main argument of this approach “new” approach is less about how national history and culture generally matter in the foreign policy of nations but more about how they should matter (in a specific way) in Turkish foreign policy. In this sense, ‘Strategic Depth’ offers the intellectual underpinning of a particular vision of contemporary Turkish foreign policy rather than an analytical concept for explaining foreign policy as such in a scholarly sense.

“Strategic Depth” is mainly based upon Davutoglu’s geopolitical and historical analysis of Turkey’s international position. It is a re-interpretation of Turkey’s history and geography following the new global context. According to Davutoglu’s concepts, the bipolar Cold War world system and the United States’ hegemony that followed it was a historical anomaly, a transitory period now ending. The international system is now entering a phase in which traditions, culture and historical heritage, i.e. what Davutoglu calls “historical depth”, will play a role alongside the traditional hallmarks of power such as geographical location, military might, economic prowess or demographic potential. To gain the status of a global power, a state must skillfully use all these elements.

Davutoglu’s approach has been essential to Turkey’s foreign policy vision for the last eight years. It has been revealed that Turkey’s new foreign policy vision reflects his academic perspective. Davutoglu reinterpreted the stable or structural variables of Turkey’s foreign policy formation. According to this perspective, Turkey’s value in world politics is predicated on its geo-strategic location and historical assets. This is the central thesis of the Strategic Depth doctrine. Turkey’s potentialities could be transformed into productive policy instruments if they are re-evaluated in harmony with the internal and international changes through strategic principles and planning instead of static perspectives and status quo motives that preclude Turkey’s full employment of its power parameters.

Davutoglu introduces a series of foreign policy principles through a new policy orientation. He gives clues about the latest foreign policy principles with general titles or specific prescriptions in his official unofficial public speeches, writings, and interviews. He lists three methodological foreign policy principles, which are explained below.

Vision-based strategy or a visionary approach refers to detecting crises before they emerge and stepping inefficiently. It envisages being a country establishing order around it rather than being a country giving a pure response to the situation. According to Davutoglu, the value-oriented visionary perspective emphasises possessing a strategic vision rather than a short-term interest in foreign policy formulation.

Consistent and systematic framework: The second principle conceives a coherent framework while dealing with the different actors of international relations. To have a systematic foreign policy framework, an accurate and consistent unification of strategic mindset, strategic planning, and political will is an inevitable necessity. This framework claims to ensure a foreign policy formation that “those who are observing will feel that there is one political brain, one approach behind this policy”.

The utilisation of “soft power: ‘Soft power’ This means “the power which is optional, non-coercive and consent-based, unlike hard power which is coercive, and command based”. State power gains its legitimacy through soft power, which stems from diplomacy, economy, culture and identity in the eyes of the others. Using soft power, the states provide another state to want “what it wants”. Soft power involves ‘consent’ rather than coercion.

When Turkey’s position in the Middle East is considered, this region is Turkey’s former geography, which is shaped by Turkey’s cultural and religious history. This principle presumes that Turkey’s effective use of soft power in the Middle East could encourage democratisation efforts in the region and its third-party role. As a result, widespread emphasis on soft power in Turkish foreign policy is introduced as an indicator of the new foreign policy trend.

Davutoglu elaborates on *Tactical principles* to characterise Turkey’s foreign policymaking as balancing freedom and security, zero problems with the neighbours, developing relations with the neighbouring regions and beyond, multi-dimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy. These conceptual tools are analysed through Turkey’s foreign policy formation in the last thirteen years, which is in the following lines.

- Balance between freedom and security.
- Zero problems with neighbours.
- Multidimensional and multi-track policies.
- A new diplomatic discourse based on firm flexibility.
- Rhythmic diplomacy.

The balance between freedom and security

Turkey is truly an exceptional case in the post-September 11 era. Contrary to many countries, Turkey continued to increase the domain of individual freedoms after September 11 following its political reforms to satisfy the EU Copenhagen political criteria. On the one hand, Turkey has been continuing its armed struggle against the violent Kurdish separatist PKK attacks, while on the other hand, expanding the scope of individual freedoms by granting the Kurdish people of Turkey broadcasting and education rights

in their mother tongue. Moreover, the AKP government has balanced security and freedom. Davutoglu emphasises this sensitive issue: “...If you ignore security for freedom, you will have anger and chaos. If you ignore freedom for security, you will have an authoritarian, autocratic society. We want to ignore neither of these two.”

In this context, harmony between freedom and security indicates a state’s success in democracy and a well-functioning domestic order. As Davutoglu denotes, ‘the legitimacy of any political regime comes from its ability to provide security to its citizens, and this security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights in the country’. In this respect, Turkey’s democracy still establishes the domestic balance between freedom and security.

“Zero Problems” with neighbours

‘Zero-problems’ policy offers peaceful territorial security by peacefully settling disputes and putting aside the current threat perceptions. It also encompasses the eradication of conflicts in cross-border relations. In foreign policymaking, diplomacy, international negotiation, and political, economic, and socio-political mechanisms to reinforce mutual interdependence are offered to cover the conflicts and develop deeper relations.

The objective of zero problems foreign policy is also the most debated part of Turkey’s new policy vision within the academic society and foreign policy authorities. It solves the problems in its relations with neighbours, which undercut Turkey’s international standing. This concerns the unresolved Cyprus question, the frozen ties with Armenia, and hostile relations with Syria.

Turkey is in contact with diverse regional and international actors. Its relations with international actors with clashing interests seem to be a challenging factor in the path of Turkey’s zero-problems vision. Since it is difficult to conciliate interests in the regions mentioned above within a peaceful and productive frame. The zero-problems principle offers greater strategic influence and international credibility than lasting hostility and conflict. However, the zero-problems goal is still challenging to achieve fully.

Multidimensional and multi-track policies

Multi-dimensional foreign policy refers to quitting the security and identity-based, mono-dimensional foreign policy. According to this principle, foreign policy dealings should diversify with various issues from cultural considerations to economics, diplomacy to politics.

In the post-Cold War era, where the international system became more dynamic and issue-wise more diversified, Turkey started to emphasise economic and cultural relations in addition to security. Davutoglu claims that it is a natural necessity of Turkey’s international position. He states that Turkey’s geo-strategic position directly influences its political, economic, and social structure, power, and possibilities, and this geography forces Turkey to follow a multi-dimensional foreign policy.

The traditional mono (or first)-track Turkish foreign policy became quite obsolete in fully exploiting the potential of the opportunities and furthering Turkey’s national interests in the post-Cold War era. In this framework, Turkish foreign policy started to benefit from the involvement of influential Turkish individuals and NGOs in foreign affairs. For example, influential NGOs like TUSAD (Turkish

Industrialists and Businessmen's Association), IKV (Economic Development Foundation), and TOBB (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) played a very constructive role in lobbying to start Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU as well as surrounding regions.

Multi-dimensional foreign policy orientation, increased influence in all its surrounding regions, and improved relations with all international actors rather than just depending on relations with the European Union and the United States. Strategic diversification of external relations with more emphasis on regional stability and more significant economic interaction with the peripheral regions and countries is another part of this principle.

A new diplomatic discourse based on firm flexibility

It should mediate between regional actors involved in conflicts and develop economic and cultural relations. They are developing ties with neighbours and beyond, offering a global perspective in foreign policy making. This principle suggests "no geographical frontier" to limit foreign policy activities. From this point of view, Turkey tends to develop intensive relations beyond its surrounding regions. Turkey entered relations with not only the European Union but also Cyprus, Russia, Iran, Israel and the United States. According to this premise, these relations are based on rational calculations, not ideological accounts. This premise could be considered a globally scaled summary of the zero-problems principle.

The best example of Turkey's changing foreign policy discourse is in the case of Cyprus. The AKP came to power with an election promise that "no solution is the solution in Cyprus" and "status quo in Cyprus is the solution" policies would not be acceptable. Instead, the AKP promised to solve the Cyprus problem by following a less aggressive strategy. In that regard, the AKP suggested that the Belgian model should be seriously considered when solving the Cyprus problem. Moreover, President Erdogan repeatedly stated that Turkey's Cyprus policy was based on a "win-win" strategy. During negotiations in New York in early 2004 and until the Cyprus referenda in May later that year, Erdogan even said that the "Turkish side will always be one step ahead" in the Cyprus negotiations, signalling the new Turkish foreign policy on Cyprus. This was a clear sign of a new principle in Turkish foreign policy: firm flexibility by Davutoglu. Firm flexibility means "knowing what you want and being *firm* on this issue yet being as *flexible* as possible in demanding and negotiating on this with the other side."

Rhythmic (pro-active) diplomacy

Another crucial dimension of the AKP's foreign policy paradigm is rhythmic diplomacy. It should maintain active, regular, and frequent contact with foreign partners and be involved in as many international forums as possible. In this respect, Turkish diplomacy diligently focuses on long-term measures and consistently builds its global image and position.

Due to Davutoglu's advice, the AKP government engaged in high-volume diplomatic visits in which Turkish officials were involved in dialogue with their foreign counterparts all around the globe while inviting foreign dignitaries to come to Turkey for consultations.

According to Davutoglu, Turkey spent 2003 on crisis management when the newly established AKP government

found two hot issues on its plate. One such issue was the US decision to invade Iraq and how American officials wanted to involve Turkey in their designs for the invasion. The other issue was none other than the Cyprus problem. While initial interaction with the United States over Iraq ended in a less than satisfactory outcome for Turkey, the same cannot be said about policies followed in Cyprus.

Rhythmic diplomacy also has connotations for the search for new areas of influence, as defined above. On the other hand, Turkey's proactive rhythmic diplomacy is mainly debated around the question of a shift of the foreign policy axis.

Turkey's new axis shift response in Foreign Minister's explanations. He states: "Being in the West, the North, East and South, trying to work hard on all these fronts without creating an issue of the axis. Where is the axis? The axis is in Ankara". From this point of view, Davutoglu underlines that Turkey's new foreign policy vision is a globally scaled perspective, which requires no axis except Turkey's self-defined strategic stance.

Turkey's new foreign policy direction still has significant compatible themes and goals with its Western allies, the US and the EU—Turkey's regional purposes in its foreign policy agenda parallel Western interests.

Erdogan's effects on AKP

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) were founded by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his friends, such as Abdullah Gul, Bulent Arinç, etc. Recep Tayyip Erdogan served as the mayor of Istanbul and gained extraordinary popularity among people. Tayyip Erdogan achieved the rise of the second charismatic leader in the tradition of National View ideology after Erbakan, whom his followers have considered the absolute founder and leader from the beginning of the movement until today.

AKP is the fruit of many factors, such as the failure of the Kemalist establishment, the social and individual discovery of religiosity, the development of civic and religious life, external factors, like globalisation and EU-Turkey relations, and the rise of conservative businesspeople class in Anatolia and so on. Although these factors are essential, a single factor is more important than others. The Erdogan factor is the key to the existence of the AKP. The charismatic personality of Erdogan is its real power. Without Erdogan, the AKP is like a body without a soul. Prime Minister Erdogan is the most popular politician in Turkey and abroad.

Although AKP and Erdogan came from the tradition of the Erbakanist National View, they are different from it. AKP won five consecutive general elections -November 2002, July 2007, June 2011, June 2015 and November 2015 with high percentages of the vote. The rise of AKP demonstrates that political Islam is no longer a marginal movement that represents the periphery of Turkey. By winning five recent general elections, AKP, which has Islamic roots but an un-Islamist agenda, is the only powerful political movement in the centre of Turkish politics. Erdogan and his friends have disavowed the Islamist ideas of the National View and recast themselves as conservatives who are pro-EU, pro-West, pro-globalisation and pro-democracy.

Although the founder of AKP, Tayyip Erdogan, came from Islamist political tradition, he never defined themselves in religious terms. Erdogan describes himself as a conservative democrat in one interview as follows: 'We are conservative

democrats. Our notion of conservative democracy is to attach ourselves to our society's customs, traditions, and values based on the family. This is a democratic issue, not a religious issue." He radically cut their ties with National View -Milli Gorus - tradition and redefined themselves secularly. Erdogan defines its political identity as the Conservative Democracy, which makes Islam not a part of its political agenda but a part of social-cultural identity. The vocabulary of AKP's conservative democracy belongs to the mainstream political discourse. The Conservative Democracy of AKP is a rejection of political Islam, particularly Erbakan's rhetoric of National View-Milli Gorus -. Instead of an Islamist agenda, it tries to synthesise conservative values, such as morality, national identity, historical pride and so on, with democracy, free market economy, pluralism, the rule of law and human rights. Erdogan's changes in a liberal and progressive direction, at the same time, show sensitivity to the importance of maintaining Turkish national, cultural and religious identity and values in the Turkish context.

AKP's self-definition as a conservative democrat is the representation of the great transformation regarding the role and function of religion in politics. Erdogan expresses the relationship between politics and religion: "A political party cannot have a religion; only individuals can; religion is so supreme that it cannot be politically exploited or taken advantage of." We could say that AKP, as a conservative democrat party, is no longer the representative of political Islam. In other words, AKP is not a religious party, but religiosity is the aspect of its many members. Making religiosity, instead of religion, an implicit part of its political discourse is a novel development, which is one of the original dimensions of AKP ideology.

AKP and Erdogan respond to the social demands of the majority, not the minority. Non-religionist groups also, such as the Gulen movement, reject religionism but advocate religiosity. In other words, Turkish society demands a 'social-individual Islam', not 'political Islam'. AKP responded to this social demand by transforming its ideological roots. Adopting conservative democracy as an ideological framework instead of Islamism indicates that a party with Islamic roots, like AKP, could make a new synthesis, evolve and change itself in a progressive direction.

To evaluate AKP ideologically, it is necessary to see its dynamic evolution. AKP has often been accused of having a hidden Islamist agenda by its opponents. Although this accusation is constantly expressed, its opponents fail to show a concrete base for their claim. Repeating such accusations is not helpful for us to understand the phenomenon of political Islam in the context of Turkey. What we can say is that external and internal conditions influence Islamist political parties, like AKP, and force them to change in a liberal and progressive direction. As the case of AKP shows, sociology is ahead of ideology.

Conclusions

As for the role of ideology as a foreign policy-making element under AKP rule, I think the effect of centre-periphery changes of power in Turkish politics over the last 13 years on foreign policymaking should be overrated because the interaction of internal and external policymaking is somehow limited to some extent as it was the case before AKP.

The ideological underpinnings of its faithful leaders Turkey's foreign policy over the last 13 years has been very consistently stable in its strategic assessment of the country's national interest, surrounding neighbours' development, international progress, as well as the ambition to play an increasingly pivotal role in the adjacent regions and the world.

The current Justice and Development Party (AKP) suggests that nationalism plays only a minor role in its identity. He takes at face value President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's statement in 2013 that "we have trampled upon all sorts of [Turkish and Kurdish] nationalisms," as well as jilted Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's 2014 claim that he is an "antinationalist." The "hegemonic identity for the [AKP] is Islamic and not Turkish," ignoring the fact that for most sympathisers, the two things cannot be easily distinguished.

The nationalist current within the AKP is dominant today. National strongman Erdogan does not hesitate to press the nationalist buttons to rally support, constantly invoking "foreign enemies" and fifth columns scheming to carve up Turkey. Erdogan may not have an explicitly ethnic element, and its vision may be broader than the national borders of the Turkish Republic. Still, it is full of classic nationalist tropes of self-assertion and glory against various dark forces. However, this new hegemonic ideology could be dubbed "Ottoman nationalism." Like nationalism worldwide, its appeal does not extend beyond the country's borders.

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