

The abstract view of Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood and the change of Türkiye's strategies in the Middle East¹

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Abstract

This article first examines Erdogan's intellectual views against the background of his Muslim Brotherhood and then analyses the reasons for the change in Turkish strategies in the Middle East. The Middle East has always played an important role in the regional security strategies of Turkey and the Erdogan government. In the last two decades, Erdogan's special perceptual psychological characteristics as well as his personality and ambitions have led to the strengthening of Turkey's position in the Middle East region. In 2021-2023, Turkey faces new economic, security and domestic challenges that need to be analyzed. In this article, we have analyzed this topic using secondary data in an explanatory-analytical way. The main question is: What influence does Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood have on Turkey's strategic policy in the Middle East region?

The results of the study show that Erdogan's personality cult and the Muslim Brotherhood's desire to lead the Islamic world have led to the promotion of Turkey's position in the Middle East region on an abstract level. On a concrete level, this has led to a chaotic domestic political and economic situation as well as national security crises that have forced him to adopt a new policy towards Middle Eastern countries, particularly Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Erdogan's new policy is in contrast to his policy following the developments in the Arab world. The evolution of Erdogan's views in the Middle East promises a return to the principle of "zero problems with neighbors".

Keywords: Erdogan, Turkey, Middle East, Justice and Development Party, Muslim Brotherhood and foreign policy.

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Introduction

With the founding of the Justice and Development Party, Turkey clearly distanced itself from the Western-orientated principle of the Kemalist tradition and attempted to become an important and influential player in the Middle East region. Turkey's Islamist Justice and Development Party attempted to create a strong political and security presence in the Middle East with a paradigm shift in foreign and security policy after failing to become a member of the European Union.

Comparing the AKP's Middle East perspective with the policies of other Turkish parties from a few decades ago, this unprecedented engagement and presence in the Middle East, together with Turkey's shift away from its Western orientation in the 2010s, draws attention to factors related to Islamic identity. The Justice and Development Party leads. Undoubtedly, part of this change is rooted in the relationship between this party and its first person with the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

The association of some political and religious parties and movements in Turkey, especially the Justice and Development Party, with the Muslim Brotherhood movement has a long history. Turkey has long been a venue for international meetings of the Muslim Brotherhood. There are examples of an ideological affinity between the Justice and Development Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, which is referred to as the Turkish branch of the Brotherhood. In fact, it seems that the political parties belonging to the Justice and Development Party under the leadership of Najmuddin Arbakan have more overlaps with the Brotherhood's worldview.

The developments in the Arab world in 2010, which led to currents close to the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in Egypt and Tunisia, were, from the point of view of the Justice and Development Party, the concept of its civilizational and cultural expansion, and this was an opportunity to strategically shape its relations with the new governments. But later, with the fall of these currents from the power pyramid in Egypt and Tunisia, Turkey's regional strategy was disrupted and shifted from solving problems with its neighbors to neo-Ottomanize and direct and indirect security interference in the Arab countries of the Middle East. Tensions in relations with Egypt and at one point with Saudi Arabia, military interventions in Syria and northern Iraq are among the consequences of this policy.

With his policy of neo-Ottomanize, which emphasizes the moderation of secular tendencies, Erdogan is striving for a more

active foreign policy in the form of Turkey's political, economic and cultural influence in the countries of the former Ottoman Empire. However, the Turkish president faces many challenges on this path. These include opposition from domestic political parties, the chaotic economy with high inflation, the war in Syria, opposition from rival Islamic countries in the region, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia, and opposition from Israel. Other countries in the Middle East also do not accept Turkey's influence and interference in their sovereign framework.

Now, the new internal developments in Turkey, including economic problems and increased inflation, as well as the pressure of public opinion and rival parties, have reduced the implementation of Erdogan's neo-Ottoman thinking and brought about a greater willingness to cooperate in the challenging security environment of the Middle East.

All these cases have posed a challenge to Turkey's policy in the Middle East in the last two years, which has convinced Erdogan, who is changing his behavior that the causes of these changes need to be explored and investigated in more detail, and that is the main aim of this article. Based on this, the main question is what impact Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood has on Turkey's strategic policy in the Middle East region?

The answer to this question, given in an explanatory-analytical way using secondary data, is that the cult of personality and the desire of Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood to lead the Islamic world has led to the promotion of Turkey's position in the Middle East region on an abstract level, while on a concrete level it has led to a chaotic domestic political and economic situation and national security crises that have forced him to adopt a new policy towards Middle Eastern countries, especially Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

1. Theoretical framework

There are different points of view when analyzing foreign policy and international issues. Some views are macroscopic, i.e. they emphasize the system and structure of international power and the influence this system has on countries' foreign policy decisions. The opposite views, called micro views, focus on the national government with specific geographical boundaries and examine the foreign policy behavior of a political entity.

The political behavior of any government is based on a number of different factors that are brought together with different priorities and

ultimately lead to a decision. There are various studies that deal with certain types of decision-makers and decision-making institutions as factors influencing the foreign policy decision-making process. There are expert analysts who have discovered a wide range of social, economic, cultural and psychological processes that have significant effects (constraining and empowering) on the foreign policy behavior of societies.

There are other analysts who focus on political processes and establish a link between a country's foreign policy and changes in public opinion, the activities of the mass media and the characteristics, backgrounds, trends and coherence of the elites. Some other analysts following the decision-making approach have focused their attention on motivational variables, roles and organizational variables that act as determinants of foreign policy within governments (Rosna, 1966, p. 16).

Decision-making in foreign policy can be viewed from the perspective of political psychology and international relations. Political psychology studies the political behavior of elites. This discipline leads us to take a closer look at individuals and people who are effective in politics. Moreover, with the methods of this science, it is possible to understand the general perception or capture the tendencies of political groups (Donald, Vas, 2018, p. 4). In their psychological model, "Janis" and "Mann" believe that the key to understanding decision making is that humans are emotional beings. "Government officials who make important decisions that affect the fate of the country are subject to a higher degree of self-restraint. We have seen situations where they are constantly striving to achieve their desired outcome while being extremely concerned about the high cost and possibility of defeat (Janis, Mann, 2017, pp. 44-45). In this interpretation, the primary motivation of political decision-makers is not to maintain the stability of the epistemological and logical method of decision-making. Rather, they are responsible for creating a kind of compatibility between the emotional conflicts that determine decision-making.

In Rosna's continuity model, the independent variables are: the type of power, the economy, the culture and the society, while he considers the dependent variables to be the individual, the role, the society, the government and the international system, with the type of government also being an intermediate variable. In forecasting foreign policy, Rosna is not only concerned with specifying internal variables, but rather with showing the role of each variable in the foreign policy process. According to him, the degree of influence of

each of the four internal factors and the international environmental factor in the design and implementation of foreign policy varies from country to country. The five variables of James Rosena's commitment model are:

- 1) Personality variable of the decision maker (individual): is the exclusive characteristic of the decision maker that encompasses all aspects of the decision maker. Rozna believes that individual characteristics are more pronounced in underdeveloped, newly independent and small countries that lack organized roles and bureaucratic symbols, and generally in societies where leaders are less influenced by public opinion and influential groups (Rozna, 1971, p. 108). Considering this variable, Rozna naturally believes that one person's decisions differ from another person's decisions in the same situation due to their different abilities and attitudes (Neack¹, Jude², 2005, p. 9).
- 2) The role variable and the scope of the decision-maker's authority: The role variable can be interpreted as follows: The idea that the government, the government or an individual thinks that it should act, the role is defined as the behavioral characteristics that result from the actor's political responsibility, and any person filling such a position is expected to behave similarly. We can view the role as the interaction between the individual and the political system and the expectations that said system places on the individual. Although the role may limit the individual's room for maneuver, such a role is assumed and performed on the basis of the individual's personality traits (Rozna, 1971, p. 108).
- 3) State bureaucracy variable: State variable in the sense that it refers to the structural aspects of the state. The complex structure of the government, the relationships between the governmental organizations and finally the experts and professionals within the same formations elaborate and present the proposals and general lines of decision-making in foreign policy, and no decision-maker is able to make a decision without these considerations. Among the government variables, some factors restrict foreign policy, while other factors expand the proposed options. The interaction of the three branches of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, including the structure of government, affects foreign policy (Rozna, 1971, pp. 108-109).
- 4) Society or social variable: Values, ideologies, influence and

¹ Neack

² Jude

interest groups and other things are among the propositions addressed in the variable society. Of course, these factors are contradictory in traditional and modern societies. In modern societies, for example, there are certain parties and formations that influence both domestic and foreign policy.

5) the variable of the international system (system or environment):

In addition to internal factors, the foreign policy of governments is also influenced by external factors. The most important external factor affecting foreign policy is the international system, which effectively controls the decision-making process of governments. The interaction between governments and the interacting system is in fact two-sided; better said, every action of governments is confronted with the reaction of the whole system; this reaction can both accelerate and restrict the achievement of foreign policy goals (Rozna, 1970, pp. 108-109). Rozna believes that the characteristics and behavior of any social system at any point in time is the product of cultural tradition and the changing internal and external environment. In other words, the activity of decision makers is influenced by records, cultural norms, and historical traditions, internal and external demands. Therefore, the assumptions that should guide any attempt to understand the foreign policy of a government or a group of governments can be listed as follows:

- The pursuit of "power" is definitely an important motivation for governments and regimes. Just as there is such a motivation for "security", these two issues are related but different. In many cases, the first goal is (to gain power) (Nonneman¹, 2005, p. 18).
- There is no single "national interest", but a series of "national interests";
- Governments are not uniform pillars. Rather, they are made up of different people and groups with different interests that may or may not fit into the national mould;
- Between interests and politics there is a decision-making process that depends on the type of government, the administrative system including "bureaucratic politics" and the personality and ideas of the decision-makers;
- Foreign policy is often about internal issues: the pursuit of "power" and "security" is probably first and foremost an

¹. Nonneman

internal matter;

- The significance of the perceptions of decision-makers is not only related to political or material interests. Rather, their perceptions about the nature of regional or international politics and their own identity and role, as well as the perceptions of their government, also feed into policy-making. As the constructivist school believes, such perceptions at the collective and individual level probably even contribute to shaping the nature of the regional and international systems in which these states operate;
- Governments and decision-makers must confront specific external challenges and opportunities, both in their immediate environment and in the fabric of global political and economic relations. These challenges and opportunities range from the more specific and one-off to the broader and long-term impacts (Nonneman, 2005, pp. 8-9).

Therefore, the levels at which the governments of the Middle East find themselves must be managed or responded to simultaneously. The methods of this management will change over time. This is because the relative importance of these three levels in shaping foreign policy may change with developments at the state, regional and global levels. A fourth possible environment or "quasi-environment" in the regional system can be added to these levels: This quasi-environment is the immediate surroundings of the states, such as the subsystem of the Persian Gulf, the Maghreb or the Nile Valley (Nonneman, 2005, p. 12). In this environment, too, transnational issues require a realistic calculation of power. Indeed, it can be said that these constraints make the foreign policy calculations of the Middle East regime more complicated than those of other governments. In the Middle East, policy makers must therefore balance internal and external pressures in the decision-making space created by the main situation of threats and opportunities.

2. Erdogan's policy after the changes in the Arab world

Since 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has sought to gradually transform Turkey into a great power, in the tradition of Turkish leaders of the past (from the late Ottoman sultans to Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey). But he has opted for an unconventional model (in contrast to Turkey's recent history). Whereas the late Ottoman sultans brought Turkey under the rule of the West in order to restore their global influence. Erdogan's goal is to expand Turkey as an independent power first in the Middle East and then globally (Cagaptay, 2021, p.

7). To this end, he is trying to balance Turkey's foreign policy in the regional and international spheres. In addition to the westernized image and western orientation, the policy of looking eastwards and paying attention to the Middle East gave Turkish foreign policy a balanced image (Gözen, 2006, pp. 10-11).

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, this country has pursued a policy of non-interference towards its neighbors in the Middle East, which is clearly due to the country's westernization policy and its preference for the principle of secularism, as well as Turkey's domestic and foreign policy changes (Tekin, 2005, p. 5). The result of this change of vision was the adoption of a new foreign policy that contradicted Turkey's traditional policy and led Turkey to become increasingly interested and active in the regional issues of the Middle East. Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of this new foreign policy, believed that Turkey's strategic depth is the result of historical and geographical depth (Davutoğlu, 2014, p. 130). Turkey, as the only country with historical experience in Middle East issues, should take the initiative. He considers this action important both for the future of the region and for the preservation of Turkey's territorial integrity. Davutoğlu believes that Turkey can only become a regional power by maintaining good relations with all areas and all its neighbors due to its location in the middle of several geopolitical areas such as the Middle East, the Islamic world, the West and Central Asia. The above policy has been referred to as the policy of zero problems with neighbors (Davutoğlu, 2014, p. 130).

Following these foreign policy developments, Turkey took a special place not only among the countries of the Middle East, but also beyond the geographical borders of the Middle East. Over the past decade, Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East has pursued several objectives: Deepening economic relations with increasing interdependence, classifying sources of military power, increasing cooperation with governments (macro diplomacy), building direct relations with parties and groups (micro diplomacy), emphasizing democratization and the role of leadership in intercultural dialogues (Tekin, 2005, p. 6). With the success of the Justice and Development Party, Turkey's image among Muslim nations became much more positive and its first person, Erdogan, gained a special position. Even the pan-Arab newspaper Al-Quds al-Arabia claimed: "Erdogan is more Arab than the Arabs" (Rubin, 2010, p. 16). During the developments of the Arab world in the region, Turkey tried to present itself as a model of middle and developed Islam with the support of the United States. But we should not forget that the turmoil in these

Arab countries was caused more by the internal structural problems of these countries than by any external component, and any successful model could only be answered based on the internal needs of each country (Tucci, 2012, pp. 7-8).

Over time, Turkey's different and somewhat contradictory positions towards developments in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria (support for popular protests) and developments in Libya, Bahrain and Yemen (support for the status quo and established political regimes) have increased internal criticism of the Erdogan government's Middle East approach and how to deal with the spread of the popular uprisings in the Kurdish regions in the domestic political dimension and the emergence of serious doubts about the true nature of the foreign policy of the statesmen of the Justice and Development Party. Erdogan's support for the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated Islamists in various Arab uprisings stemmed from his ideological beliefs and his general desire to expand Turkey's influence throughout the Middle East as a regional hegemon within the former Ottoman Empire. While trying to improve economic and cultural relations with the former Ottoman countries and create new spheres of influence, Erdogan sought to create a new identity consisting of different religious and ethnic identities of the former Ottoman Empire.

3. The history of relations between the Justice and Development Party and the Muslim Brotherhood

The founding of the Justice and Development Party marked the beginning of a new period in relations between Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood, which can be divided into three phases: Conflict, openness and interdependence: In the first term of the Justice and Development Party, which took control of Turkey when Erdogan was elected prime minister in 2003, it held completely different positions to the Muslim Brotherhood. For the first time, the Justice and Development Party showed a desire to form a coalition with secular and liberal elites in Turkey. In foreign policy, it orientated itself towards the policy of the United States and focused on Turkey's efforts to join the European Union and to enter into Islamic alliances and coalitions with Muslim countries. Moreover, in its early years, the Justice and Development Party constantly reassured foreign observers that it was committed to secularism and maintaining good relations with Israel. Obviously, this attitude was at odds with the ideology of the founder and later leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Justice and Development Party, which

were Islamist but secular (Ayyash, 2020, pp. 4-5). In fact, before the 2011 revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood saw the Justice and Development Party model as a threat to itself and feared that the Brotherhood's young members would adopt similar ideas. For Muslim Brotherhood leaders, for whom loyalty and organizational cohesion were more important than anything else, recognition of the Justice and Development Party's success in government was an implicit endorsement of the success of an Islamist splinter movement that supported the Brotherhood's narrative that this organization had a monopoly on righteous resistance endangered. In October 2009, Rafiq Habib, a Christian advisor to Muhammad Mahdi Akef (the seventh leader of the Muslim Brotherhood), described what Erdogan presented not as "damaged secularism" but as "damaged Islam" (Habib, 2009, p. 3). This situation changed rapidly in the following years. The initial period coincided with the Arab Spring and the culmination of the sovereignty of Ahmet Davutoğlu's ideas in Turkey's foreign policy system. In 2011, Tariq Ramadan, the grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, declared that "democratic Turkey is the model of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt." He believed that Turkish Islamists are an inspiration for Islamists in the Middle East; in particular the various branches of the Brotherhood, which were "the greatest direct beneficiaries of the Arab Spring" (Tas, 2022, p. 722). The Muslim Brotherhood's electoral successes and later its victory in the presidency strengthened relations between Turkey and Egypt. The movement constantly emphasized the political and religious similarities with Erdogan. Morsi assured Egypt's international partners that its relations with Israel would not change. The involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Justice and Development Party had significant economic opportunities for both political entities. Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party became the closest international allies of Morsi and the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party.

During this period, Turkey regarded the Brotherhood movement as a trump card in its diplomatic variables. Erdogan considered cooperating with the Brotherhood movement and trying to expand Turkey's communication network by relying on Islamic organizations led by the Brotherhood as a way to restore Turkey's true identity. With this mentality in mind, Erdogan, while fully supporting Davutoğlu, facilitated the purge of Kemalist diplomats from the structures of the Foreign Ministry. This period also saw the first fundamental differences within the ruling party, which were accompanied by the complete purge of Abdullah Guel. Furthermore,

during this period, a serious sympathy for the Brotherhood movement and various organizations associated with this movement emerged in Turkish Islamic society.

Even after the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood following the coup in Egypt in 2013, the reorganization and logistical efforts to strengthen the Muslim Brotherhood's international community were led from Istanbul. Members of Turkey's Justice and Development Party, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, continued to support the Brotherhood in various forms, such as granting asylum to wanted Brotherhood members. This closeness is based on the common interest of Erdogan and the Brotherhood to return Turkey to the "era of Islamic rule" and the view that this movement protects the "Islamic Ummah", and shows the Turkish government's support and adherence to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood in this country and other countries in the region. The ultimate goal of Turkey's Middle East policy change after the Justice and Development Party came to power was to gain authority, especially over neighboring Islamic countries. The developments in the Arab world since 2010 have created a great opportunity for Turkey to rethink its role in the Middle East and gain a special position to develop its political model. Turkish politicians hoped that other Arab countries, like Turkey, would try to create moderate Islamic governments modelled on the Justice and Development Party. Turkey saw these developments as an opportunity to restore its historical role and position. This issue culminated with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennah(z)da in Tunisia. Accordingly, the Arab Spring marked a new stage in bilateral relations.

Contrary to the earlier perception of the Justice and Development Party as a splinter movement that embraced Western secularism, the Brotherhood at least strategically used the popular discourse of the "Turkish model" to politically legitimize itself in the face of accusations.

What makes the Justice and Development Party attractive to Egyptian Islamists is its success. The successive electoral victories of the Justice and Development Party and its ability to remain in power embolden the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead of winning the elections, the Muslim Brotherhood needs factors to successfully stay in power; because, as in the 2012 elections, getting votes is not a problem. The 2012 elections and the events in Egypt until the fall of Mursi have shown that the Brotherhood's biggest concern is what it should do in the government to stay in the power structure. In this way, the Justice and Development Party was a good model for regional governments

due to the implementation of democracy and good governance, a dynamic economy and an active foreign policy. The above factors enabled Turkey to build a positive image among the Arabs (Bekaroğlu, 2016, pp. 10-11). But still, not everything was attractive about the example of the Justice and Development Party. Secularism in Turkey's political structure was one of the things that contradicted the Muslim Brotherhood's fully Islamic approach.

During his two decades in power, Erdogan was able to reshape the Turkish economy (which many saw as an economic miracle) and, most importantly, curb the ambitions of the army; a case that the Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Egypt were unable to realize when they were in power. Monica Marks believes in the potential impact of Erdogan's policies on the Muslim Brotherhood: "What you see in Turkey is a regime that looks very powerful, at least at first glance. It uses the discourse of democratic legitimacy to defend a policy that is undemocratic in many ways. That is very seductive" (Ayyesh, 2020, pp. 13-14).

Turkey, with all its advantages and disadvantages, has ambitiously tried to take the lead in the region. Turkey's disadvantages are obvious: compared to Iran's military might, Saudi Arabia's money and Israel's level of development, it lacks hard power. This limits Turkey's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy and strengthen its negotiating position. On the other hand, Turkey has certain advantages, including the fact that it is the heir to the Ottoman Empire and is considered a stable (Muslim) democracy in the Middle East. However, these advantages can potentially become a handicap for Turkey (Bekaroğlu, 2016, p. 13). The neo-Ottoman activity of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East met with nationalist reactions among the Arabs, which failed due to the combination with other problems and potentials of Turkey.

While support for the Muslim Brotherhood initially had no place in Erdogan's foreign policy and the Kemalist approach took precedence, Erdogan had been instinctively inclined towards the Muslim Brotherhood since his youth, and this instinct to help and protect the Muslim Brotherhood became the real starting point and linchpin of his policy in Syria and Egypt (Özkan, 2019, p. 7). Erdogan's relationship with the Brotherhood is not at the height of his pan-Islamist vision. Rather, it intensified when it was more inclined towards the nationalist foreign policy discourse. But in a symbolic turn, after the failure to resolve the Kurdish issue in 2015, he supported the new nationalist order of the Brotherhood's Justice and Development Party, namely "One homeland; one mode; one flag; one

nation" changed its direction (Tas, 2022, p. 726). Erdogan's latest policy is a silent admission of the decline of political Islamism and an acknowledgement of its regional limitations. The serious signs of this change in Erdogan's approach to the Brotherhood in the Middle East are examined below.

3-1. The state of domestic politics and the economic crisis

Turkey's institutional structure has always acted as a moderating variable in the Justice and Development Party's Middle East policy. While governments are composed of diverse and competing actors, the centralization and personalization of political power in contemporary Turkey has eliminated systems of checks and balances, traditional actors and pushed foreign policy towards centralization and personalization at a faster pace. This process reached its climax with the transition of the parliamentary system to the presidential system in 2018 (Tas, 2022, p. 726). Government-society relations are among the other moderating variables that affect the government's ability to respond appropriately to external pressures and opportunities. While Justice and Development Party elites can generally utilize Turkey's power potential, society (social cohesion) and elites can determine the level of support and accountability for foreign policy goals. In this respect, the ruling alliance between the Justice and Development Party and some extreme nationalist parties and the populist expansionist slogan has influenced the foreign policy of this country. According to Erdogan, the cross-border military operation could stimulate the important principle of "rallying around the flag" in Turkish society and increase public support for his government's policies, at least in the short term, and serve as a distraction in the successive economic crises that he too has been suffering from for some time with the declining popularity of his presidency and Turkey's shaky economy (with high inflation).

Turkey's economic data point to a catastrophic situation that is exacerbated by a flawed economic experiment. Erdogan believes that the solution to inflation is to make money cheaper. In 2021-2022, he tested his theory and acted in contrast to other central banks that try to curb inflation by raising interest rates. From September 2021, he lowered his key interest rate by ten per cent to 9 per cent (Economist, 2023, p. 2).

Even before the catastrophic earthquake of 7/8 in Turkey, Erdogan had to deal with many crises. His unorthodox approach to the economy led to exponential inflation of up to 85% in the years 2022-2023 (Figure 1). At the same time, his government is facing

accusations of corruption, bribery and disunity. Erdogan has unbalanced the Turkish economy with his proposed economic model. The economic goal of Erdogan's model, namely flourishing investments, current account surplus, strengthening the lira and price stability, has failed in all four cases and has not achieved its goals, and Turkey is moving towards a devaluation of the lira and a tightening of economic conditions.

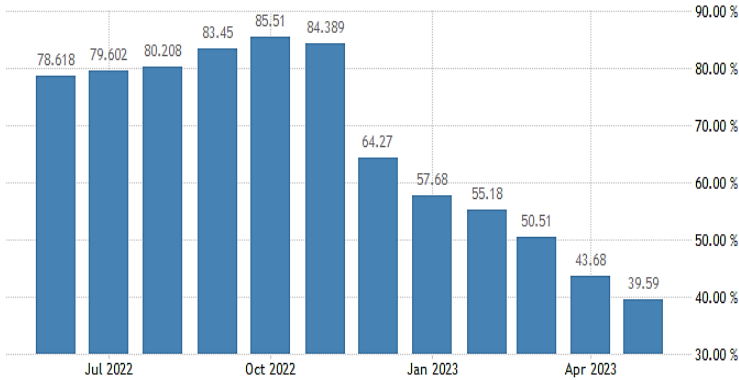


Chart 1: Inflation rate in Turkey from June 2022 to May 2023.

Erdogan's motivation to change his foreign policy behavior is essentially economic. Erdogan hopes to attract foreign capital to Turkey by easing tensions with wealthy Arab countries that have distanced themselves from Turkey over the past decade due to its neo-Ottoman policies.

Faced with the highest inflation of the last 20 years, the Turkish president has turned to foreign policy to lead his economy out of recession. Erdogan has turned to ideological enemies in the Middle East in the hope that their investments can revive inflation and the falling lira and reduce unemployment.

Turkey's economic interactions with Middle Eastern countries may not end the competition that still exists in areas such as Syria, Egypt and Libya, but they do suggest that Turkey will be more pragmatic in changing its neo-Ottoman policies.

3-2. Libya, Egypt and Syria

Political Islam has penetrated Turkey less than Erdogan wished. But Turkey under Erdogan's leadership saw the developments in the Arab world between 2010 and 2012, which shook the Middle East, as an opportunity to export its political Islam. In addition to Egypt, Turkey supported Brotherhood parties and other Islamist groups in Libya, Syria and Tunisia. Erdogan and his then foreign minister, Ahmet

Davutoglu, wanted to accelerate the collapse of the old regional order and strengthen Turkey's influence on the new order (Economist, 2023, p. 5) Erdogan began the regionalization process with a new fantasy for the Middle East. He suddenly brought into play the Koroğlu Turks in Libya, whose names had never been mentioned before, but who came onto the scene during Ankara's co-operation with the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Libyan Government of National Accord^۱, declaring: "In Libya, the Koroğlu Turks are a remnant of the Ottomans and they are under threat of ethnic cleansing. Haftar^۲ is also trying to destroy them, since they exist throughout North Africa; one of our main tasks in Libya is to protect the grandchildren of our ancestors" (Erdogan, 2020, p. 2). Erdogan wanted to use this issue to create a military basis for forcing Turkish concessions in the Horn of Africa. In this way, the Justice and Development Party is relying on the power of the Muslim Brotherhood branches rather than a deeper shared history to reshape the region. Ankara's closeness to the Muslim Brotherhood has led to it gaining influence in areas of the Arab world that previously had no place in Turkish politics. The identity of the Muslim Brotherhood is not only a political lever, but also provides a religious legitimization for Turkey's interventionism. This was especially true when Turkey's support for Hamas surpassed that of Arab leaders on the Palestinian issue, which resonated strongly with the Arab population.

The victory of Mohamed Morsi in the 2012 presidential elections in Egypt and the leadership of Ennah(z)da in the transitional government of Tunisia after 2011 were the culmination of this project. Turkey also supported the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Development Party^۳ in Libya and exerted pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to legalize the activities of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and hold free elections (Yeşilyurt, 2017, p. 72).

At the end of the summer of 2011, after the United States had called on Assad to step down, Ankara also wanted Assad to be deposed. At the time, this issue led Erdogan to believe that he had Washington's unconditional support to fully intervene in Syria. Having worked with the United States and other NATO allies to overthrow the Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya (albeit after an initial

۱. Government of National Accord (GNA)

۳. Justice and Construction Party (JCP)

setback), Erdogan believed that co-operation in Syria against Assad was also possible (Chapatay, 2021, p. 118). But this policy in Egypt, when Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power and in Syria two years later; it ended when Russia intervened to support the Assad regime (Economist, 2023, p.5).

Turkish and Egyptian sources, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and spiritual leader of the movement, claim that Erdogan had warned the Muslim Brotherhood of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's intentions months before the military coup. Nevertheless, the history of Turkey, which experienced four military coups in the second half of the 20th century, did not encourage the Muslim Brotherhood to imagine parallel consequences for its behavior in Egypt. In the two years between the revolution and the military coup, the Muslim Brotherhood insisted on the exceptional status of the Egyptian military and had no concerns that military officers (including el-Sisi) might attempt to overthrow the democratically elected president. As Egyptologist Amy Austin Holmes describes, the "coup from below" was a surprise to the Muslim Brotherhood, and most Muslim Brotherhood leaders and rank-and-file members had no idea that the army might turn against them (Holmes, 2021, pp. 233-238). As diplomatic channels failed and the Muslim Brotherhood's rising star faded (especially with the fall of Morsi), Ankara adopted a proxy war strategy to deal with major setbacks on various fronts with the help of Muslim Brotherhood networks. In Syria, for example, Turkey supported Filaq al-Sham, an armed group linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, which joined the Turkish military's Operation Euphrates Shield together with Ahrar al-Sham in 2016. In 2018, Erdogan also supported the National Freedom Front, which is led by Brotherhood-affiliated groups, political Salafists and nationalists, to rebuild and unite Islamist nationalist armed groups in Idlib (Yüksel, 2020, p. 142). And by strengthening this proxy architecture, Istanbul increasingly became the transnational center of the Brotherhood's activities. In foreign policy, making yesterday's mistakes can be the main cause of current and future problems and impose a heavy price on the country. The ideological views of Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood on Egypt and Syria have made Turkey pay a heavy price.

It is clear that the goal of the Erdogan-led Development and Justice Party was to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad. But today its goal is to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria, because the Turkish government has come to the conclusion that the

separatists in Syria have become a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity. The Turkish military authorities regard the restoration of relations with Syria as acceptable and desirable. Erdogan, the President of Turkey, is now serious about resuming relations with Syria, because Turkey's national security and territorial integrity are at stake. In the short term, reconciliation with Syria has more to do with Turkey's domestic politics than with strategic calculations. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has long called on the Assad regime to take concrete steps to support the return of the 3.7 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey (Schiavi, 2023, p. 10).

Now Turkey, under the leadership of Erdogan, is improving relations with Egypt as well as Syria. This matter will inevitably lead to a change in Erdogan's Brotherhood policy; however, he will not sever his ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. The connection with the Muslim Brotherhood has increasingly become a burden in Turkish foreign policy; to reconcile with influential Arab countries and show their goodwill in this regard; in 2021 the Turkish authorities asked Brotherhood TV stations in Istanbul to tone down their criticism of the military-dominated Egyptian government.

To this end, in mid-summer 2021, the Muslim Brotherhood stopped the activities of some of its centers in Turkey on the direct orders of the Turkish authorities and also evacuated its headquarters in Istanbul and imposed new restrictions on "Yahi Musa" and "Ala Samahi", the leader of the Hasm movement. Applied in Turkey, which are being persecuted internationally (Mecdi, 2021, p. 1). Due to continued pressure from the Turkish government, several critical Arab journalists left Istanbul, and the Muslim Brotherhood's most popular satellite broadcaster, Mokamlin, closed its offices in Turkey in March 2022 (Tass, 2021, p. 2). The Turkish government's current closeness to the al-Sisi government has worried many Muslim Brotherhood exiles and prompted them to consider immigrating to another country such as Malaysia.

Turkey has also announced in a message to Egypt that it has suspended the granting of citizenship to some members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt is also demanding the immediate withdrawal of military advisors and elements affiliated with Turkey from Libya, and Ankara is asking Cairo for more time to withdraw these advisors and elements. According to Saleh Mutlu Şen, the Turkish chargé d'affaires in Cairo, Erdogan has invited Al-Sisi to Turkey on 17 June 2023 in order to clarify many issues (Mutlu Şen, 2023, p. 5). Al-Sisi and Erdogan had a brief meeting last year after years of strained relations between the two countries during the

Qatar-hosted World Cup in Doha and with the efforts of Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. The Egyptian president also congratulated Erdogan following his victory in the Turkish presidential elections in May 2023. However, it seems that Erdogan is at a fateful crossroads. On the one hand, he does not want to sever his relations with the Muslim Brotherhood because of his long history and the expenses and investments he has made for this movement over the years, and on the other hand, he wants to cooperate with Egypt due to internal problems and hand over the perpetrators and those who were responsible for planning the assassination of the Egyptian attorney general on the condition that they receive an appropriate punishment.

What is certain, however, is that Erdogan is not prepared to abandon the Muslim Brotherhood, at least not at the present time. The visit of Osama Jamal, the Secretary General of the Council of Muslim Organizations of the United States, a Muslim Brotherhood figure, and his accompanying delegation in May 2022 came at a time when Erdogan was taking steps to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Syria and Israel. It seems that his government's moves to stop the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey are more tactical in nature than a strategic reform to gain satisfaction in Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi (Buzkurt, 2022, p. 3). But in the end, Erdogan chooses the second path according to Turkey's national interests, and this path will lead towards rebuilding the image of the Justice and Development Party, which was destroyed by the neo-Ottoman policies.

3-3. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

Turkey on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on the other supported the opposing sides in the recent crises and conflicts in the Middle East, each trying to strengthen their ideology and influence. They waged a proxy war. This is because Turkey supported the political Islamists close to it, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE were determined to discredit and destroy them. Therefore, the Islamists of the Justice and Development Party also threatened the kings of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

To neutralize Turkey's policy, the United Arab Emirates supported Abdel Fattah al-Sisi militarily against Mohammed Morsi (Muslim Brotherhood); they also supported Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan leader against Turkey who supported political Islamists in Tripoli. The UAE even softened its stance towards Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against the Turkish-backed rebels in Idlib, Syria

(Vohra, 2022, pp. 1-2).

But due to the conditions explained above, Erdogan is reconsidering his policy of brotherhood in the Middle East. One of the reasons for Turkey to push for the normalization of relations with countries such as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is the very weak position of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the current situation. One Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated government after another has fallen, from Egypt to Sudan to Tunisia, and the Muslim Brotherhood as a whole has experienced catastrophic failures with its autocratic responses to the Arab uprisings.

The Muslim Brotherhood itself is also affected by the conflicts and internal friction in the two camps in London and Istanbul. According to many Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, the Muslim Brotherhood is generally on the wane and its potential power as a threat to the security of the regimes of these countries has greatly diminished. For this reason, the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have lost the value that Erdogan once saw in it. In addition to the systemic drivers of Turkish foreign policy, internal challenges and the strong need for capital from the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf give Erdogan more motivation to repair the broken relations with these countries (especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE) (Tas, 2022, p. 735).

Conclusion

While the ideological links of the Justice and Development Party with the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be ignored, Turkey's grand strategy and the Brotherhood's role in it mainly follow the motivations and systemic limitations predicted in the material structural perspectives of power; Erdogan, as the first decision-maker in Turkey's power structure, cannot ignore this. In the current situation, where on the one hand the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood is declining in the Arab countries of the region and on the other hand Turkey is facing economic problems, Erdogan is trying to restore relations with the countries with which he has lost relations by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite the conflict between Erdogan's Turkey and several Arab kingdoms of the Middle East, the change in this country's Middle East policy is logical due to the economic turmoil in Turkey. But for Erdogan, the distance between competition and regional co-operation is determined only by the need to hold on to power.

The cult of personality and the desire of Erdogan's Muslim Brotherhood to lead the Islamic world on an abstract level have led

to the promotion of Turkey's position in the Middle East region. On the concrete level, this has led to a chaotic domestic political and economic situation as well as national security crises, forcing him to adopt a new policy towards Middle Eastern countries, especially Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Erdogan's new policy is in contrast to his policy following the developments in the Arab world. The evolution of Erdogan's views in the Middle East promises a return to the principle of "zero problems with neighbors".

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