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# The Foreign Policy- Hegemony Nexus: Turkey's Search for a "New" Subjectivity in World Politics and Its Implications for US-Turkish Relations

Ali ASLAN\*

## Abstract

*The linkage between foreign policy and hegemony is admitted but has not been systematically analysed in the study of Turkish foreign policy. One of the key reasons for this is the absence of analytical tools that conceptualise the linkage between foreign policy and hegemony. In response to this gap, this study presents post-foundational/post-structural analytical tools to study the linkage. In addition, it applies those tools to analyse the far-reaching transformation in Turkish-American relations in the context of Turkey's search for a new subjectivity in world politics. It argues there have been two main periods in Turkish-American relations since the AK Party came to power: an era of "lack of understanding" between the years 2002 and 2006, and the era after the parties had come to a "new understanding" since 2006.*

## Key Words

Post-structuralism, foreign policy, hegemony, AK Party, Turkish-American relations.

## Introduction

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu on one occasion bashed the European Union (EU) for not understanding the "new" Turkey by comparing it with the United States' (US) agility in perceiving Turkey's "new" reality: "They [the EU] are still far away from understanding Turkey, which is a rising power. But the United States, as Turkey's strategic ally, understands this very well."<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates, inter alia, an ongoing "structural" transformation in US-Turkish relations, or at least underlines the fact that Turkey desires to carry out far-reaching changes in bilateral relations as a result of its search for a new subjectivity in world politics. This shift is often described by state officials in such a way that the two countries have evolved from being "strategic allies" to "model partners." These descriptions reveal the presence of various "modes of relations" between the two countries. And they are in general defined in terms of changes in the relative importance of the two

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\* Ali Aslan, PhD, University of Delaware, USA.

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As implied by Davutoğlu’s statement, the issue of coming together under an overarching identity and falling apart in effect reveals that states struggle to produce structures-overarching identities or “international states”<sup>2</sup>- within which they identify with differential (subject) positions. This points at the problem of *overdetermination* since the process of identity/interest formation involves a degree of hegemonic power relations among parties. Accordingly, with respect to Turkey’s relations with the West, some scholars contend that Turkish foreign policy under the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*’s (the Justice and Development Party, AK Party) reign serves Turkey and its desire to be co-opted by the Western-dominated world system.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, some commentators argue that Turkey under the AK Party has taken a counter-hegemonic, anti-Western (Islamist) foreign policy attitude; it has abandoned the “Western axis” some claim.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, it is discussed whether

Turkey is in search of building up an empire in the East.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars stress that current Turkish foreign policy cannot be described as anti-Western or subservient to the West, and that Turkey, it is argued, is seeking more room to define its foreign policies as a result of a change in its leadership and strategic doctrine.<sup>6</sup> Thus, they indicate that this has led to convergence and divergence between the West and Turkey over various international issues.<sup>7</sup>

This study, too, argues that Turkey is striving to define its foreign policies independent from the West. It argues that the current Turkish foreign policy is in a way counter-hegemonic but it does not indulge in antagonising the West in carrying out this goal. Turkey’s disassociation from the West does not have to be called anti-Westernism. In order to shed light on this problem, this article attempts to develop heuristic analytical tools by deploying post-structural discourse theory. It has two main sections. The first develops a post-structural/post-foundational account of foreign policy that highlights the interaction between the hegemonic political practices in domestic and international realms. The second applies this framework to the study of US-Turkish relations since 2002, relations that can be divided into two periods: the years of a “lack of understanding,” 2002-2006; and the years when there has been

an evolution of a “new understanding” between the two countries, namely from 2006 onwards.

## Agent, Structure and Power in Foreign Policy Analysis

Despite the differences among mainstream approaches in international relations (IR) over the relative importance of agent and structures (individualism vs. structuralism) and the nature of structures (materialism vs. idealism), there is a striking common denominator over the problem of agent-structure relations: agent and structures are conceptualised as pre-existing totalities which are counter-posed to each other.<sup>8</sup>

Post-structuralists oppose this view of agent-structure relations and they seek to deconstruct the opposition between agent and structure in which one of them is prioritised over the other, and at the same time they strive to revise this binary division within a new conceptual ground that offers each element its due consideration.<sup>9</sup> This does not make structure and agent disappear; they are rather intertwined on a new conceptual ground.

Here the issue of subjectivity appears to be crucial because the mainstream view of agent-structure relations is mainly driven by the reduction of subjectivity to individuality. According to this conception of subjectivity, the subject is, first of all, believed to be both rational and transparent to itself; secondly, the ensemble of its positions is united and homogenous; and finally it is the origin and basis of social relations.<sup>10</sup>

Post- structuralism refutes this view and contends that the phenomenon of subjectivity cannot be thought of as independent from the structures. The structures, however, are argued to be lacking any essence and characterised by the impossibility of closure and nonfixity.<sup>11</sup> The

absence of an essence furnishes the structures with the characteristic of being undecided, unstable, and contingent. This lack also leads to a similar lack in the subject because the undecidedness and contingency of structures cannot provide the subject an ultimate and fixed identity. The subject therefore cannot exist on its own- it is not self-transparent- as it seeks to identify with the “outside.”

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politics-*the politics of identification*- which involves an impossible struggle for identity and search for completion on the subject's part.<sup>12</sup> The lacking subject yearns for completeness by identifying with the objective realm, by creating certain structures. This underlies a specific form of relations between the subject and the structures: the moment when the subject succeeds in identifying with the objective realm is the moment of its eclipse, its integration with the structures. This indicates the transition from *political subjectivity* to *subject positions*- two categories of the subjectivity. The former indicates the independence of the subject from the structures and its irreducibility to the structures, particularly at a moment of structural instability and dislocation.<sup>13</sup> The latter, on the other hand, indicates the necessity of the structures for the subject, and suggests the subject's integration with the structures as a differential position within the structures. This underlines the integral relationship between the subject and the structures: the political actors transform their own identity insofar as they actualise particular structural potentialities and refute others.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, post- structuralism proposes to "shift analysis from assumptions about pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity and its political enactment."<sup>15</sup> In the realm of

international relations, the sovereign state is the primary subjectivity/political actor and from a post-structuralist perspective, the activities of the state-*statecraft*- are viewed as creating an effect of completeness. Statecraft functions to represent the state as a finished and objective political unit, as well as produces a *particular* state-centric reality of the global political space.<sup>16</sup> It indicates that "no state is complete and all states struggle against failure."<sup>17</sup> In this regard, post- structural political analysis proposes to focus on examining the boundary-producing activities or practices of the state, which constantly attempts at grounding the sovereign state as the primary subjectivity of world politics.<sup>18</sup>

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The field of foreign policy is one of the primary sites of statecraft. Resting on a post- foundational view of subjectivity, post-structuralists distinguish "Foreign Policy" from "foreign policy" in the sense that the latter refers to the reactions of pre-given and complete state actors to

their environment whereas the former underscores that the field of foreign policy is all about producing the “other” or “foreign” to achieve complete and stable subjecthood: “the self-identity of a state rests on a prior difference from other states.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the field of foreign policy is not about linking two complete political systems- domestic and international- but instead is about the production of these political systems or spaces.<sup>20</sup>

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“Foreign Policy” then contains, first, the production of two political spaces, domestic (self) and international (other); second, the fixation of meaning in each of these political spaces by creating differences and subject positions; and, finally, the maintenance of a degree of correspondence between those objectivities and subject positions in order to generate a particular state-centric reality and an enclosed totality on the basis of *nation*, which currently holds the empty place of “power” or sovereignty, as the primary referent of sovereignty is the people or nation.<sup>21</sup> The boundaries between inside and outside

are drawn according to this conception of nation and (national) identity. And this supports a particular political position and set of interests within the society since the nation, like all other totalities, is ontologically incomplete, undecided, and constructed- it has to be grounded on the basis of a *political project*.

This dimension highlights the linkage between Foreign Policy and hegemony. Namely, Foreign Policy involves a struggle- the *politics of identification*- among political forces to fill the void in meaning of *the global*, which is symbolised currently around the sovereign states-system. In other words, political forces compete to construct parallel and corresponding objectivities in domestic and international political spaces in order to reproduce a *particular* state-centric reality- such as the East-West or the North-South antagonism- and boost their political interests. This particularity of state-centric reality refers to the fact that those objectivities/ identities in domestic and international political spaces depend on a specific projection of identity and order. In other words, the state-centric reality at any moment rests on a *particular* political project realised by a hegemonic political force.

Indeed, we should note that political forces engage in the production and fixation of meaning in the shared global

political space as they strive to construct a state-centric reality by resorting to boundary-producing activities. These are two integral processes in the construction or capturing of the global. There is only one objective field as the global, political projects pursue hegemonic struggle not only against their domestic contenders over producing a particular state but also against the political forces with particular political projects outside their boundaries for the construction of the global around a particular identity.<sup>22</sup> So we have two parallel and highly interrelated hegemonic competitions going on simultaneously: the hegemonic competition among political forces within the domestic realm over gaining a full and complete identity through establishing a *particular* state; and the hegemonic competition among political forces located in different “state spaces” over establishing a *particular* global around a definite identity project.

## Turkey’s Search for a New Subjectivity and Its Implications for US- Turkish Relations

The AK Party, as a hegemonic political force, came to the scene with a specific political project, “conservative-democracy.” The conservative-democratic political project has displayed

Turkey’s will to produce a civilisational *difference* within the global liberal order:

“[W]e believe the dialogue between civilisations is a necessary step for world peace and brotherhood in the current time. Respecting civilisational differences and meeting on a common ground are imminent for a democratic world.”<sup>23</sup>

This has involved drawing new boundaries between the inside (self) and the outside (other) on the basis of a conservative-democratic identity. The AK Party accordingly has sought to fix the domestic political space around “conservative-democracy” while at the same time it has attempted to oppose liberal Western universalism in the international political space by offering a democratic political ground in world politics which requires the recognition of the plurality of civilisation(s), namely the establishment of a world order based on an equal and just distribution of rights and responsibilities among civilisations.<sup>24</sup> In order to structure the global political space as such, the AK Party has strived to identify Turkey with the subject position “centre-state” by replacing it with its long-standing subject position of a “Western state.” This desire of obtaining a new subjectivity has created serious crisis, partly owing to the internal hegemonic competition between the Kemalists and the AK Party, especially in the 2002-2006 period, with the global centre, the US in particular. However, after 2006,

the US has gradually admitted Turkey's new subjectivity as a "centre-state."

### *The Dislocation of the Structures and the Implications for US-Turkish Relations*

As noted, the system structures are formed by differential subject positions and they are contingent and undecided. The contingency and undecidedness of the structures becomes more acute and obvious in time of structural dislocation. In such a period, the established identities are shattered and the social actors find themselves in a vacuum of meaning. However, the dislocation also furnishes actors with political subjectivity, and therefore provides an opportunity for new discursive constructions. As a result and in response to the collapse of structures or established identities, social actors engage in rebuilding the dislocated structures.

In the early 2000s, US-Turkish relations were dislocated. The relations between the two countries had been grounded on the premise that the US accepted Turkey as a secular-democratic "Western" polity, whereas Turkey contributed by not acting independently and opposing the Western projects in the global political space as long as they did not conflict with Turkey's secular-national integrity, such as with the Cyprus and Armenian

problems. This equilibrium was upset by two key developments. One of them was the events of 11 September, which made more visible the void of meaning that had engulfed the international system since the collapse and dislocation of the Cold War identities and structures. After 11 September, the Bush government embarked on fixing the meaning of the international political space around the antagonism between the subject position of "free world" and the subject position of "global terrorism." The *National Security Strategy* (NSS) document of the Bush government stated: "[T]here are few greater threats than a terrorist attack with WMD."<sup>25</sup> Resorting to a logic of difference, which engages in weakening sharp antagonistic polarity in a political space and expanding and increasing the complexity of political space, the Bush government attempted to expand the "free world" by using any means including military power. Accordingly, the Bush government (and other G-8 countries in the global centre) carved out a discourse on the Islamic world through a project, the *Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa*. This project states: "We the leaders of the G-8 are mindful of peace, political, economic and social development, prosperity and stability in the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa represent a challenge



which concerns us and the international community as a whole.”<sup>26</sup> In parallel with this, another document, prepared by the RAND Corporation and submitted to the US government, categorised countries and political forces in the Islamic world into four different groups: radicals, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists.<sup>27</sup> This document advised that the US should back the modernists (or moderates).

Accordingly, Turkey, in the foreign policy discourse of the Bush government, began to be presented as a “moderate Islamic” country, a (political) model to be followed by countries in the Muslim world. This was an overt existential threat to the Kemalist hegemony, which had strictly forbidden Turkey’s affiliation with Islam and the Islamic world. Therefore, the “secularist” Kemalists sharply refuted this label. General İlker Başbuğ, for instance, stated to journalists in Turkey after his visit to Washington in March 2004 that:

In the context of the Greater Middle East Project, in some circles Turkey is presented as a model. Turkey does not have a claim to be a model. From its establishment, the Turkish Republic has been a secular, democratic, and social state, governed by the rule of law. Some talk of Turkey being an Islamic state. Secularism and a moderate Islamic state cannot coexist.<sup>28</sup>

In the same vein, Faruk Loğoğlu, the Turkish Ambassador to the US (and now a deputy of the Republican People’s

Party, the CHP), reacted to US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who described Turkey as an Islamic republic, and said that “Turkey is a democratic and secular republic.”<sup>29</sup>

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Another key factor contributing to the fluctuation in US-Turkish relations was the dislocation of Turkish domestic structures. The Kemalist identity that had been determining the Turkish discursive field and representing the metaphoric totality of Turkish society since the outset of the republic was dislocated by the rise of the conservative (AK Party) elites. Indeed, the relationship between the US and Turkey has been defined as a “strategic alliance” since 1947.<sup>30</sup> To reiterate, in the context of Turkey’s “Western” subject position, the “strategic alliance” had been understood in such a way that Turkey would contribute to Western projects at the global and regional levels and not act independently in the international political space so long as the Western projects did not threaten Turkey’s secular-national integrity. Yet now, the AK Party has attempted to identify with a different subject position



in the international realm, the “centre-state,” which proposes to engage in global initiatives independent from the West, but which does not necessarily mean opposing the West on every occasion.<sup>31</sup> This new subject position in world politics was described- in comparison to the subject position “bridge” which had been frequently used after the late 1980s- by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu (previously the Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister and since 2009 the Minister of Foreign Affairs):

When Turkey’s role in the international system was defined, this was usually the role of “bridge.” In fact, the sole function of a bridge is to connect two entities and carry over one side to the other; an actor defined as a bridge is not regarded as *an independent actor with agency*. Embracing this definition had led us to be perceived as imposing the values of the West when we establish relations with the East and as an Easterner carrying the negative attributes of the East when we establish relations with the West. In this new period, Turkey has to be defined as “centre” state, not a “bridge”<sup>32</sup> [emphasis added].

Therefore, what the AK Party officials have understood from the “strategic alliance” is significantly different from the Kemalists understood from it. Accordingly, the AK Party has attempted to revise relations between the US and Turkey in accordance with its projected subject position, the “centre-state.” This has involved redefining the foundation of bilateral relations, which has consisted

of redefining the content of the “strategic alliance”, and a shift from “strategic alliance” to “model partnership.” This attempt to redefine the rules of bilateral relations and the division of political authority has significantly destabilised Turkish-American relations. In addition, the hegemonic competition between the conservative and the Kemalist elites in the domestic realm and the importance of the US’s backing have complicated Turkish-American relations further. In this period, particularly the years between 2002 and 2006, a serious crisis of mutual confidence damaged the relations between the two states.

### *The Domestic Turmoil*

American backing for the AK Party government, which became obvious with the Bush-Erdoğan meeting in Washington in December 2002 (just before the EU’s Copenhagen Summit), dashed the Kemalist hope for averting the counter-hegemonic challenge of the conservative elites with the help of the global centre. The Kemalist elite became uneasy with the Bush government’s support of the AK Party government and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s bid to be the next prime minister.<sup>33</sup> The Kemalists split up into two large discursive groups after the pressure of the crisis of representation<sup>34</sup> had become more acute with the EU’s 1999 Helsinki Summit.<sup>35</sup> One group

maintained Turkey's Western orientation (for EU membership in particular), while the other group struggled to change Turkey's direction from Europe to Eurasia.<sup>36</sup> For the latter group, after the US's backing of the AK Party government, the West completely lost its allure. Due to increasing tension with the counter-hegemonic challenge of the AK Party, it was easy for the ultranationalist Kemalists (the so-called "*ulusalcılar*") to capture the discursive leadership of the Kemalist political force. This shift within the Kemalist bloc significantly altered public opinion in Kemalist circles towards anti-Americanism.<sup>37</sup> One of the popular slogans in the republican meetings organised by the *ulusalcılar* in 2007 (conducted against Abdullah Gül's candidacy for president) was "*Ne ABD, ne AB, tam bağımsız Türkiye*" ("Neither the US nor the EU, fully independent Turkey").<sup>38</sup>

Alongside the rising anti-Americanism among the Kemalists, in the Turkish public in general anti-American sentiments have increased. Turkish novelists and filmmakers went further with novels such as *Metal Fırtına* (*Metal Storm*), which portrays a war between the US and Turkey, and the movie *Kurtlar Vadisi Irak* (*Valley of the Wolves Iraq*) which has a similar theme.<sup>39</sup> This was definitely galvanised by the Bush government's unilateral and interventionist foreign policies towards the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> This

political situation presented a dilemma for the AK Party. On the one hand, it was supposed to revise Turkey's position vis-à-vis the leading actor of the global centre in order to put forward a parallel objectivity in the international realm. Appearing as a proxy of the US would destroy the AK Party's popular support, threaten its political project, and drag it into a serious crisis of representation. On the other hand, having Islamic roots, the AK Party had to secure the backing of the global centre, the US in particular, in order to have legitimacy in the eyes of the international society and tackle the Kemalist hegemony. In short, it had to balance internal and external pressures without falling into a legitimacy crisis and also a crisis of representation. In response, the Kemalists have attempted to force the AK Party into a crisis of legitimacy by either signifying it as a proxy of "imperial" powers to the Turkish domestic audience,<sup>41</sup> or by portraying it as pursuing an anti-Western (and Islamic and non-democratic) Islamist foreign policy to Western power centres.<sup>42</sup>

### *Phase I: The Era of "Lack of Understanding", 2002-2006*

The relationship between the US and Turkey in the context of the US's Iraq invasion in 2003 was a good example in this respect.<sup>43</sup> On 3 December 2002, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul

Wolfowitz visited Ankara and submitted a three-stage plan to Prime Minister Gül.<sup>44</sup> The first stage involved the US military inspecting communications facilities and bases in Turkey. This would be followed by the improvement of communications and air bases, as required. Finally, US air and land forces would move into southern Turkey to take their place to open the northern front.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (the National Security Council, MGK) met on 28 December 2002. The meeting, which emphasised concern on the developments in northern Iraq, ended with a decision allowing the US only to inspect communications facilities and bases in Turkey (stage one) and emphasising the necessity of a “buffer zone” 60-70 km deep in northern Iraq after the US invades Iraq.<sup>46</sup> A month later, the MGK reconvened and emphasised that Turkey “backs solving this problem facing the international society through peaceful ways”; however, if an operation would be necessary, Turkey “will take all necessary measures to protect its national interests.”<sup>47</sup> On 6 February, parliament passed a resolution (*tezkere*) allowing the US to make improvements of communications and bases, as required (stage two).<sup>48</sup> A week later, US personnel and equipment began to arrive at Turkish ports and airfields.

As these preparations for an operation were carried out, the AK Party

government made a last-ditch attempt to prevent the operation by trying to persuade Saddam Hussein to fully comply with UN disarmament resolutions, or more preferably step down from power. In the context of this endeavour, the Minister of State Kürşat Tüzmen visited Baghdad on 11 January 2003 and delivered Gül’s message to Saddam.<sup>49</sup> On 23 January, the foreign ministers of Iraq’s neighbouring countries- Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan- met in Istanbul. They called for Saddam to cooperate with the UN and compromise with the Iraqi people.<sup>50</sup> On 6 February, Saddam’s deputy Taha Yasin Ramadan secretly visited Ankara. In this meeting Gül stated to Ramadan that “it is up to you to prevent the war.”<sup>51</sup>

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On 24 February, the cabinet eventually agreed to bring a resolution (*tezkere*) to parliament under Article 92 of the constitution.<sup>52</sup> A memorandum of understanding with the US was finally agreed on 1 March. According to this, 62,000 US troops, supported by 255 war planes and 65 helicopters, would be allowed into Turkish territory, with

60,000 Turkish troops occupying a 30 km “buffer zone” in northern Iraq.<sup>53</sup> Both in the Kemalist and conservative (AK Party) camps, there were groups opposing and supporting the decision.<sup>54</sup> Neither of the groups wanted to take the responsibility for this decision due to the strong public opposition to the war in Iraq. Therefore, both the Kemalists and the AK Party did not want to appear in the Turkish public’s eyes as if they were leading Turkey into a war. At the same time, neither of the groups was ready to oppose the US and shoulder the responsibility of a possible “no” decision due to the importance of the US in their hegemonic struggle in the domestic realm. Hence, the process of passing the *tezkere* witnessed a series of strategic moves from both sides. For example, the AK Party government decided to delay a parliamentary vote on the *tezkere* until after a meeting of the MGK scheduled for 28 February 2003.<sup>55</sup> The AK Party wanted the MGK (read the Turkish army) to make the decision. The MGK, in response, refused to do this; it simply said that the proposal had been “evaluated” without issuing a recommendation.<sup>56</sup> In other words, it returned the bomb to the AK Party’s hands. The *tezkere* was, therefore, debated in parliament on 1 March; 264 deputies supported the motion, with 250 opposing and 32 abstentions and absentees. Despite the fact that there were more “yes” votes

than “no” votes, the motion did not pass since the parliament’s rules requires an absolute majority of the whole house (at least 267 votes).<sup>57</sup> To look at the results, 100 AK Party deputies had failed to back the motion, with around 68 actually voting against.

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In effect, this result uncovered a serious discursive divergence within the AK Party. This is especially true regarding one particular criticism levelled against the AK Party after the failure of the *tezkere*. According to this view, Gül should have made support for the motion the subject of a group decision (the Turkish equivalent of a three-line whip) with open voting rather than allowing an anonymous electronic ballot. The most likely explanation is that Gül did not want to advertise this discursive split and subject himself and those close to him in the AK Party with the burden of the decision.<sup>58</sup> This is due to the fact that despite there being no clear data on who supported and opposed the resolution at the time, it was disclosed later that the AK Party’s leadership cadre in the foreign

ministry, particularly Abdullah Gül and Ahmet Davutoğlu, opposed Turkey's entrance into a war against an Islamic country.<sup>59</sup>

With regards to the Kemalist opposition, the Kemalist parties voted against the resolution. The previous coalition government, which was composed of pro-Kemalist political parties, had not opposed sending Turkish troops to Afghanistan to help the US after 11 September 2001.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, Turkey even took over short-term command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan with a contingent of 1,400 soldiers in June 2002.<sup>61</sup> However, the Kemalist forces opposed sending troops to Iraq, alongside its strategic interaction with the AK Party government, this was a result of the emerging discursive split- the pro-West and pro-Eurasia groups- within the Kemalist elite<sup>62</sup> as the nationalist and anti-Western pro-Eurasia group opposed the decision.

This failure created a fury in Washington. Wolfowitz blamed the Kemalists, the army in particular, of “not playing its leadership role” in passing the motion to the parliament.<sup>63</sup> The “strategic alliance,” as US officials understood it, required Turkey to support the decision. The AK Party government and the army sharply reacted against Wolfowitz's statements by arguing that the decision

was a result of democratic procedures.<sup>64</sup> However, the parliament passed a second resolution allowing coalition air forces to use Turkish air space on 20 March, after the invasion of Iraq had already started.<sup>65</sup> Later, on 24 June, the government issued a decree allowing the use of İncirlik air base and the nearby port of Mersin for logistical support for US forces in Iraq.<sup>66</sup> This support was no more than the contributions of other NATO members, many of whom also opposed the war. Furthermore, on 6 October 2003, the Turkish parliament attempted to pass a third *tezkere* allowing Turkish troops (around 10-12,000) to participate in the international stabilisation force in Iraq.<sup>67</sup> This time the Iraqi Provisional Governing Council and Paul Bremer, administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, rejected the plan.

The failure of the *tezkere* hit the fabric of bilateral relations, which had been articulated as “strategic alliance”. And it deteriorated further with the arrest of 11 Turkish Special Forces soldiers in Süleymaniye who were part of a small detachment which had been stationed in northern Iraq since 1997, originally to monitor a ceasefire between warring Kurdish factions in the region, by US forces for “disturbing activities” on 4 July 2003.<sup>68</sup> More shocking was that the soldiers were taken off for interrogation with sacks over their heads. Gül called Powell and stated that “it is unacceptable

and improper.”<sup>69</sup> The Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök, on the other hand, defined the incident as “the biggest crisis of confidence”<sup>70</sup> between the two countries. The Minister of Justice Cemil Çiçek defined the incident as “one of the breaking points in the 57-year-old relations between two countries.”<sup>71</sup> In order to alleviate the crisis and re-establish confidence between the two countries, a commission composed of Turkish and American officials was established.<sup>72</sup> However, it was later disclosed that the Turkish army had interpreted the incident as “revenge”

for the rejection of 1 March *tezkere*.<sup>73</sup> The war of words intensified after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in April-May 2004 and the

US attack on Fallujah in November 2004, in which more than 2,000 people were reported to have been killed. Mehmet Elkatmış, a prominent AK Party deputy and the head of Human Rights Commission in the parliament, described the Fallujah incident as “genocide.” The US Embassy in Ankara reacted to Elkatmış by publishing an official statement saying that his claims were “baseless, provocative, and insulting” and drew attention to the so called “Armenian genocide”. Minister

of Foreign Affairs Gül, in response, stressed that “it would be nothing but blackmailing by saying if ‘you blame us with genocide, we will do the same to you’”.<sup>74</sup>

The tension continued the next year. In June 2005, in a Bush-Erdoğan meeting in Washington, Bush described relations between the US and Turkey as “strategic relations”, and it was claimed that he avoided using the word “alliance” on purpose. This disturbed the Turkish side, especially as Bush had called US-Greek relations a “strategic alliance”

in a meeting with his counterpart Costas Karamanlis 20 days before. One Turkish foreign policy bureaucrat interpreted this to mean that the balance of

importance between Greece and Turkey in US foreign policy had shifted at the expense of Turkey.<sup>75</sup> In the same meeting, a US official stated that upgrading relations to its previous level was in the hands of the Turkish government. The official said that if Turkey did not take “necessary” steps and their national interests diverge, the US “will exclude and disregard [Turkey]. Strategic alliance means overlapping of national interests and allies move in the same direction. At this stage, they do not overlap on some issues and therefore we cannot

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cooperate.”<sup>76</sup> This attitude contradicted Turkish officials’ articulation of “strategic alliance” that the concept of “strategic alliance” “should not be interpreted as Turkey embracing American policies faithfully”.<sup>77</sup>

### *Phase II: Towards a New “Understanding”, 2006-2012*

Despite these intractable statements, the AK Party and the Bush government needed each other. Therefore, although Turkey’s search for a new subjectivity generated fluctuations in relations, bilateral relations by no means went up to the point of collapse. The preliminary sign of a new period in bilateral relations came about in the summer of 2006. In July 2006, the US’s new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül met in Washington and declared that they had reached a mutual agreement on a “shared vision document,” which emphasised their common agenda on the development of democracy and shared values.<sup>78</sup> This initiative basically aimed at establishing a mechanism to communicate views and the positions of each side on such issues as Iraq, the PKK, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, energy, and Iran, and it would therefore stop the mutual misunderstandings that had strained relations since 1 March 2003.<sup>79</sup> It was titled “A common

vision and structured dialogue in order to improve the strategic partnership between Turkey and the US.”<sup>80</sup> This was a historical development in the history of the bilateral relationship in the sense that relations were now based on mutually agreed values, not merely on strategic power calculations, and the sides were equal partners agreeing to understand each others’ position on crucial issues.<sup>81</sup> Rice, accordingly, depicted the relations as “a powerful strategic relationship based on common values.” Gül defined the document as “a large-frame agenda instead of an active action plan” and noted that it was prepared “in order to stage more effective cooperation in bilateral, regional and international issues, to put the issues into writing and consider them a reference point.”<sup>82</sup> The document reads:

We share the same values and ideals in the context of regional and global targets. These targets are developing democracy, freedom and welfare. For this reason, Turkey and the US are face to face with common tests and opportunities that require their common efforts. These tests and opportunities shape the elements of our common agenda based on consultation and cooperation.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, in the face of increasing PKK attacks, the AK Party government tabled a motion in the parliament (just after the crisis in domestic politics over Gül’s presidency was over) allowing military operations in northern Iraq



against the PKK militants, which had been carried out from the PKK's main base in the region after it was forced to leave Syria in 1998. The motion was passed with full opposition support on 17 October 2007.<sup>84</sup> However, the parliament's decision was in practice inoperable without the permission of US, which held practical sovereign power after Saddam's fall. Therefore, Erdoğan paid a long-planned visit to Washington to explain the urgency of the problem to the Bush government in November 2007. President Bush appeared to recognise the urgency of the situation. In his speech, within which he used the phrase "strategic ally" for the first time after the 1 March 2003 crisis, he stated: "The PKK is a terrorist organisation. It is an enemy of Turkey, Iraq and the United States."<sup>85</sup> He promised that the US would supply the Turkish forces with "real-time" intelligence on PKK bases and movements in Iraq. Thus, he gave a green light to Turkish operations in northern Iraq against the PKK militants. Accordingly, the Turkish air force conducted a series of targeted bombing raids on PKK bases in northern Iraq on 16 and 22-23 December 2007 and on 16 January 2008.<sup>86</sup> Following that, a major land and air incursion on 21-29 February 2008 was conducted.<sup>87</sup> With increasing US pressure, military operations came to an end. The military argued that the withdrawal decision had not been

taken under foreign pressures and the operation had fulfilled its objectives.<sup>88</sup>

On 8 January 2008, Gül, as the new president of Turkey, visited Washington. President Bush stated that Turkey was a strategic ally of the United States, and that cooperation between the United States and Turkey would continue against their common enemy, the PKK. Moreover, he expressed his country's support for Turkey's EU membership bid by saying that Turkey had shown that democracy and Islam co-exist and that "Turkey is a bridge between Europe and the Muslim World." Gül, on the other hand, said that he was pleased with cooperation against the PKK, and he argued that "[O]ur relations cannot merely be defined as relations between two countries; our relations contribute significantly to regional and global peace."<sup>89</sup>

The momentum in relations that came with Rice becoming secretary of state continued and developed further after Barack H. Obama was elected US president in November 2008. President Obama, in his speech to the Turkish parliament in April 2009, attempted to upgrade relations to a so-called "model partnership":

I would like to underline Turkey's importance. Turkey is viewed as a bridge between the West and the East. It has an extraordinarily rich heritage. It harbours ancient civilisations and modern nation-states together, gives importance

to democracy and the rule of law, has a dynamic economy, is a NATO member and has a Muslim majority population. Regarding these features, it occupies a special position in world politics. It is an important actor in global and regional politics. As a result, we are excited to work together. Working together will lead to integration between the Muslim and the Western worlds, and will be the path towards peace and prosperity.

This can be achieved only when Turkey and the United States form a *model partnership*. A nation with a dominantly Christian population will meet another nation with a dominantly Muslim population, and this will unite the two continents. Even though we have a dominantly Christian population, we regard ourselves as a nation bound by ideals. Sustaining the promise of attachment to secularism and the rule of law, if we as the West and the East work together, will make an extraordinary impact in world politics [emphasis added].<sup>90</sup>

This new concept has reconfirmed Turkey's bid to be a "centre-state" by first of all underlying its Islamic identity; second, by locating it as a leader of the Muslim world; and third, by emphasising the universality of democratic values and of a democratic world order based on the plurality of civilisations. Relations then have been conceptualised as relations not between two nation-states but rather the two leading polities of two civilisations. This has underlined the fact that the sides might have different views on issues; this should be respected and divergences should be debated and resolved before they lead to a crisis. Moreover, it

envisioned diversification and expansion of bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States.<sup>91</sup>

In its endeavour to identify with the subject position "centre-state," Turkey has started to play a more active role in international institutions. For instance, Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2009-2010 term in October 2008. After 47 years, Turkey had gained the right to sit on the UNSC. After the results were disclosed, Erdoğan made a statement:

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The AK Party government has strived to revise Turkey's (subject) position vis-à-vis the global centre in the context of its search for a new subjectivity.

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"Our country has shouldered an increasing responsibility in the realm of peace, security, and stability at regional and global levels. Turkey's election has been a result of its growing weight in international politics and the reflection of confidence the international society has for Turkey."<sup>92</sup>

Obama's Ankara visit came right after the so-called "Rasmussen crisis". The AK Party government changed its attitude after President Obama took the initiative in solving the crisis.<sup>93</sup> In December 2009, Obama and Erdoğan met in Washington. In the meeting President Obama praised the AK Party

government's "democratic initiative",<sup>94</sup> whereas Erdoğan stated that Obama's description of Turkish-American relations as "model partnership" indicated the start of a new period in bilateral relations and pointed out that Turkey had started to take important steps to fill the content of this new "model partnership."<sup>95</sup> In June 2010, Obama and Erdoğan met in Toronto at the G-20 Summit. This meeting came after Turkey's "no" vote on the US-led motion that extended sanctions on Iran in the UNSC.<sup>96</sup> In response, a high-level official in the US State Department made a statement that the US was disappointed by Turkey's decision but that they were still "strategic allies."<sup>97</sup> In the June 2010 meeting, alongside Turkey's "no" vote to the sanctions, Turkish-Israeli relations were also on the table. Erdoğan stated that Turkey and the US were in agreement that Israel should apologise for those Turkish citizens who had died on the Gaza flotilla raid, pay reparation for their families, and end the embargo on Palestine.<sup>98</sup> However, Israel denied taking steps on these issues and the US kept silent. The AK Party government has kept pressure on the US. In his meeting with Obama in September 2011, Erdoğan said that the US government "knew very well that we are right in our claims against Israel on this matter; therefore, they cannot tell us 'stop going after Israel.'"<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

The AK Party government has strived to revise Turkey's (subject) position vis-à-vis the global centre in the context of its search for a new subjectivity. This attempt to upgrade and redefine its bilateral relations has been opposed by the US until Condoleezza Rice became the new Secretary of State in 2006. After 2006, a new understanding has been reached and that gained momentum after Obama got elected US President in November 2008. Hence, despite there being many issues- such as the Israel-Palestine conflict and Iran's nuclear enrichment programme- on which Turkey and the US have different views, the level of relations has not fallen to that of the 1 March 2003 crisis.

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**In order for Turkey to sustain its new subject position at the global level, it has to lead economic, cultural and political integration in its region.**

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However, Turkey's new subject position, which locates Turkey both in the Western and Islamic civilisations, sits on a thin ice; it can be sustainable insofar as Turkey does not have to make a choice between the West and its own civilisational basin. The best scenario for Turkey is the lack of conflict between the

West and the Muslim societies. In this respect, the Middle East and Israel are important given the US's unconditional support for Israel. In the crises between Israel and the Muslim societies, such as the Palestinians, Lebanon and Iran, the fragility of Turkey's new subject position is revealed. So far, Turkey has successfully coped with this situation by adopting the "legitimate" political language of international law and human rights- and by not lapsing into culturalist anti-Westernism- in confronting Israel and the West while siding with the Muslim societies. In addition, it has acted to alleviate the conflicts and return to normalcy through diplomacy. However, if the volume of conflict reaches a point transcending the limits of control through diplomatic channels and/or persists for a period of time, the equilibrium Turkey has established between the West and its own civilisational basin might entirely shatter. Avoiding such a situation is crucial for Turkey because it needs time to boost its military and technological capabilities in order to live up to the requirements of its "centre-state" subject position. At this point, Turkey's power capability is behind the level to keep reproducing the subject position "centre-state."

The state is supposed to establish parallel objectivities in its domestic, regional, and global political spaces to enjoy completeness and subjectivity. So,

in order for Turkey to sustain its new subject position at the global level, it has to lead economic, cultural and political integration in its region. The lucrative political atmosphere after the so-called "Arab Spring" has dramatically altered how that objective is served owing to the confrontation with the Assad regime in Syria. As long as it continues, the Syrian crisis will suck up Turkey's power and prestige and put off regional integration in the face of the reluctance of the "international society" to intervene in Syria. This might, as well, instigate Turkey's dependence on the West (NATO and the US) and undercut its search for a new subjectivity.

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In order for Turkey to pose a "real" civilisational challenge, it also has to sustain an economic and cultural autonomy that involves fixing the global political space in such a manner anchored in its unique civilisational *Weltanschauung*.

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Furthermore, the AK Party also needs to reproduce a parallel objectivity in the domestic political space in order to sustain its "centre-state" subject position in the international realm. This objectivity is the conservative-democratic "society," which claims to represent the metaphorical

totality of the Turkish society. Yet, the secular-nationalist opposition strives to transform Turkey's confrontation with the Assad regime into a new antagonism (around religious sectarianism)<sup>100</sup> in the domestic realm in order to recapture its lost hegemony, or at least block the expansion of the conservative-democratic society. In addition, the Kurdish problem also dislocates the AK Party's conservative-democratic society, revealing its contingency by highlighting its partial character. If these dislocatory processes gain weight and the conservative hegemony enervates, Turkey will have trouble backing up its subject position at the global level. It may face a crisis of representation as a result if the objectivities do not correspond to each other.

And finally, from a post-structuralist perspective, Turkey's search for a new subjectivity and counter-hegemonic upsurge goes beyond interstate relations. The realm of international politics is merely one of the sectors in global political space, the global "social". Turkey's civilisational politics should also involve carving out alternative models of international political, economic and cultural life. For the time being, Turkey's challenge against the global centre is limited to the sector of international politics- achieving political autonomy vis-à-vis the global centre. In order for Turkey to pose a "real" civilisational challenge, it also has to sustain an economic and cultural autonomy that involves fixing the global political space in such a manner anchored in its unique civilisational *Weltanschauung*.

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