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# Tracing the Shift in Turkey's Normative Approach towards the International Order through Debates in the UN

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## Abstract

*The “normative turn” associated with the post-Cold War order has been influential in rising states’ increasing reference to normative issues like justice and fairness. Rising powers are expected to challenge the established institutions or at least attempt to revise the dominant norms of the system in order to reflect their own interests and values. This paper tentatively treats Turkey as a rising state and attempts to understand the gradual “normative shift” in Turkey’s approach towards international order in the context of Turkey-UN relations over the last decade. To this aim, Turkey’s normative approach towards the international order will be comparatively analyzed through the debates at the UN focusing specifically on two consecutive periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. By doing that, the paper will theoretically question and empirically analyze the extent to which Turkey took a revisionist or integrationist posture towards the international order in the UN platform over the last decade.*

## Key Words

Rising states, international order, Turkey, normative foreign policy, United Nations.

“The most casual observer of the international scene can see that the problem of the world order has not been solved.”<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

There emerges broad consensus among scholars that the current international order is undergoing a major restructuring in the post-Cold War era, especially in the last decade. As Zakaria argues, a great transformation or a tectonic power shift has been taking place: “the rise of the rest” and in particular the “rise of Asia.”<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, recent shifts in the global political economy have witnessed the emergence of several newly powerful states from the South.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, this global shift has been accompanied by the parallel rise of regionalism of emerging powers for which regionalism is seen increasingly as an important policy tool demonstrating their influence at the global level.<sup>4</sup> The present structural transformation of the global system has reminded us that we live in a dynamic world where empires and systems come and go according to history’s dictates. What makes this process of change much more significant is the fact that the dynamism of “rising states” is in marked contrast to *Europessimism*.<sup>5</sup> In

this vein, the recent financial crises in many western countries not only have severely negative economic effects, but they also challenge the idea of a *stable, western-led global order*. In a relatively short period of time, there has been a dramatic shift from the talk of a *liberal moment* in the early post-Cold War period to the focus on a *US Empire* in the early years of this century to the analyses of *rising states* and more recently to a *post-western world order*.<sup>6</sup>

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In times of global power transitions, a prevailing question centers on the position of rising powers towards international order as well as their growing economic and political might to challenge its established institutions.<sup>7</sup> As a result of its significant increase in its material capabilities- particularly its economy- as well by its peers' recognition of its increasing importance in the international scene,<sup>8</sup> Turkey has recently been defined among the "MIST" countries, which is coined to describe the next tier of large emerging economies- "Mexico, Indonesia, South

Korea and Turkey"- after BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).<sup>9</sup> In parallel to its rising economic and political power status at the global level, Turkey has witnessed a doctrinal foreign policy change accompanied by an increasing regional and normative approach both in discourse and practice as well as new or content-enriched diplomacy instruments.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, there is a dynamic scholarly literature on Turkey's new foreign policy together with a chain of references presenting Turkey as a trading state, regional power, and/or an emerging economy.<sup>11</sup> In most of these studies, Turkey's new position vis-à-vis the current international order has been widely discussed in reference to its ability- as well as limitations- to use its soft power or to its growing efforts to be influential in regional affairs.<sup>12</sup> However, few serious attempts have so far been made to analyse Turkey's *normative posture* towards the international order, in a comparative manner, via its post-Cold War policies in the UN platform.<sup>13</sup>

This paper conceptualizes Turkey as a "rising state", aims at understanding its changing "normative approach towards the international order" in a historical-comparative perspective through the debates at the UN. To this aim, firstly, the normative challenges posed by rising states towards the international order will be theoretically investigated. In order to do that, the paper will first theoretically

problematize the interplay between rising states and the international order as well as its established institutions. Secondly, by conceptualizing Turkey as a rising state, its normative approach towards the international order will be comparatively analyzed through the debates at the UN with specific focus on two consecutive periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. Accordingly, the paper will investigate whether there is any meaningful shift in Turkey's normative approach towards the international order in the last decade. In this vein, the favorable domestic and systemic conditions under Justice and Development Party (JDP) rule in the last decade that enable Turkey's "order criticism" and their limitations will be problematized. This study aims to contribute modestly to both the ongoing debates on the interplay between rising states and the international order as well as the existing literature on Turkish foreign policy, from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

## Analyzing the Interplay between Rising States and the International Order: The Role of International Institutions

'Rising states' is a complex and multidimensional term and there is no commonly accepted definition among scholars of what an emerging

or rising power is. One of the most evident commonalities is their growing economic weight in world politics.<sup>14</sup> As Ikenberry puts it, for the first time in the modern era, economic growth is bringing non-Western developing countries into the top ranks of the world system. Their collective size and impact on global trade, finance, energy, and the environment are predicted to make them important players. According to Ikenberry, these are remarkable developments from not only the economic dimension but they also have potentially far-reaching implications for power and governance in world politics.<sup>15</sup> In other words, these countries' increasing might in the global economy is believed to have the potential to reshape the global political landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> By the same token, Andrew Hurrell suggests that these rising states all have a relatively high degree of at least potential military and political-power resources, a reasonable degree of internal cohesion, and some ability to contribute to the generation of a revised international order. Furthermore, each aspires to a more influential role in global affairs.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, it is a widely held view among scholars that rising powers are portents of change in the international order.<sup>18</sup> But the question remains, what is the precise nature of this change?

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A multitude of writers working from quite different perspectives is in agreement that the rise of emerging countries beyond the West is pivotal to understanding how the global order is being reshaped in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Ikenberry, the current world order is “hard to overturn and easy to join.”<sup>19</sup> New entrants into the system have ways of gaining status and authority as well as opportunities to play a role in governing the current order.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the specific character of today’s rising states and the interests, incentives, and constraints that they manifest and face make integration and accommodation more likely than radical transformation.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Cooper and Flames assert that the established powers were challenged explicitly because of their privileged role in systemic terms, as expressed in their veto status inside the main governing institutions of the world order, like the UN. Therefore, the intensity of the challenge was magnified

by a psychological sense among the emerging states of being “outsiders” in the multilateral system, kept away from these privileges.<sup>22</sup> Philip Nel argues that rising powers basically ask for “recognition” and “redistribution” in the world economic and political order. In this vein, the current generation tends to have more confidence in their ability to effect the “redistribution” of wealth, prestige, and power in the global political economy, though, and tend therefore to be more “integrationist” than the first generation of post-colonial leaders.<sup>23</sup>

One the other hand, for some scholars, this global order, though it was routinely referred to as such, never had the potential to encompass the entirety of the world. As Richard Falk argues, the EuroWestcentric world order does not now, and never did benefit the vast majority of the peoples of the world. Falk argues that it is in fact psychologically harmful because it failed to appreciate diverse civilizational traditions, exploiting the peoples and resources of these traditions by constructing self-serving rationalizations for dominance.<sup>24</sup> In this vein, Fontaine and Kliman assert that states like Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Turkey offer great potential as partners to *extend* the global order.<sup>25</sup> In this vein, a prominent scholar on rising powers, Andrew Hurrell, suggests that power transitions among major states have never been simply about clashes of material power and material interest. Conflicts over *rival justice claims*

have often been a determining factor in the history of world order. Contestation over these normative claims has long been at the heart of international politics, and the return over the past decade of more Hobbesian or Westphalian tendencies has brought them once more to centre stage. Thus for Hurrell, emerging powers have laid great emphasis on arguments for normative issues like, “justice” and “fairness” and they will naturally seek to revise the dominant norms of the system in order to reflect their own interests as well as values.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, as Nathalia Tocci asserts, apart from more ambiguous claims like justice and fairness, there are three main dimensions that define “normative” foreign policy: (i) what an actor wants (its goals); (ii) how it acts (the deployment of its policy means); and (iii) what it achieves (its impact).<sup>27</sup> Firstly, according to Tocci, normative actors aim to shape the international environment constantly over time by regulating it through international regimes, organizations and law. Secondly, the actor itself should be legally committed to internal legal standards of democracy, transparency and accountability as well as to external legal commitments such as the UN framework and international law. Thirdly, in order to create a normative impact, an international actor's direct or indirect actions and inactions should preserve the international legal environment and lead to some institutional, policy or

legal changes within a third country.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it is still unclear for many scholars whether the preference of rising states is to work through core established international institutions or to utilize other parallel forms of international coordination in order to realize their normative purposes.<sup>29</sup>

The ability of rising powers to exert their influence through international institutions is challenged by the hierarchical and unequal structure of current global governance institutions. Sometimes the “ordering” role of hierarchy was formalized as in the special rights and duties of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, or the weighted voting structures of the IMF or World Bank. Secondly, the regional context can be a source of weakness for rising powers either because of unresolved regional conflicts or because of regional instability and the sheer difficulty of maintaining influence (like in the Middle East). As Hurrell argues, regional context is also crucial for aspiring rising powers in the sense that a state may be seen as a rising state- to the extent that it fulfils a managerial or order-producing role within its region. Thirdly, attempts to develop a global role as a “rising power” can easily raise the concerns of regional neighbours. This has been particularly evident in the reactions of regional second-tier states, like the attempt by India and Brazil to obtain permanent seats on the UN Security

Council.<sup>30</sup> In this vein, being sceptical of the role of international institutions, some scholars argue for the emergence of “an ambiguous new order...in which multilateral institutions...have only a limited role to play alongside emerging national and regional strategies.”<sup>31</sup>

Turkey’s increasing regional and international profile especially in the first half of the 2000s with regards to its remarkable economic growth, diplomatic outreach and its growing visibility in international institutions, has led many scholars to conceptualize Turkey as a “rising state” while at the same time discussing the limitations of its rise.<sup>32</sup> This study tentatively treats Turkey as a “rising state”, and attempts to understand its changing “normative posture” towards the international order via its policies in the UN platform. Accordingly, the rest of the paper will theoretically question and empirically analyze the extent to which Turkey, as a rising state, has taken a “revisionist” or “conformist-integrationist” posture towards the international order in the UN throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Turkey gained political as well as economic power and influence, has it become more “integrationist” towards the international order and its institutions like the UN or “revisionist” towards them? In other words, how could one explain the interplay between Turkey’s rise and international institutions? Is it rising at the expense of the current order

which, inevitably, leads to the declining role of international institutions in Turkish foreign policy or do established institutions of the current international order, like the UN, increasingly provide Turkey with political space to build new coalitions in order to try to affect an emerging (new) order that would be reflective of its own interests as well as values? Above all, is Turkish foreign policy experiencing a “normative turn” in terms of foreign policy objectives, means of implementation, and policy outcomes, over the last decade?

In light of these questions, the next section will analyze the evolution of Turkey’s posture towards the international order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of the role of the UN in a comparative perspective through the debates in the UN platform. To better understand the continuities and changes in Turkey’s “normative” approach towards “order” in the last decade, Ankara’s approach towards “international order” with its “established institutions” since the early Republican era first needs to be briefly highlighted.

## Turkey and the International Order: The Role of the UN in Turkish Foreign Policy Tradition

Ever since the early Republican era, Turkey has always maintained certain

values and principles as the basis of its foreign policy, but it has also been shaped by the responses it has given to structural changes in the global order. Among many, the country's foreign policy has been guided by a normative commitment to the unchanged ideal of "peace at home, peace in the world", through multilateral cooperation.<sup>33</sup> In this vein, since the establishment of the League of Nations in 1920, Turkish rulers have demonstrated their positive posture towards multilateral cooperation by arguing that "Mustafa Kemal's understanding of 'peace in the world' denotes multilateral defence of the peace".<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the identity of the new Turkish Republic was defined by Mustafa Kemal as a "modern state which aims to coexist peacefully with international society of states."<sup>35</sup> Turkey's approach towards the League of Nations was shaped by the new Republic's search for "legitimacy" of its newly constructed nation-state identity in the post-World War I international order and also search for "security" in both the domestic and international arenas. Yet, the League experience quickly turned out to be short of proper implementation of its founding principles and ultimately proved incapable of preserving peace and preventing aggression in the 1930s, eventually collapsing with the onset of the Second World War.

Following the end of the Second World War, Turkey was among the 50

founding members of the UN, when Hasan Saka, the Foreign Minister of Turkey, and Feridun Cemal Erkin, the first permanent representative of Turkey in the UN, signed the UN Charter at the San Francisco Conference in 1945.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the Cold War, the US-Soviet rivalry was the main factor shaping UN activity in world politics, and due to the veto mechanism, the UN's role was very limited. The 1950 Korean War and "decolonization process" of the late 1950s and 60s were two main cases that shaped the UN activity in the course of the Cold War. During those years, Turkish leaders declared at every possible occasion that "acting in accordance with the UN Charter and UN Resolutions is the main guiding principle of Turkish Foreign Policy."<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, in his speech before the United Nations, Permanent Representative of Turkey in the UN, Selim Sarper defined Turkey as a "peace-loving and freedom-loving country with an unshakable faith in the fundamental idea of the United Nations."<sup>38</sup> The UN was both a "socialization" platform for Turkey in its quest for the Westernization ideal and also a rational choice in its search for "security" in the field of foreign policy during the Cold War years.<sup>39</sup> This was reflected in Turkey's participation in the 1950 Korean War. By joining the Korean War, Turkish rulers did not only aim to "secure" Turkey from threats, but also "enhance" its prestige among the "peace-loving" states.<sup>40</sup> In other words,

Turkey aimed to strengthen its security as well as secure its place in the western international order, by joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The traces of this “ideational” and “political” posture could also be seen in Ankara’s foreign policy towards the “decolonization” process in the UN General Assembly during the Cold War years. In the post-Second World War era, organized political groups in Africa and Asia began fighting on behalf of a whole ‘people’ against colonial powers. The fundamental principle on which these struggles were granted legitimacy was the right of peoples to “self-determination”. Contrary to the posture adopted by most Asian and African countries, Turkey remained neutral or voted in favour of the French position at the UN General Assembly regarding the independence of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco in the 1950s. In Turkey’s view, France’s relations with these territories were a matter for France, and therefore they were not within the competence of the United Nations.<sup>41</sup> This approach could be explained with reference to Turkey’s close alignment with the Western world after World War II. At the time, Turkish foreign policy-makers had another immediate and specific political concern. Greece had brought the question of Cyprus, which was then under British rule, before the UN General Assembly in 1954. Turkey was apprehensive on the application of the self-determination

principle which might lead to an eventual unification of the island with mainland Greece.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, in accordance with Turkey’s perceived interests, the “self-determination” principle was given *conflicting* interpretations in different situations during the Cold War years. For instance, Turkey supported the implementation of the principle of self-determination for the overwhelmingly Muslim province of Kashmir, which was part of India, in order to show its support for Pakistan and to strengthen the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) links with this country, although it opposed the implementation of this principle in the determination of the future status of Cyprus in the UN platform.<sup>43</sup>

In terms of Turkey’s posture towards the third world in the UN platform, there was a growing rapprochement between the non-Western world and Turkey on the question of decolonization in the 1960s. Accordingly, Turkey acted as a co-sponsor of the UN General Assembly resolution 1514, adopted in 1960 and entitled the ‘Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’.<sup>44</sup> Yet, Turkey’s support for “decolonization” of the Third World was highly influenced by Turkey’s Western ties. Except in the 1950s, Turkey generally sided with non-Western countries, unless the resolutions in question did not fundamentally undermine the confines of its pro-Western foreign policy. As Berdal Aral

asserts, Turkish attitude towards the decolonization issue could be described as one of ‘*unprincipled sympathy*’ for the long fought struggle of the Third World nations.<sup>45</sup> Although Turkey demonstrated increased willingness towards supporting the struggle of Third World nations after the 1960s, it did not “actively” and “consistently” participate in international normative attempts at creating and extending international standards to bring about a more peaceful and equitable international system. Due to its specific reservations on issues like the Cyprus problem, Turkey generally remained “suspicious” about normative issues such as human rights, protection of minorities and self-determination.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, as Gönlübol puts it, UN norms and resolutions were the “main guiding principle” in Turkish foreign policy, yet Turkey’s posture towards the UN was also “political,” aimed at securing Turkey’s integration with the western block.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, Turkey began to express its “unhappiness” with the workings of the the UN, just after its establishment in 1945. Accordingly, Turkish rulers did not hesitate to express the need for “urgent UN reform” as early as 1947, by criticizing the UN for not being a “representative” organization.”<sup>48</sup> Despite criticisms towards the UN system and its decisions, Turkey was “cautious” to act in marked contrast to the decisions and resolutions of the

United Nations during the Cold-War years. Since its entry into the League of Nations in 1932 and later in 1945 to the United Nations, a closer look at the main historical parameters during the Cold War era shows that despite some exceptional periods in the 1960s and 1970s, where Turkey had to intervene militarily in Cyprus due to the growing inter-communitarian conflicts, Turkey has generally pursued a peaceful “multilateral” diplomacy by remaining explicitly attached to the norms and decisions of the United Nations.<sup>49</sup> Turkey’s attitude towards the UN during the Cold War was predominantly “*conformist-integrationist*”- and the UN platform was considered as the *main addressee* of Ankara’s foreign policy choices. Yet, Turkey’s heavily and exclusively “Western-oriented” foreign policy in the aftermath of World War II mostly rendered its relations with the non-Western world “conditional” on its relations with the West, without a substantial “normative agenda” of its own in the UN platform.<sup>50</sup>

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## Turkey, the UN and International Order in the 1990s: Between Geopolitical Anxiety and Active Diplomacy

The 1990s were marked by an increased number of conflicts in many parts of the world accompanied by increased expectations of international organizations like the UN due to the end of the superpower rivalry. In the 1990s, Turkey faced the challenge of adjusting to new international realities as a result of the changes sweeping its immediate neighbouring regions. In this regard, Ankara was largely affected by the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the transformation of the political landscape in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as the eruption of violent ethnic and regional conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus.<sup>51</sup> In the post Cold War environment, Turkish rulers openly declared their expectations from the UN to take a leading role in the resolution of conflicts as well as in the creation of a new international order.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, the collective response of states under the UN umbrella to the aggression by Iraq towards Kuwait in the 1990 Persian Gulf War was welcomed by Turkey as a clear sign of the increased effectiveness of the UN in a post-Cold War world order. In this vein, Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin declared Turkey's happiness with the UN's leading role in the post-Cold War era:

...It (the UN) has demonstrated how effective it can be by playing a leading role in the liberation of Kuwait, showing that it can function as its founders intended nearly half a century ago.<sup>53</sup>

However, the Bosnian War that began in 1992 and the UN's response during the course of that war resulted in failed expectations on the side of Turkey towards the organization's ability to cope with the changing realities of the post-Cold War order. In fact, as early as the 1990s, Turkish rulers openly declared in the UN platform on every possible occasion that the most severe challenge to the new order was being posed by the series of crises unfolding in the former Yugoslavia. In this regard, Turkey conceptualized the Bosnian war as a "big damage" to the emerging new world order.<sup>54</sup> During the course of the Bosnian War (1992-1995), Turkish rulers openly criticized the UN for its "ineffectiveness" and "inability" to end a humanitarian tragedy and repeatedly asked for a "representative", "effective" and "accountable" Security Council reflecting the changing international order.<sup>55</sup>

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Despite growing uneasiness in Turkish public opinion towards the UN's inability to respond to the Bosnian war, Ankara did not choose to act unilaterally and instead continued its "multilateral efforts" in the UN platform, stressing the "international legitimacy" principle.

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Despite intense criticism towards the UN, the 1990s were marked by one of the most active multilateral diplomacies of Turkey in the UN platform since its establishment. Ankara strived to take a role in the restructuring of the post-Cold War regional and global order through multilateral platforms, especially the UN. Considering the turbulent 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy focused mainly on political and security issues as it tried to play an "active role" in the solution of the Yugoslavian crises. There were many letters directed from Turkey towards the UN Secretary General during the Bosnian War, accompanied by many speeches of Turkish diplomats and rulers recorded in the UN platform.<sup>56</sup> Turkish newspapers were organizing signature campaigns towards the UN headquarters.<sup>57</sup> Ankara's diplomacy in the Islamic Conference Organization was also crucial in demonstrating Turkey's approach towards the role of the UN in the sense that Turkey asked the Islamic Conference leaders to work within the UN platform in order to secure a credible response towards the war.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, despite growing uneasiness in Turkish public opinion towards the UN's inability to respond to the Bosnian war, Ankara did not choose to act unilaterally and instead continued its "multilateral efforts" in the UN platform, stressing the "international legitimacy" principle.<sup>59</sup>

Hence, not only in rhetoric, but also in practice, in the face of intense

criticisms both on moral, legal and political grounds, the UN continued to be the "main addressee" of Turkey's multilateral efforts in the post-Cold War order. Accordingly, Turkey developed many proposals before the UN for the solution of the Bosnian War, tried to become a bridge between the Bosniaks and the international community, and negotiated with Milosevic to prevent the Kosovo War.<sup>60</sup> As in the case of Bosnia, Turkey supported the UN Security Council Resolution 794, adopted on 8 December 1992, which authorised military enforcement action in order to tackle the Somalian humanitarian crisis. Ankara contributed to the UN Operation in Somalia, called UNOSOM, as part of a Unified Task Force- UNITAF- between January 1993 and February 1994. Turkey also took part in the UNOSOM II operation as the commander of the peacekeeping force in Somalia between May 1993 and January 1994.<sup>61</sup> Despite limitations, Ankara hoped that the UN Security Council resolution on Somalia would be a "model" for taking collective military measures towards the Bosnian War and struggled to convince the UN Security Council members for collective military intervention towards the Bosnian War. Yet, the UN Security Council shunned military action in the case of the Bosnian War until 1995.<sup>62</sup> In the aftermath of the wars in question, Ankara contributed to the "establishment of a new regional

order” by sending soldiers to the peacekeeping missions, both in Bosnia and later Kosovo. Following the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, Turkey participated in NATO’s IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and later KFOR in Kosovo.<sup>63</sup>

One should also note that an important landmark affecting the shift in Turkish foreign policy towards a normative approach in the 1990s was the proclamation of Turkey as an official candidate for EU membership in 1999. After this declaration, the EU’s norm diffusion towards Turkey led to a rapid Europeanization process that also contributed to the rising of awareness in Turkey about the importance of defending the EU’s core principles both in domestic and foreign policies so as to reach its European ideal.<sup>64</sup> Yet, still, the 1990s turned out to be a period of “geopolitical anxiety”<sup>65</sup> in terms of questioning Turkey’s future role in the new world order as well as in organizations like NATO.<sup>66</sup> Thus, Turkey’s active foreign policy towards its surrounding regions was also prompted by Turkish foreign policy makers’ worries about Turkey’s decreased geostrategic importance for the West in the early 1990s.<sup>67</sup> With the end of the Cold War, Turkey struggled hard to find its “own role” in the emerging post-Cold War order and initiated an active foreign policy in different regional arenas.<sup>68</sup> This posture on the side of

Turkish rulers had been evident in their repeatedly underscored diverse discourse of identifying Turkey’s potential role as a “model”, “destination” and “bridge” between the East and the West during the course of the 1990s.

In this regard, the “world state” concept of İsmail Cem, the Foreign Minister of the coalition government between 1999 and 2002, also points to how Turkey’s foreign policy role was conceived normatively in various- and sometimes conflicting- terms during the 1990’s international order. Cem argued that Turkish foreign policy has been alienated from its cultural roots and historical past and it must be replaced with a new understanding based on the awareness of Turkey’s rich identity and historical assets inherited from the Ottoman states.<sup>69</sup> For Cem, Turkey, as a democratic country having reached European standards of human rights in the Islamic world, should be presented to other Middle Eastern countries as “a model” in the emerging post-Cold War order. Accordingly, Cem outlined his vision for Turkey as “to transform her into a world state”:

A world state positioned among the major centers of the world and representing a unique blend of civilizational assets, historical experiences and strategic attributes. One that is not a mere observer of others’ success stories but has its own achievements that sometimes makes them envious as well. One that consistently develops its special relations

with the regions with which she shares a common history. One that, in line with Atatürk's legacy, constitutes a role model for nations with parallel cultural backgrounds.<sup>70</sup>

Cem's "world state" conceptualization was crucial in the sense that it laid down a new vision for Turkey's future role in the new world order in the post-Cold War era. However, in practice, the domestic, as well as regional dynamics made it hard for Turkey to act on these claims in the 1990s. Turkey's complex domestic constraints in terms of democratic deficits and the Kurdish issue, combined with its security-based foreign policy priorities, did not create an appropriate context for a comprehensive normative agenda in foreign policy.<sup>71</sup> Although Turkey followed an active diplomacy in cases like the 1990 Persian Gulf War and the 1992-1995 Bosnian War in the UN platform, there was only a limited manifestation of Turkey's willingness to adopt a "leading role" on issues of regional and global importance focusing explicitly on a "normative" agenda in the UN platform.

All in all, undoubtedly, since its establishment, Turkish foreign policy witnessed one of the most "active diplomacies" in its history within the UN platform during the 1990s. This posture was most evident in Ankara's relentless struggle to convince the UN Security Council for a collective military intervention towards the Bosnian War, as well as in its immediate support for

the UN efforts during the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91. Although normative concerns came to the fore in Turkish foreign policy discourse, especially after the Balkan crises,<sup>72</sup> Turkey's increased engagements in the UN platform were predominantly shaped by its immediate "security" considerations as well as its attempts to fashion a new "role" for itself in the emerging post-Cold War order. As Sayari puts it, above all, the strengthening of its ties with the West remained the primary motivating force for Ankara's engagement in its surrounding regions during the course of the 1990s' international order that was shaped by uncertainty both at home and abroad.<sup>73</sup>

## Turkey, the UN and the International Order in the 2000s: Normative Resistance and an "Order-Building" Role

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, Turkey's foreign policy has reflected a more "*value-oriented*" outlook towards order, both in discourse and practice.<sup>74</sup> The new foreign policy approach towards order is more interested in "*building influence*" in its region as well as across the globe through international institutions.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, the new rulers did not just capitalize on the "active diplomatic initiatives of the

1990s”, but also demonstrated increasing “willingness” to adopt a new “*order-building role*” in the last decade especially through the UN platform.<sup>76</sup>

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Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009-2014), who served as the chief advisor to the Prime Minister between 2002-2009, was the architect of new thinking in Turkish foreign policy. According to Davutoğlu, world order has been going through major earthquakes since the end of the Cold War, and these have shaped Turkey’s potential as well as limitations in foreign policy making. Since the policies Ankara pursued during the immediate post-Cold War era were not that proactive, Turkey paid a heavy price in the face of the first earthquake. Nevertheless, Turkey has emerged as a powerful state in the subsequent second and third earthquakes, namely September 11 and more recently the world economic crises.<sup>77</sup> More importantly, although there have always been regulatory agreements among the powerful states at the transitional turning points of the world order, there was, however, no real

agreement among states on what the new order would be like after the Cold War. For AKP leaders, this provided an important opportunity for Turkey, in terms of both its “possible role” in the making of a future international order and its “critique” against the structure of the current order.<sup>78</sup>

In this vein, Turkey’s foreign policy role in the AKP era is defined as being one of the main actors in the construction of the new regional/global order(s):

... 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... At the global level, we will aspire to build in a participatory manner a new international order that is inclusive of the international community at large...<sup>79</sup>

This “new international order” vision has been conceptualized to encompass three dimensions: i) political order based on dialogue and multilateralism; ii) an economic order based on justice and equality; and iii) a cultural order based on inclusiveness and accommodation.<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, Turkish leaders have criticized and at times challenged the current international order on “political”, “economic” and “cultural” grounds on multilateral platforms and called for a revision to its institutional architecture:

You have the UN Security Council still reflecting the post-Second World War geopolitical balances... We think that in

the UN there should be a much more “participatory” political order, much more “justice oriented” economic order and a much more “inclusive” cultural order.<sup>81</sup>

In parallel with their predecessors, today's Turkish rulers raise in every possible occasion “the urgent demand” for a much more “representative” and “effective” order in the UN System.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, Prime Minister Erdogan's (2003-2014) remarks in 2012 on the UN's paralysis over the Syrian uprisings that the “UN is facing a serious test of effectiveness,” clearly illustrates the “continuity” in Turkish rulers' approach towards the role of the organization in the 1990s:

The United Nations is facing a serious test. That test is about whether or not the Organization can represent the good conscience of the international community and act in accordance with it. In other words, it is about whether it can translate humanity into practice or not. So far, the track record has not been promising.<sup>83</sup>

What's crucial here is that, for AKP leaders, in addition to the “institutional ineffectiveness” and problematic economic order, there is also the problem of “cultural order” within the international system. This concern became visible in Davutoğlu's criticism of the “Eurocentric” cultural world order. A Eurocentric cultural approach cannot, he argued, be shaping the future of humanity in a world of rising states. More importantly, in Davutoğlu's words, there should be certain “new values

that should be injected.”<sup>84</sup> Such normative issues are one area in which Turkey has been maintaining a sustained criticism of the international order, and Turkish leaders seem convinced that the current order fails to uphold justice and breeds inequality and mistreatment.<sup>85</sup> “This is a search about a “cultural order” that integrates different historic entities to the system rather than reading the global system in terms of norms, understandings and practices through a single historical perspective.”<sup>86</sup>

Ankara's “normative resistance” towards the current UN order is best symbolized in Turkish rulers' recurring discourse of “the world is bigger than five”.<sup>87</sup>

Since 2002, Turkey has acted critically of the UN not only for its failure to play an effective role in the maintenance of peace and security in the world, but also for its inability to adequately support the “development” needs of impoverished nations. In particular, Turkey has asked the UN to concentrate more on all issues related to human rights and development.<sup>88</sup> The new “normative” paradigm in Turkish foreign policy was also evident in the search for the alleviation of poverty and inequality in the world. In this regard, in their criticism towards the UN system, Turkish leaders attribute to their country “a new role” aiming to “bring a higher moral standard to global governance and politics and achieve a harmony of *realpolitik* and norms-based foreign policy.”<sup>89</sup> In parallel to that, in the words of Abdullah Gül, “Turkey's unique historical,

political, and social experience bestows upon it both a role and a responsibility to promote peace, security.”<sup>90</sup> Reflected in Davutoğlu’s “humanitarian diplomacy”<sup>91</sup> concept, compared to their predecessors, AKP rulers increasingly emphasized their willingness to take “responsibility” in shaping the international order, ranging from security issues to environmental ones. In this regard, emphasis on Turkey’s global responsibility not only as a firm defender of universal values, but also as a state with a strong willingness to extend its assistance to “the people who rise up to demand such values” is illustrative of Turkey’s “normative” approach in shaping a new world order:

In pursuit of our global objectives, we will endeavor to listen to the consciousness and commonsense of humanity, and become a firm defender of universal values... We will extend our assistance to the people who rise up to demand such values.<sup>92</sup>

In practice, Turkey has been a vocal advocate in the plight of the Palestinians and the Syrians. It has also emerged in the last decade as a major force in addressing the issues of global underdevelopment and the humanitarian suffering in Africa.<sup>93</sup> Turkey took many initiatives to contribute in shaping a just global order especially through utilizing international platforms. More importantly, Turkey has also been taking an interest in global issues which are prominent in the UN’s agenda, even though they do not necessarily fall within the traditional domain of Turkish

foreign policy.<sup>94</sup> In this vein, Turkey was the first non-Western country to host the 4<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in May 2011. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has already named Turkey as one of the major donors towards alleviating the acute food crisis in Africa. Turkey’s contributions to the UN and to projects in the least developed regions of the world have been on a steady increase over the last decade.<sup>95</sup> Turkey’s voluntary contributions to the United Nations amounted to almost US\$ 12 million in 2005 and 2006, including a donation worth US\$ 600.000 to the newly-founded “Central Emergency Response Fund”.<sup>96</sup> Displaying a systematic uptick, Turkey became the world’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest donor in development cooperation and the 3<sup>rd</sup> in humanitarian aid relief in 2012, providing assistance to 131 countries listed as aid recipients in 2011.<sup>97</sup> In 2010 Turkey co-chaired with Egypt an “International Donor’s Conference for the Reconstruction and Development of Darfur” in Cairo. Also, in May 2010 Turkey hosted the Istanbul Somalia Conference organized within the UN framework. Subsequently, in June 2012 the second international conference on Somalia was held in Turkey under the theme: “Preparing Somalia’s Future: Goals for 2015.” On 26 September 2013, while speaking at the World Humanitarian Summit of the 68<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, the UN Secretary General praised Turkey’s international

assistance and declared that Turkey will host the first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.<sup>98</sup> In this vein, Turkish rulers have increasingly become strong advocates of Asian, African and Latin American struggles for peace and prosperity in international platforms, first and foremost in the UN.<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, despite intense criticisms towards the workings of the UN system, in practice, the UN has increasingly become an important arena in Turkish rulers' search for a just international order as well as their efforts to "restructure" the world order. In the words of Abdullah Gül:

The United Nations provides a political and moral compass for our endeavours towards a just international order- a better order that will prevent new conflicts, ensure that human rights are upheld and lead to more equitable and sustainable distribution of prosperity.<sup>100</sup>

Turkish rulers took every opportunity to emphasize the crucial role of an "effective" UN in the international order as well as Turkey's "commitment" to strengthen the UN system in its own foreign policy:

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Since the 2000's, Turkey's order-criticisms encompass more concrete normative suggestions to "extend" the global order, as well as an "increased willingness" to take a more "active role" in the UN platform.

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Strengthening multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations in the international system is a fundamental aspect of our foreign policy. It is the strongest hope and guarantee for a safer and better world.<sup>101</sup>

Accordingly, since the 2000's, Turkey's order-criticisms encompass more concrete normative suggestions to "extend" the global order, as well as an "increased willingness" to take a more "active role" in the UN platform. In this vein, the Turkish Foreign Ministry's report called "Turkey's Priorities for the 62<sup>th</sup> Session of UN General Assembly" in 2007<sup>102</sup> has been remarkable in terms of documenting Turkey's priorities and expectations from the UN in a wide range of areas as well as suggesting contributions from Turkey in establishing a just new world order.<sup>103</sup> In practice there is evidence in the last decade of a tremendous surge in the number of initiatives taken in international platforms, namely the UN, aimed at "restructuring the international order" towards a just settlement of disputes. Turkey's non-permanent seat in the 2009-2010 period and also her second application for UN temporary membership for the 2015-2016 term clearly demonstrate Ankara's increasing "willingness" over the last decade to take the "responsibility" in reconstructing the international order through the UN platform. Ankara had been longing for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council since 1961 and the 2009-2010 membership was a great achievement for

Turkey, since the long period of absence has been a major obstacle in Turkish foreign policy, restricting its “visibility” in the international arena.<sup>104</sup>

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**Turkey’s efforts since 2011 at finding an effective resolution to the Syrian uprising emphasizing the humanitarian tragedy also aimed at mobilizing the UN platform to take effective measures.**

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Turkish leaders’ intense diplomacy in the UN platform in recent years on issues like the Syrian uprisings, the Palestinian issue and the Iranian Nuclear Program illustrates Turkey’s increased visibility in the UN platform aimed at finding a just solution to crucial problems in world politics. In this regard, Turkish rulers’ active campaign in 2012 for a non-member observer status to the Palestinian state before the UN General Assembly Platform was remarkable. Turkey’s efforts since 2011 at finding an effective resolution to the Syrian uprising emphasizing the humanitarian tragedy also aimed at mobilizing the UN platform to take effective measures. Accordingly, Turkish rulers strived to guarantee further collective measures towards Syria and harshly criticized the UN on many occasions of indirectly supporting the oppression of the Syrian

people by “failing to unite on Syria.”<sup>105</sup> In fact, Turkey has raised the Syrian issue both before the General Assembly and before the Security Council many times and also sponsored draft resolutions in the General Assembly.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Turkey’s efforts together with Brazil on the Iranian nuclear program, resulting in the Tehran agreement and intense diplomacy to avoid further sanctions to ensure diplomatic talks has been illustrative of its efforts in the UN platform to take responsibility in shaping the international order.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, Turkey significantly supported and promoted cultural international initiatives at the UN like the UN’s “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative launched in 2005. The project certainly constitutes a new perspective in Turkish foreign policy, in which Turkey has assumed the position of the spokesperson of the Islamic world and for the first time has undertaken a pioneering role in a global initiative.<sup>108</sup>

One should also note here that Turkey’s increasing quest to adopt a normative “order-building” role in the last decade towards the international order has been made “possible” in the existence of available systemic, regional and domestic factors. Firstly, Turkey’s growing regional role, especially up until the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, was crucial. When Turkey had little influence in its region, it mattered little whether Ankara had a normative foreign policy or not. Turkey had the luxury of acting without giving

much thought to its responsibility to espouse a more ambitious foreign policy based on “values.” When Turkey increased in power and influence however, the question of “values” became a much more significant issue.<sup>109</sup>

Secondly, as Öniş and Kutlay suggest, at the systemic level, the hegemonic power transformations have provided a window of opportunity for rising powers to act relatively more independently in comparison to periods when systemic control mechanisms were tight and robust.<sup>110</sup> Hence, the strong agency on the part of current Turkish rulers who pursue a greater role for Turkey in restructuring the international order is well-suited to the conducive external environment in the 2000s, in which new operational areas were opened for rising powers in the world system.<sup>111</sup> In this vein, the increasing pressure put on the UN system for “reform calls” as a result of structural transformations in the last decade also fostered Turkey’s agency in terms of normative “order-criticism”. Moreover, financial crises in the global economy and the so-called “Europessimism” accompanied by Western powers’ struggle to preserve the established order might be argued to have enabled a more receptive environment towards alternative demands coming from rising states. Not only such systemic factors, but also favourable domestic conditions fostered Turkey’s attempt to adopt a global role towards responsibility in shaping world order.

Yet, in the last decade, there were clear limitations towards Turkey’s normative posture in bringing about sound policy outcomes. In the most recent Syrian crises, Turkey undoubtedly played an important and constructive role in terms of humanitarian aid and welcoming massive numbers of Syrian refugees from the other side of the border. Yet, Turkey has been unable to convert its commendable unilateral effort to a genuine multilateral effort.<sup>112</sup> As the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey increased dramatically, Turkey appealed to the UN in 2012 and asked for the implementation of the principle of “responsibility to protect” in Syria.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Turkey’s efforts failed to produce the desired outcomes as in the case of the refusal of prominent international actors to establish no-fly zones or humanitarian corridors in Syria. Indeed, for some scholars, Turkey’s Syrian policy has been to some extent counter-productive as it has undermined Turkey’s image of being a benign regional power, by drawing it into sectarian conflicts and over-involvement in the domestic politics of key Arab states. What is more, since the onset of the Arab uprisings, Turkey has been blamed by some for disrespecting the principle of national sovereignty.<sup>114</sup>

Likewise, the AKP government displayed a great deal of sensitivity towards the military coup in Egypt on “normative” grounds, and has been quite critical of the EU leaders for not being equally responsive. However, this kind of

sensitivity and the pro-democratization posture adopted towards events in the outside world do not easily generate international attention and credibility, given the growing belief that Turkey's democratic credentials display a number of important deficiencies.<sup>115</sup> In this regard, Turkey's ability to adopt a normative foreign policy role is also argued to have been downgraded in recent years with shortfalls in domestic politics with regards to an occasional lack of tolerance towards freedom of expression, the failure to write a new constitution and the lessening belief in the rule of law. "Furthermore, Ankara's contradictory foreign policy approaches towards some Middle Eastern countries' human rights policies like Saudi Arabia and its silence towards Sudanese government's human rights violations in Africa have increasingly been criticized on normative grounds for being double-standard."<sup>116</sup>

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If sustained, the ongoing “normative” restructuring process in Turkish politics in terms of democratization, freedom and human rights, accompanied by a relatively peaceful, stable and prosperous domestic order, will continue to prompt Turkey's eagerness to adopt a normative foreign policy role in the UN platform.

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In the same vein, some scholars argue that Turkey's humanitarian and development activities in Africa as well as its growing sensitivity towards the neighbouring regions were motivated mostly by a desire to open new markets for its rapidly growing and globalizing commercial interests.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, its previous campaign for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat for the 2009-2010 period also seemed to have precipitated a wave of Turkish aid activism toward Africa in the 2000s. This was accompanied by the opening of embassies and financing projects in sub-Saharan Africa, which in turn secured a number of votes for Turkey during its successful bid for a UN Security Council seat in 2009-2010.<sup>118</sup> Above all, Turkey's, inability to get the necessary votes for the 2015-2016 Security Council membership in the UN General Assembly as well as the counter-campaign initiated by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, clearly demonstrated Turkey's limitations in exerting its influence through international institutions in a changing, highly volatile regional context. Nevertheless, if sustained, the ongoing “normative” restructuring process in Turkish politics in terms of democratization, freedom and human rights, accompanied by a relatively peaceful, stable and prosperous domestic order, will continue to prompt Turkey's eagerness to adopt a normative foreign policy role in the UN platform.

## Conclusion

Since the 2000s, there have been clear indications of Turkey's changing power status as a result of its increasing hard and soft-power capabilities in foreign policy accompanied by an increasing enthusiasm on the side of Turkish rulers to take an active role in regional and global affairs. The United Nations Development Programme dubbed its 2013 Human Development Report "The Rise of the South". The states that belong to the group of rising powers is remarkably diverse and large; they include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the 'BRICS'), as well as, states like Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey.<sup>119</sup> Similar to the leaders of the BRICS, Turkish leaders are increasingly seeking to have an active role in the UN platform. We could thus witness Russia's preoccupation with the Security Council; Chinese resistance to any reform of the UN Security Council that would add new permanent members; Brazil's campaign for a permanent seat in the Council; and India's efforts to become an 'agenda mover' on various issues reflecting its newfound role as a bridge between North and South in the UN. Considering the triad offered by Turkish policy makers under the AKP government, in terms of a new *political, economic and cultural order*, there is a clear "*normative resistance*" against the idea of a unipolar world order and its

frozen institutions, often accompanied by the conviction that the international system is gradually, but ineluctably, moving toward multipolarity with the phenomenon of rising states.<sup>120</sup>

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As a rising power with attachments to Western institutions of the current world order such as NATO, the Council of Europe, the EU and the OECD, Turkey's demand for a revision of the international system is clearly distinguished from the demands of other rising powers.

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One should note here that Turkey's increasing visibility in global affairs and several of its critical normative discourses as well as foreign policy moves vis-a-vis the West are sometimes taken as indicators that it has adopted or may adopt a "revisionist stance" towards the current international order. Yet, Turkey's "*order-criticism*" is hardly new and goes back to the Republican era. By comparatively analyzing the historical evolution of Turkey's approach towards the international order as well as its foreign policy practices in the UN platform, this study demonstrates that since the 2000s, Turkey's order-criticisms encompass more concrete normative suggestions to extend the global order, as

well as an increased inclination to take a more active role in the UN platform as a result of favourable domestic and systemic factors. Nevertheless, as a rising power with attachments to Western institutions of the current world order such as NATO, the Council of Europe, the EU and the OECD, Turkey's demand for a revision of the international system is clearly distinguished from the demands of other rising powers.<sup>121</sup> Turkey's bond with the West rests on more than shared strategic interests as Turkey's centuries old westernization ideal with its institutional relations has left indelible marks on Turkey's culture and institutions.<sup>122</sup> "In fact, Turkey's current challenge to the international order is revision-oriented rather than being anti-systemic."<sup>123</sup>

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At the systemic level, the structure and the working methods of the UN Security Council is one of the main obstacles towards rising states' ability to shape the course of developments as well as Turkey's ability to play a central role in shaping international politics.

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Turkey's "normative resistance" is designed to propose an "international justice-based alternative approach" to the existing international order which needs to be reconstructed *not*

*outside but in* the UN platform. Yet, it would be wrong to argue that all these efforts on the side of Turkish rulers fostered "optimal" outcomes in terms of sound accomplishments. At the systemic level, the structure and the working methods of the UN Security Council is one of the main obstacles towards rising states' ability to shape the course of developments as well as Turkey's ability to play a central role in shaping international politics. Again, the changing regional context after the 2011 Arab uprisings has already had a remarkable effect on Turkey's "normative foreign policy role" as well as on Turkey-UN relations. The diminishing regional support for Ankara became manifest during elections for the Security Council for the period between 2015-2016. Its failure to obtain a non-permanent seat at the Security Council clearly revealed the limitations of Turkey's increasing role in the UN platform. Thus, although there has been a clear manifestation of Turkey's enthusiasm to adopt a normative foreign policy role in terms of defining new normative aims and frequent use of normative means, the normative outcomes seems to be much more complicated, especially in the last couple of years.

Above all, the UN's almost 70 years old "frozen" system faces an *increased pressure* for "structural change" with ongoing global systemic and political transformations in the last decade.

This creates a tension in which the organization will either *reorganize* its system to adopt the process of change in world politics or face some kind of diminishing legitimacy. In this vein, the “heightened pressure” resulting from crises of the international order as well as the legitimacy of the UN system has the potential to open up new areas for

rising states’ normative resistance in the search for a just and representative international order. As being one of the founding members of the UN, the world organization will continue to remain at the center of Turkey’s increasing efforts to search for an effective, representative and just international order.

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