Two Stages of Turkey's Quest for a Regional Power Status in the Middle East: An Integrated Role-Status-seeking Approach

Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'da Bölgesel Güç Statüsü Arayışındaki İki Aşama: Bütünleşik Rol-Statü Arayışı Yaklaşımı

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Öz

2002 yılından bu yana Türkiye, tarihsel miras ve liberal tecrübe iddiası temelinde bölgesellik rolünü vurgulayarak Orta Doğu'da bölgesel güç statüsü elde etmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma, teorik çerçevede rol teorisi ile statü arayışı (status-seeking) teorisini bir araya getirerek ve bunlar arasındaki ilişkiyi ele alarak bölgesel güç literatürüne katkı yapmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu bütünleşik yaklaşım, bölgesel güç olmayan çalışanlar aktörlerin rol eğilimleri ve bölgesel karşı-rollerin, bölgesel bir gücün belli bir bölgedeki hiyerarşi içerisindeki statüsünü tanımladığını ileri sürmektedir. Çalışma, bu yaklaşımdan yararlanarak Arap Baharı öncesi ve sonrası dönemde, Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel güç olma arayışındaki dalgalanmaları incelemektedir. Türkiye, 2002-2011 yılları arasındaki ilk aşamada bölgesel işbirliği rolünü oynayabilmiştir ve bölgesel güç statüsünü geliştirmiştir ancak Arap Baharı sonrasında bu rolü oynama konusunda zorluklar yaşamıştır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye, Rol, Statü Arayışı, Arap Baharı, Orta Doğu*

Abstract

Since 2002, Turkey has actively been seeking a regional power status in the Middle East through the articulation of regional roles based on historical legacy and liberal experience. Theoretically, the paper seeks to contribute to regional power literature by integrating role theory with status-seeking theory and examining the interactions between them. This integrated approach suggests that the role orientations of aspiring regional power and regional counter-roles determine the level of status recognition of that regional power in a given regional power hierarchy. Using this approach, the paper examines the fluctuations in Turkey's pursuit of regional power status in the Middle East over two uneven stages before and after the Arab Spring. It shows that Turkey was able to play regional cooperative roles and improve its regional power status during the first stage (2002-2011) while has stumbled over the period since the Arab Spring.

***Key Words:** Turkey, Role, Status-seeking, Arab Spring, Middle East*

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Introduction

In recent years, the concept of 'regional power' has prevailed among the IR studies of regionalism and regional power theorizing. This new wave of studies has emphasized the foreign policy behavior of regional powers, which contribute to regional and international order as good global citizens. In general, these studies have provided three essential contributions. First, they offer aspiring non-Western powers agential space and role in contributing to the international institutions and order. Second, they reconceive the concept of power as a liberal normative status, a little far from the traditionally realistic terminology grounded on self-interest and material supremacy. Third, they identify three power types, the established middle powers that act internationally, such as Canada, emerging middle powers like South Korea and regional powers such as Indonesia. Therefore, for regionalist and multilateralist accounts, such powers are 'emergentist phenomena' that take on identity, role, and status.

While regionalist theorization remains a Western-centered and middle power-oriented approach, research efforts have already attempted to reduce this negligence in the studies of the Middle East. This negligence emanates from the fixed criteria, which strictly requires material and moral qualifications of a state to be considered as a regional power and accepted by others as well. These initiatives explore how attitudes and behavior of aspiring regional powers are mirrored in their foreign policy agenda and role concepts. A considerable number of Turkish IR scholars are mostly among those leads of this academic wave. However, they have devoted considerable initiatives to studying Turkey as an aspiring regional power in the Middle East and as a global middle power. Variably, some of them emphasized Turkey's normative attributes, including soft power brand and civilizational power, and others highlighted its structural elements, including its pivotal geography, material capacity, and foreign alliances.

To understand the nature and dynamics of regional power status-seeking (RP status-seeking) in world politics, first, this needs a thorough understanding of the subject theoretically and analytically. In doing so, a theoretical framework consisting of two interactionalist social theories 'role theory' and 'status-seeking theory' will be of significant help. However, the content of this paper will contribute to IR studies of regional powers in two ways.

Conceptually, role theory defines regional power as 'role' whereas status theory defines it as 'status' or position. Accordingly, this indicates that there is an analytical relationship between them in the way that the concept of aspiring regional power is interchangeably analogous to a 'role-maker' or 'status-seeker.' Role identity and behavior determine the new aspired status

of a state in the relevant power and social hierarchy. In world politics, when an aspiring regional power plays a role as part of its responsibilities, the other states might recognize or reject it-status recognition and rejection. Thus, roles are the self-proclaimed responsibilities of status-seeker, whereas recognition lies in the eyes of status-conferrer (other states).

Analytically, the paper builds on this theoretical framework to analyze the case of Turkey, as recently assumed to be an emerging regional power in the Middle East. Compared to previous research on Turkish foreign policy using role theory, this study aims to fill the theoretical gap that scholars have left to date. This gap is the result of a serious misunderstanding of agent-structural relations in the Middle East.

This paper, however, attempts to discuss the current public and academic debates about the fluctuation of Turkey's role and status in the Middle East and answer this question 'why Turkey was able to play regional cooperative roles and improve its regional power status during the first stage (2002-2011), while stumbled along the period of the Arab Spring? However, this paper provides a critical appraisal of the transformations of these two phases, considering the internal and external determinants of Turkish foreign policy.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the theoretical concepts of the two theories. The second section analyzes the domestic dynamics of Turkey's role making as a regional power status-seeker (SS), including role conceptions, role sources, role expectations, and internal challenges. In the third section, the article discusses the regional dynamics and challenges of the Middle East as a status-conferrer (SC) that has determined Turkey's regional power status. This section is chronologically divided into two parts the first discusses how in the period before the Arab Spring, regional stability had helped Turkey improve its regional power status while in the post-Arab Spring period underwent regional role and status competition.

Regional Power at the Nexus of Role and Status Theories

Role theory offers a rich literature of socio-political concepts and an in-depth theoretical framework for making a proper understanding of the interplay between "self" and "other" and their agencies and structures. Agency informs about the identity of "self" (status-seeker) and the perception of "other" (status conferrer), while structure informs about what "self" expects from "other" (s) and vice versa.

The status theory demystifies the enigma of status-seeking behavior of societies or states seeking to enjoy higher status in social stratification. It shows how, on the one hand, such social entities attempt to convey clues about their roles and expectations to other societies or states of the 'status-

conferring part.' On the other hand, the acceptance of these roles and expectations are relatively determined by the degree to which the status-conferring part would appreciate. In some cases, the status-conferring part might not accept the roles and expectations of the status-seeking part.

Foreign policy role theory has been developing over the last decades to contribute to the conceptual and theoretical domains of foreign policy analysis and international relations.[1] As to Holsti's definition, roles are *'the policy-makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or insubordinate regional systems.'*[2]

This paper argues that the functions of foreign policy roles are six-dimensional. First, they are cognitively conceptions motivated by self-identification and belief systems of decision-makers. Secondly, structurally are 'positions' in a particular social hierarchy. Third, functionally a state plays a single master role besides a set of auxiliary roles. Fourth, temporally, a state is motivated either by emerging status demands, for instance, a rising power's aspiration to a middle power status or influenced by historical experience, and

1   Richard Adigbuo, "Beyond IR Theories: The Case for National Role Conceptions," *Politikon*,Vol. 34, No. 1,2007,pp. 83–97; Vít and Beneš and Sebastian Harnisch, "Role Theory in Symbolic Interactionism: Czech Republic, Germany and the EU," *Cooperation and Conflict*,Vol. 50, No. 1, ,2015,pp. 146–165; Marijke Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots," in *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, 2011; Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis*,Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012,pp. 5–24; Suzette Grillot Chafetz, Glenn, Hillel Abramson, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy : Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *International Society of Political Psychology*,Vol. 17, No. 4 ,1996,pp. 727–757; Sebastian Harnisch, "Role Theory: Operationalization of Key Concepts," *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses* ,2011,pp. 7–15; K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*,Vol.14, No. 3 ,1970,pp. 233–309; Moch Faisal Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*,Vol. 72, No. 4,2018,pp.343–363; Ulrich Krotz, *National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared, CES Germany & Europe Working Papers, No. 02.4,* 2002; Philippe G. Le Prestre, *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition* ,McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 1997; David M. McCourt, "The Roles States Play: A Meadian Interactionist Approach," *Journal of International Relations and Developmen*,Vol. 15, No. 3, 2012,pp. 370–392; Chih-yu Shih, "National Role Conception as Foreign Policy Motivation: The Psychocultural Bases of Chinese Diplomacy," *International Society of Political Psychology Stable*,Vol. 9, No. 4 ,1988,pp. 599–631; Cameron G. Thies and Angguntari C. Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International & Strategic Affairs*,Vol. 40, No. 3 ,2018,pp. 397–421; Leslie E. Wehner and Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation: The Domestic Contestation of Roles," *International Studies Review*,Vol. 16,No. 3, 2014,pp. 411–436; Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly*,Vol. 24, No. 4, 1980,pp.532–454.
2   K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*,Vol. 14, No. 3,1970,pp. 233–309,p. 245,246

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narratives (role identity). Fifth, roles have orientations either being cooperative or competitive. Sixth, roles are interactional in terms of role making and status recognition being *"repertoires of behavior, inferred from others' expectations and one's own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands."*[3]

Ontologically speaking, role theory is concerned with understanding the cross-subjective world of status-seeker identity and status-conferrer expectations. The relationship of role and status through socialization determines both considerations.[4] Unlike other status-seeking strategies, roles are more qualified, stable, and meaningful elements of identity affirmation and status attribution. McCourt argues with constructivists that *"a solely identity-based explanation is incomplete and ultimately unpersuasive since identities are affirmed by playing social roles, which give identity meaning."*[5] Likewise, Chafetz suggests that *"roles provide individuals with a stable sense of identity."*[6] Thus, these two features of roles (quality and stability) could also explain the consistency and normative nature of the status-seeking behavior of the regional powers.

Foreign-policy roles often revolve around three categories of orientations, and each category falls into role sets. Such role orientations (cooperative, competitive, and system-oriented), however, reflect the decision-makers' ideological and strategic setting and shape the state and role identity of aspiring regional powers. First, certain states with cooperative role orientations aim to contribute to the regional order, allocate norms, and collaborate with civilized and democratic actors. Second, some states with competitive roles tend to play hegemonic roles, counter the roles of other aspiring actors, and act unilaterally. Third, system-oriented roles vary; some countries are satisfied with the regional and international system and therefore play status quo roles, some are unsatisfied and therefore play revisionist roles, and some others are skeptical of it and therefore call for reforms.

As role-theory promises to integrate foreign policy theories with that of IR, here, this paper attempts to do so with status-seeking theory. The reactivation of the foreign policy role approach lets international relations analysts reassess the substantive agency of decision-makers at times of peace and crisis.

3   Stephen G. Walker, "Symbolic Interactionism and International Politics: Role Theory's Contribution to International Organization," in *Contending Dramas: A Cognitive Approach to Post-War International Organizational Processes*, 1992, p.32.
4   Cameron G. Thies, "The Roles of Bipolarity: A Role Theoretic Understanding of the Effects of Ideas and Material Factors on the Cold War," *International Studies Perspectives,*Vol. 14, No. 3 ,2013,pp.269–288; Kai He, "Role Conceptions, Order Transition and Institutional Balancing in the Asia-Pacific: A New Theoretical Framework," *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol.72,No.2, ,2018,p.9.
5   David M. McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain's Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 4 ,2011,p. 1599.
6   Chafetz, Glenn, Hillel Abramson, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy : Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," Vol. 17, No. 4 ,1996, pp. 727-757,p. 733.

On the one hand, borrowing the status approach to regional politics tackles 'reductionism' in IR theory and encourages new insights into the foreign policymaking of aspiring regional powers.

The definition and relationship between role and status should be clarified before we proceed. We ought to distinguish between status, status-seeking, and regional power status. First, status refers to traits-based and relative position-based. Both are defined in Wolf's concepts as '*trait-status*,' which refers to prestige hierarchies while '*role status*' refers to an achieved higher position in deference hierarchies.[7] In the first category, it stands for honor[8], reputation[9], prestige[10], and recognition[11] in the social hierarchy. In the second category, status refers to deference, standing, rank, identity, role status, and as a regional or middle power.[12]Historical legacy motivates regional powers to regain their past role status, which may signal to "others" a return of imperial domination and colonization. Second, status-seeking behavior, apart from philosophical interpretations, is how states define their position by questioning *"who gets what, when, and how in international relations."*[13] Thus, status is an end interest itself. To Freedman, status is *"stratification, derived from the subjective evaluations and judgments"*[14] of interchangeable parts of "self" and "other." Similarly, Pouliot refers to social stratification as *"a never-ending struggle for mastery."*[15] Moreover, in Paul, Larson, & Wohlforth's definition *"status as collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)."*[16]

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7   Reinhard Wolf, "Taking Interaction Seriously: Asymmetrical Roles and the Behavioral Foundations of Status," *European Journal of International Relations,*Vol.25,No.4, 2019,p.7.

8   Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* ,Cambridge University Press, 2008,p. 64.

9   Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science,*Vol. 17, No. 1 ,2014,pp.371–393.

10   Daniel Markey, "Prestige and the Origins of War: Returning to Realism's Roots," *Agricultural History Review,*Vol. 8, No. 4 ,1999,p. 158.

11   Reinhard Wolf, "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition," *International Theory,*Vol. 3, No. 1 ,2011,p. 107.

12   Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea"; Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Concerns and Multilateral Cooperation," in *International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism*, ed. I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval ,Cambridge University Press, 2010,pp.182–207; T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, ed. T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics* ,Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Thies and Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System."

13   Marina G Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly,*Vol, 62, No. 3 ,2018,p. 2.

14   Joshua Freedman, "Status Insecurity and Temporality in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations,*Vol. 22, No. 4 ,2016,p. 4.

15   Vincent. Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders,*Cambridge University Press, 2016,p. 55.

16   Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status World Polit.*, p.7.

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Unlike the application of social identity theory to status strategies, the role approach provides FPA with a premonitory understanding of what states want and how they work to accomplish what they want. Each state has its own 'status concerns' about how to facilitate its future status improvement. This flexibility opens the door for states to articulate their national roles to socialize, help, or even reduce the expected roles and status of their peers in the same social hierarchy.[17]

The concept of status-seeking refers to the interactional process and social strategy through which states check their status concerns and relative rank in the international social hierarchy. Leaders envisage role conceptions of the perceptual worlds, and their governments act accordingly to qualify for a higher position. Therefore, regional roles determine foreign policy orientations and behavior, while status stands for recognition and followership because of a long process of socializing and persuading a state or group of states about the standards and beliefs of the role-maker. Drawing on Renshon's interpretation, state status *"is inherently positional'...and one actor moving up in a hierarchy requires some other actor's downgrading...changing one's status requires changing the beliefs of multiple other actors, and since it is positional, there are both winners and losers in this process."*[18]

Third, the concept of regional power status refers to legitimacy and recognition conferred on an aspirant regional power by "others" in a relevant social hierarchy.[19] Two preconditions of attaining a regional power status lie in Kavalski's positive correlation *'the recognition by others rests on recognition of others.'*[20]The former counts for status-seeker roles accepted by others, and simultaneously, the latter counts for fulfilled roles expected by others 'status-conferring parts.' The regional power status is therefore distinct from that of regional power as it builds on material and ideational sources, while status *"is based on a role and a set of special rights and duties that are tied to this social position."*[21]

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17 Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," *International Organization,*Vol. 70, No. 3 ,2016,pp. 513–550; Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* ,Princeton University Press, 2017.

18 Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," p.522.

19 Christina Stolte, *Brazil's Africa Strategy Role Conception and the Drive for International Status* /New York: Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015; Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea"; Emel Parlar Dal, "Status-Seeking Policies of Middle Powers in Status Clubs: The Case of Turkey in the G20," *Contemporary Politics,*Vol.*25,* No. 5 ,2019,pp. 1–17; Thies and Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System."

20 Emilian Kavalski, "The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context," *Cooperation and Conflict,*Vol. 48, No. 2, 2013,p. 229.

21 Christina Stolte, Brazil's Africa Strategy Role Conception and the Drive for International Status, p.28.

Table: 1 Status-seeking Behavior of Aspiring Regional Powers

	'self'- status-seeking power		'other'- status-conferring region
Qualifications	1- Power Sources: material, ideational and instrumental (FP tools) 2- Cooperative role orientation	Recognition	1- Positive expectations 2- Role emulation 3- Cooperative attitudes
Challenges	1- Domestic challenges: role conflict, strain, and contestation 2- Competitive and revisionist role orientations	Rejection	1- Negative expectations 2- Discursive alter-casting 3- Counter roles 4- Status competition

Internal Dynamics of Turkey's Quest for the Status of Regional Power

This section highlights the interaction between the status-seeking part (Turkey) and the status-conferring part (Middle East). The two parts interact according to the following dynamics:

Constant and Variable Sources of Turkish Regional Roles

Compared to other potential regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey possesses ample material, ideational and foreign-policy resources. Its economy has been developing since the early 2000s. Together with its large population, military, significant geography, historical heritage, liberal experience, alliances, and participation in international organizations, all made it possible to play substantial roles and achieve higher international status.

Ideationally, the JDP's elite reformulated Turkey's Middle East foreign policy through two successive foreign-policy doctrines. The first had appeared since 2002, and the second formed after the Arab Spring and the failed coup attempt in July 2016. As for the first, Davutoglu doctrine was architected by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, known as strategic depth. Moreover, this geopolitical strategy was crafted by soft power to revive the Ottoman legacy known as 'neo-Ottomanism,' to serve three regional policies, namely good neighborliness, multi-dimensional foreign policy, and pan-Islamism. The term critically refers to restoring Turkey's geopolitical heritage through foreign-policy discourse and roles and consolidating cultural and economic relations with states within the former Ottoman sphere. This doctrine persisted until the Arab Spring to validate Turkey's quest for regional power status in the region, requiring Turkey to rebuild a 'Muslim and Middle East self-identity.' Second, since 2016 the changes in Turkey and abroad have replaced Davutoglu's doctrine with that of President Erdogan. The Erdogan doctrine has developed to respond to these security challenges and re-evaluate fault-lines of former

Turkish foreign policy.[22] By contrast, this doctrine is a mixture of self-centric Eurasianist security system and neo-Ottoman identity and characterized by two foreign policy styles, maximum autonomy, and reciprocal diplomacy.[23] Among the effects of this new doctrinal change is a significant shift in foreign policy role concepts and orientations that have focused more on the security dimension to respond to national and regional threats.

Turkey also established an ambitious foreign policy through institutional, structural, and discursive instruments. President Erdogan has driven Turkish foreign policy endeavors on three principles: active engagement in former Ottoman geography, discursive advocacy for Muslim interests, and soft power institutionalization. Institutionally, Turkey enhanced its Middle East ideational influence through institutional bodies and active involvement in the Organization of Islamic Conference. In 2010, Turkey launched the Office of Public Diplomacy under the Prime Minister's decision to channel regional public communication through diplomacy and 'tell the new story of Turkey.'[24] Other innovative bodies are the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Yunus Emre Institutes (Cultural and Linguistic Body), Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) with Arabic version and Turkish Government Scholarships maintained by the Presidency for the Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB).

Structurally, regional dynamics enabled Turkey to project its regional power status and roles. With two main regional transitions, Turkey envisioned pursuing proactive regional activism. First, the regional multipolarity after the fall of Arab nationalism,[25] regional intra-interstate conflicts, and foreign interferences. Second, the JDP's network of ideological alliances, mainly the Muslim brotherhood. This pattern of ideological polarization allowed Turkey to be a leading actor in mobilizing this group during the Arab Spring.[26]

22 Metin Gurcan, "Turkey's New 'Erdogan Doctrine,'" *Al-Monitor*,2016, https://www.al-monitor. com/pulse/originals/2016/11/turkey-wants-use-its-hard-power-solve-regional-problems.html; Daily Sabah, "Turkey's New Security Concept," *Daily Sabah*,10/26/2016, https://www.dailysabah. com/columns/duran-burhanettin/2016/10/26/turkeys-new-security-concept; see also Ihsan Yilmaz, Galib Bashirov, "The AKP after 15 Years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 9, 2018, pp. 1812–30.

23 Lars Haugom, "Turkish Foreign Policy under Erdogan: A Change in International Orientation?," *Comparative Strategy*,Vol. 38, No. 3 ,2019, p. 211–13.

24 Crystal A Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly*,Vol. 34, No. 6 ,2013,p.1128.

25 Elizabeth Monier, "The Arabness of Middle East Regionalism: The Arab Spring and Competition for Discursive Hegemony between Egypt, Iran and Turkey," *Contemporary Politics*,Vol. 20, No. 4 ,2014,pp. 421–434.

26 André Bank and Roy Karadag, "Before the Arab Revolts and After: Turkey's Transformed Regional Power Status in the Middle East," in *Regional Powers in the Middle East* ,Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, 112–14.

As for regional initiatives, immediately after the JDP came to power, Turkey began to contribute in the areas of mediation, conflict resolution, economic interdependence, and advocacy for regional claims. As for mediation, Turkey served as a mediator between Syria and Israel, and between Palestinian factions Hamas and Fattah and along with Brazil co-mediated Iran's nuclear program in 2009 after the collapse of the P5 + 1 deal. Turkish efforts to find a political settlement in Iraq, particularly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, were due to an existential fear of independence of North Iraq. Although Turkey initiated the Iraq Neighbors Initiative shortly before the invasion of Iraq,[27] the influence of the United States and Iran in Iraq has then limited the role of Turkey. Instead, it centered on economic collaboration with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), in particular with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which Ankara considers to be the most efficient way of ensuring both economic and security interests mostly the hydrocarbon supply and non-Kurdish separation.[28]Turkey also initiated in late 2010 the Levant Quartet for cultural and economic cooperation to include Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Turkey has, on several occasions, advocated for crucial regional concerns such as the Palestinian issue, such as the stance of Prime Minister Erdogan at the Davos Summit in 2009 and the Mavi Marmara flotilla in 2010. Likewise, Turkey has sharply criticized and condemned human crimes in Syria, the assassination of Saudi dissident Khashoggi and the incarceration of former Egyptian President Morsi.

Yet, domestic political concerns, coupled with growing regional dynamics, including Russia's influence in Syria and US reluctance, affected current contours of Turkish foreign policy. Accordingly, the JDP has undoubtedly rebuilt the foreign-policy framework in three ways: (1) the shift in foreign-policy doctrine from the moral idealism of the Davutoglu doctrine to what Tayyar Arı refers to as an "idealist realism and smart power"[29]known as the Erdogan doctrine; (2) the smooth shift of the axis from the West to Russia; and (3) the shift in foreign-policy role orientations towards the region from cooperative roles to competitive ones. All these new political imperatives invoke Turkish Cold War foreign policy, described by Donelli as *a more securitized foreign policy in which the hard power regained supremacy on soft power."* [30]Turkish military involvement in Syria and Libya is a robust indication of these changes in Turkish foreign security policy.

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27 Meliha B. Altunişik and Lenore G. Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12,No. 4 ,December 2011,p. 576.

28 Dimitar Bechev and Joost Hiltermann, "Turkey's Forays into the Middle East," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 ,2017,p. 53.

29 Tayyar Arı, "Türk Dış Politikasının Kavramsal ve Kuramsal Temellerini Yeniden Tartışmak," in *11. Uluslararası Uludağ Uluslararası İlişkiler Kongresi* ,Bursa: Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi, 2019,p. 5.

30 Federico Donelli, "Back to the Hardest: The U-Turn of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Political Reflection Magazine*, No. 19, 2019, pp.11-15, p.13.

Discursively, the pan-Islamic profile of the JDP, coupled with its strategic ambition in the Middle East, prompted Turkey to leverage the opportunity to reduce Turkey's 'other self' and establish common denominators. The JDP institutionalized exceptionalism discourses of self-identity, soft power, and role model to articulate Turkey's regional and cultural belonging along with a notable change in foreign policy paradigm. All this was aimed at changing Turkey's image, perceived in the Middle East as a coercive power during the Cold War. In an explicit reference to this, Turkish Chief Advisor to Turkish Prime Minister Kalin claimed that Turkey *"is grounded in some larger concepts of cultural affinity, historical companionship, geographical proximity, social imagery, and how all of these create a sense of belonging."* [31] Unlike before, post-Arab Spring uncertainties set firm limits on Turkey's discursive power to the extent of increasing deviation from soft-power discourse to more national discourse of securitization like that of the 1990s. Instead, Turkish nationalist discourse significantly outshined binary identity discourses about the Western or Eastern "self" of Turkey. Consequently, three nodal references have echoed prominently in Turkish foreign-policy discourse, namely national sovereignty, security, and dignity.

From Cooperative to Competitive Roles

The initial project of Turkey's quest for a regional power status in the Middle East appeared during the 1980s. As the Cold War was about to close its final chapter, Turkey gradually embraced a cautious multi-dimensional foreign strategy. To do that, it required balancing Turkey's Western commitment by playing a bulwark role against the communist influence and geo-strategic rapprochement with the Middle East. Under Turgut Özal, Turkey cultivated the early seeds of neo-Ottomanism and reconsidered the traditional non-involvement policy towards the Middle East. The main factors of this policy direction were the Özalian influence combined with regional dynamics, including the Iranian revolution, the Iraq-Iran War, and the issue of Cyprus.[32] On this, Turkey formulated a Middle Eastern vision of two policies, political neutrality and economic opening, which then defined Turkey as a trading state and civilization bridge.

During the 1990s, Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East centered on an assertive security approach to addressing domestic and regional issues.[33]In this time, it focused more on Central Asia and the Caucasus,[34] con-

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31 Ibrahim Kalin, "Debating Turkey in the Middle East: The Dawn of a New Geopolitical Imagination?," *Insight Turkey,*Vol. 11, No. 1 ,2009,p. 90.

32 Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Suleyman Elik, "Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran and Arab Middle East," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2011,pp. 643-662.

33 Hasan Kösebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization* ,Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p.122.

34 Mustafa Aydin, "Foreign Policy, 1923–2018," in *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*, Routledge, 2019, p. 373.

cerned with its post-Cold War NATO status, and PKK insurgency. As for the Middle East, Turkey engaged in a confrontation with Syria, conducted intensive military campaigns against PKK in northern Iraq, joint US-led intervention in Iraq, and built strategic relations with Israel.[35] As a result, Turkey seemed to Arabs as a "post-Cold Warrior"[36] and "coercive regional power."[37]

Turkish rapprochement with the Middle East started in the late 1990s, with the Turkish-Syrian crisis reconciliation and effective containment of PKK. With the coming of JDP leadership in 2002 combined with regional prospects and strained Turkey's admission into the European Union, Turkey finally decided to reshape its regional foreign policy. Unlike before, Turkey sought to assert a regional power status by a proactive foreign policy and good neighborly relations.

Table: 2 Typology of Turkey's Roles in pre- and post-Arab Spring

Role Orientations	Role Typology	Stage
Cooperative	Role model, civilizational bridge, mediator, regional sub-system collaborator, trading state, and defender of peace and stability	2002-2011
Competitive	Regional leader, regional protector, active independent, anti-terrorism role	Post-Arab Spring

As Wish confirms, *"those leaders from the same nations have very similar role conceptions,"*[38] we realize that in the case of Turkey during the JDP rule, such roles became active and centered on the Middle East as the *"real theatre of Turkey's rising regional power."*[39] Ideationally, JDP has allocated a combination of domestic and regional expectations and cultural backgrounds to create a new image and identity of Turkey. Functionally, the JDP has started re-conceptualizing and applying regional role conceptions.

Until the breakout of the Arab Spring, the JDP formulated a collaborative Middle East strategy focused on multicultural diplomacy, historical legacy, and liberal experience. Upon the principles mentioned above, the JDP outlined six cooperative role conceptions for the Middle East, including the role model, the civilization bridge, the mediator, the regional sub-system collaborator, the trading state, and the peace and stability defender. During this time, Turkey

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35   Dietrich Jung, "Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities," *Mediterranean Politics,* Vol. 10, No. 1 ,2005, p.9.

36   ibid, 9.

37   Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Middle East after September 11: The Importance of the EU Dimension," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 4 ,2003: 84–85.

38   Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions,"p.532.

39   Emel Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.37, No. 8 ,2016,p.1429.

was able to diversify its alliances and roles rather than deviate from the regional status quo. In other terms, it offered to build a balance of foreign policy orientation between emulating the West (Europeanization) and stimulating the East (Middle Easternization).

In the first stage of a Middle East regional power project from 2002 to 2011, Turkey proposed a benevolent regional leadership and exceptional "other" rather than the hard "other" that dominated regional views throughout the pro-Westernist period. In doing so, the JDP started reconstructing Turkish exceptionalism as having a central location, moderate Islam, and international standing. Moreover, the JDP decided to represent Turkey as a big brother and a good neighbor by conceptualizing and introducing specific assertive roles, including the role model as Turkey would be a regional example of political, economic, and democratic experience. Second, the bridge role or central power is a unique complementary to regional leadership. This role was presumed to differentiate Turkey from other competing regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia. The role bears different references politically 'bridging West and East,' economically 'energy hub' and ideationally 'bridging Western and Muslim civilizations.' Third, other institutional roles, such as the regional mediator, regional sub-system collaborator, peace and stability defender, and trading state, were prevalent during this period. All these roles served to articulate Turkey's contribution to maintaining regional stability, peacebuilding, and crisis prevention. For instance, Turkey's mediation between Syria and Israel in 2008 and, along with Brazil, Turkey mediated talks with Iran on nuclear aspirations after the Iran-P5 +1 agreement failed in October 2009. All these were among the most significant initiatives of these roles.[40]

The second stage of Turkey's regional power projection in the Middle East started shortly after the Arab Spring. By this transition, Turkey acquired the 'Ankara Moment.'[41] It capitalized on it by promoting popular revolutions. However, with the advent of regional multi-power rivalry and change of Turkey's foreign policy roles, Turkey was forced to contend for hegemonic leadership, protection of refugees and oppressed people, and maintenance of the new regional status quo. Together, these latest domestic and regional imperatives have culminated in two scenarios in Turkey's regional power pursuit.

The first scenario began with portraying Turkey as an influential leader committed to promoting pro-change uprisings, encouraging conservative-liberal Islamic opposition, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, managing transitional governments, and preserving the existing regional status quo.[42] Amid

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40 Altunişik and Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP."
41 André Bank and Roy Karadag, "The 'Ankara Moment': The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 2007-11," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 34, No. 2 ,2013, pp. 287–304.
42 Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey's 'Return' to the Middle East," in *Regional Powers in the Middle East*

the Arab Spring, the JDP began rearticulating two competitive roles 'regional leader' and 'regional protector.'[43] The first role slowly evolved after the Arab Spring as a third-way leadership policy to combat Iran's influence and counter-revolutionary Arab regimes. Turkey intended to serve as a leading Sunni bloc against Iran-led Shia domination, Israeli aggression, and post-Arab Spring status quo leader against that of the pre-Arab Spring status quo (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and UAE). On the other hand, the regional protector role featured mainly in two obligations—first, Turkey provided strong advocacy for the protesters in the media and the international community. Second, it offered humanitarian protection of refugees and asylums.

The second scenario of Turkish regional power status arose after 2016 because of consecutive dilemmas both domestically and regionally. Immediately after the regional uprisings, owing to agential and systemic causes, the regional political structure shifted dramatically. At home, Turkey encountered crucial challenges, mostly the 2016 coup attempt, terrorist attacks, and political criticism of JDP's regional strategy. At the regional level, Turkey plunged in the Syrian quagmire, failed to maintain the status quo in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, and faced the Qatari crisis and the Mediterranean dispute. Subsequently, Turkey conceptualized new three assertive roles 'active independent,' 'anti-terrorism,' and 'regional protector.' It is worth noting that these three conceptual roles are politically interrelated. As the active independent role arises from Turkey's political isolation, the role of anti-terrorism is a self-justification for Turkey's pre-emptive foreign policy. Simultaneously, the regional protector role is also a moral self-justification for continuing Turkey's foreign policy. These three role conceptions are clarified as follows:

First, the active independent role conception has intensified in line with the Erdogan doctrine, which aims at consolidating Turkey's regional power status by (1) balancing regional hegemonic aspirations of Iran in Syria and Iraq and of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and UAE in Libya, Yemen, and Sudan. (2) A tactical balance between a political distancing from Western allies, because they denied Turkey's regional requests, and collaborating with Russia on the Syrian and economic agenda.

Second, the conceptualization of the anti-terrorism role emerged because of Turkey's southern border being subjected mainly to security threats of ethnoreligious terrorism. Having this role, it seems that the JDP has revisited Ataturk's slogan 'peace at home, peace in the world.' This role has frequently appeared in the Turkish elite's discussions regarding threats to national security from Syrian-based terrorist organizations, including ISIS, PKK, and its

,Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p.134–36.
43 Yasemin Akbaba, Özgür Özdamar, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, NY : Routledge, 2019, p. 99.

extension PYD/YPG. Turkey considers all these threats to be a 'terrorist corridor' and is keen to replace it with a 'peace corridor.' For instance, President Erdogan stated, "Turkey will not allow a terror corridor along its borders with Syria."[44] Indeed, this role concept has been transformed into four military operations in Syria, 'Euphrates Shield 2016,' 'Olive Branch 2018,',' Peace Spring 2019 and 'Spring Shield 2020.'

Third, the role of Turkey's regional protector has evolved to deal with the new foreign policy doctrine and to justify Turkish military intervention in Syria and Libya. It affirms Turkey's moral responsibility towards its allies and brothers. In the case of Syria, President Erdogan stated that "*Turkey is not fighting against Syrians; it is fighting with Syrians against oppressors.*"[45] While in the case of Libya, Turkey has been supporting the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA)from the start to prevent what President Erdogan described as "*conspiracy against the Libyan people.*"[46] Likewise, President Erdogan's persistent criticism of Western policies in the Islamic world reaffirms the JDP's role conception of 'regional protector' as a moral duty to defend what he considers the marginalized Muslim world. His slogan, 'The world is greater than five,' is a culmination and presentation of his nationalist rhetoric and Islamist worldview representing his desire to change what he terms the 'crooked international system' and the UN system to put the voice of the oppressed people and regions.[47]

Role Expectations

About the outcome of the Turkish foreign policy role in the region, there are five main expectations:

1) Turkey has sought to compensate for its deficit of status after being denied joining the EU.
2) Turkey has sought to work out a civilization bridge role through emulation and simulation policies. As an EU candidate, Turkey is expected to disseminate European values in the Middle Eastern societies.

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44 Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey, "'The Biggest Threat to Syria's Future Is the PKK and Its Extension PYD/YPG,'" 2019, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/109649/-the-biggest-threat-to-syria-s-future-is-the-pkk-and-its-extension-pyd-ypg-.

45 Daily Sabah, "Turkey Fighting against Oppressors, Not Syrians, Erdoğan Says," *Daily Sabah*, October 16, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2019/10/16/turkey-not-fighting-against-syrians-its-fighting-against-oppressors-erdogan-says.

46 Arab Center Washington, "Turkey's Growing Role in Libya: Motives, Background, and Responses," 2020, http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/turkeys-growing-role-in-libya-motives-background-and-responses/#_edn3.

47 Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, "'Our Motto "the World Is Bigger than Five" Is the Biggest-Ever Rise against Global Injustice,'" 2018, accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/89052/our-motto-the-world-is-bigger-than-five-is-the-biggest-ever-rise-against-global-injustice.

3) Turkey's foreign policy engagement in the Middle East has aimed at forming an East-West synthesis. Such a strategy would minimize reliance on the West in domains of security and culture to the degree that it is no longer the 'Gendarme of the West' and balance Islamism with nationalism in order to relax Western values in exchange for support among conservatives.

4) As far as "self-other" distinction is concerned, Turkey has chosen to define its character with a positive significant "other" and with a shared Muslim identity- 'collective we-ness' after decades of isolation from the East during the pro-Western era.

5) Turkish foreign policy roles in the region have aimed at diversifying energy resources, protecting its borders, and broadening its geopolitical zone of influence.

Regional Dynamics of Status-conferring Region

Turkey's pursuit of regional power status in the region fluctuated across the pre- and post-Arab Spring times. It could yield considerable regional acceptance during the first phase while having difficulties in the second phase due to dramatic shifts in Turkey and the post-Arab Spring region. In comparison, the first phase shows that regional and international audiences expected 'new Turkey' to contribute better to regional stability and modernization. However, in the second phase, Turkey seems to decline to fulfill its expectations and promises. These two phases are addressed as follows:

First Stage 2002-2011: Regional Expectations and Acceptance

The advent of the regional role model policy of JDP significantly astonished the regional masses as a third-way willing to balance regional political ideologies of right-left, liberalism with Islamism, and conservative democracy with totalitarian secularism. As for Arabs, the Turkish role model was translated according to two opposing groups and their viewpoints. The first group, comprising the 'Islamic camp' led by Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan), has materialized as a step towards developing their own. This group credited the Turkish model role solely to the ideological tutelage of JDP and its leader Erdogan. On the other hand, the second group, including the military-secular group, viewed the Turkish role model as a top-down type of conservative democratization that could only inspire Arab regimes to expand on its constitutive roots. For this group, the value of the Turkish model forms a sort of motivation, which could not be completely emulated unless specific institutional and ideational conditions were met in the region.[48]

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48 Hassan Nafaa, *The 'Turkish Model' in the Mirror of the Arab Spring. Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy from a Transatlantic Perspective.*, Mediterranean Paper Series, 2011.

Both Arabs and Iranians were relatively pleased by Turkish regional roles for such following expectations:

1) Turkish distancing policy towards Israel has indicated a positive stance on the Palestine-Israeli issue.

2) Turkish promising zero-problem strategy publicized a conciliatory role in resolving the water dispute between Turkey and Iraq.

3) After years of confrontation, Turkish normalization with Syria was a positive indicator of the Turkish new regional strategy.

4) They expected Turkey to play a regional mediator and peacemaker in the conflict-ridden region following the 9/11 events and Iraq invasion.

5) The Sunni Arabs saw that Turkey would have the power to challenge Iran's regional hegemony and head a Sunni alliance.

6) They expressed the hope that Turkey's leverage in the international community, the G20, NATO, and the European Union would help address their issues and settle them in such organizations.

Internationally, against the 9/11 backdrop, the West saw Turkey as a possible role model for bridging the divide between the Muslim world and Western civilization. On many occasions, Western leaders shared hope in Turkey to play such a crucial role. For instance, President Bill Clinton praised Turkey's future role in stabilizing the region during his 1999 visit to Ankara *"the future can be shaped for the better if Turkey can become a part of Europe fully, as a stable, democratic, secular, Islamic nation."*[49] Likewise, at the 2004-Istanbul NATO Summit, President George W. Bush pointed out that *"the example that your country has set on how to be a Muslim country which embraces democracy, the rule of law and freedom."*[50]

As for the Western expectations, the new Turkish leadership envisioned a role model as part of its commitment to the European Union, which shows that Turkey should effectively socialize the European values. In addition to this, the West generally expected Turkey's regional policy to meet the following expectations:

1) To counter Russia and Iran's increasing influence in the region.

2) To contribute to the international combat against terrorism in the region.

3) To empower and encourage regional actors and populations to follow good governance policies and economic reforms like those of Turkey.[51]

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49 Emel Parlar Dal and Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model' in the Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective,"p. 267.

50 Meliha Benli Altunisik, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly*,Vol.27,No. 1 &2, 2004,pp.45-64,p.46.

51 See Kemal Kirisci, Gareth M. Winrow, and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* ,Routledge, 2013.

Second Stage 2011-present: Regional Skepticism and Contestation

In a dynamic region, the developments in the security environment and power relations have alarmed Turkey's optimism. In the meantime, Turkey has dramatically faced a complex network of alliances and fronts, including the Russian-Iranian alliance, the Arab axis (Saudi-Egyptian-UAE), and the US-European posture. Amid those events, Turkish foreign policy had to either proceeding to use soft tools and roles or cast around for more realistic policy alternatives to deal with the new structural constraints.

At the heart of the Arab Spring, regional debates about Turkey's active involvement in events arose one is idealistic, and the other is realistic. First, the idealistic debate holds that Turkey's role in the uprisings was ethically justifiable in supporting political protesters against regional tyrants by institutional means. Second, the realistic debate involves two other sub-debates; the first argues that Turkey's reaction was to face counter-revolutionary movements that sought to overturn the newly established Islamist regimes while the second concerns Turkey's Syrian policy.

After a decade of strong relations with Syria since the beginning of the 2000s, the outbreak of the Arab Spring turned everything upside-down. Such a shift in Turkish-foreign policy towards Syria is attributed to three different reasons:

1) To present Turkey as a constructive and responsible actor protecting Syrian civilians from the repression of Assad's regime.
2) To portray Turkey as a loyal Western ally, working together as NATO members to tackle the Syrian crisis 'Davutoglu fallacy'.
3) To respond to the broader public discourse about Turkey's sovereignty, security, and image.[52]

At the regional and international levels, Turkey's stance on the Arab Spring has triggered regional skepticism and counter-roles of three blocs as follows:

Russia-Iran bloc

Historically, geopolitics has rendered Russia and Turkey adversaries, while economic interests and Eurasian identity make them friends[53] being the '*axis of*

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52   Özlem Demirtas-Bagdonas, "Reading Turkey's Foreign Policy on Syria: The AKP's Construction of a Great Power Identity and the Politics of Grandeur," *Turkish Studies,*Vol. 15, No. 1 ,2014,pp. 139–155.

53   Şener Aktürk, "The Fourth Style of Politics: Eurasianism as a Pro-Russian Rethinking of Turkey's Geopolitical Identity," *Turkish Studies,* ,2015; Şener Aktürk, "Turkey's Role in the Arab Spring and the Syrian Conflict," *Turkish policy quarterly,*Vol. 15, No. 4 ,2017,p. 89.

the excluded [54] and the *'liminal "others" of European identity.'*[55] Such maxims confirm why they are *"friends in times of weakness, while foes in times of strength"*[56] and interprets the ebbs and flows of their recent relationship.

Despite their good economic relations, the Syrian crisis has propelled Moscow and Ankara into different directions. Such contested positions on Syria stemmed from the following calculations:

1) Russia's stance on Syria appears to be a symbol of Turkey's geopolitical commitment to the West.
2) Russia strongly assisted Assad's regime in maintaining its strategic foothold in Syria as the only path to Mediterranean and Levant affairs. As such, Russia's political and military presence in the region affects Turkey in terms of Moscow support for Levant states, including Greece in the Cyprus dispute and other regional states over EEZ disputes and maritime militarization.
3) Russia's worst-case scenario in Syria is Turkey's pan-Islamic inclination, allegedly fueling a sectarian war in Syria and fear of transforming it into a new Afghanistan.
4) Russia took advantage of the Syrian game to fill the regional power vacuum.

Turkey and Iran also compete for regional influence and status. Given political differences, the Arab revolutions spoiled each other's roles and ideals. By contrast, Iran plays an expulsive revolutionary role in extending its influence in the region through a Shiite-led resistance order while Turkey plays an impulsive revolutionary role in building a springboard for Islamic opposition and conservative democratic order.

The Syrian crisis has strenuously worsened Turkish-Iranian relations. Since 2011, Turkey has been critical of Iran for four geopolitical reasons. First, the notable support for the Syrian regime. Second, the increasing influence in Iraq and other countries, including Yemen. Third, the prospective nuclear status, which gives Iran more regional leverage than Turkey. Fourth, Turkey considers Russia's backing to Iran's regional agenda is a proxy threat to its status in NATO. For instance, just before the Syrian conflict, Iran opposed Turkey's deployment of anti-ballistic missile defense systems along its borders.[57]

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54 Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?," *Survival,*Vol. 48, No. 1 ,2006,p.81.
55 Viatcheslav Morozov and Bahar Rumelili, "The External Constitution of European Identity: Russia and Turkey as Europe-Makers," *Cooperation and Conflict,*Vol. 47, No. 1 ,2012,pp. 28–48.
56 Şener Aktürk, "Toward a Turkish-Russian Axis? Conflicts in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, and Cooperation over Nuclear Energy," *Insight Turkey,*Vol. 16, No. 4 ,2014,p.21.
57 Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, and Mir Mohamadali Seyed Jalili, "Economic, Political, and Strategic Issues in Iran–Turkey Relations, 2002–2015," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East,*Vol. 4, No. 1 ,2017,p.80.

Arab bloc

Turkey appeared as the '*winner of the Arab Spring*' following the uprisings.[58]Thus, this gave an impetus to the regional multipolarity of two contested axes to be formed. The first is the Arab nationalist axis, which comprises Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and UAE, and the Revolutionary axis contains Turkey, Qatar, and Arab revolutionary movements, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood. As Turkey has since become the epicenter of the revolutionary forces, the divergence between the Arab nationalist axis and Turkey intensified gradually over the years. As a result, the Arab nationalist axis has been critical of Turkey on a set of ideological and geopolitical concerns, including:

1) Ideological contestation: Saudi-Turkish relations have gained economic momentum and an increasing geopolitical understanding of creating a strategic Sunni bloc to offset Iran's regional influence. Nevertheless, their ideological and political considerations on post-Arab Spring developments dramatically deepened their relationship rift. Ideologically, Saudi Arabia and its allies have always criticized Turkey for attempting to create a Muslim Brotherhood crescent like the Shiite crescent. As such, Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman categorized Turkey to be a part of a "triangle of evil" along with Iran and extremist Islamist groups.[59]

2) Sub-regional Gulf interference: Turkey's rising relationship with Qatar is viewed by the Arab axis, especially Saudi Arabia and UAE, as a persistent challenge to the sub-regional order of the Gulf. On such a perception of threat, they are concerned with the 'divided Gulf syndrome' that increasingly prevails due to the strong links between Turkey and Qatar.

3) Hegemonic aspirations: This concerns the regional hegemonic agenda of Turkey in the region, including the ambition to exert military presence and play leadership roles in the region, evoking that of the Ottoman Empire. This concern has risen as Turkey constructed a military base in Qatar and launched the Red Sea Belt project. Geo-strategically, such a planned project would divide the Red Sea into two zones. The idea of the first zone is to rent the former Ottoman Suakin island of Sudan on the upper northern flank of the Red Sea for military and economic purposes. The island is located opposite the Saudi city of Jeddah. Moreover, the idea of the second zone is the lease of two military and economic bases in Somalia and Djibouti on the lower southern flank of the sea.[60]

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58 Bilgin Ayata, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World : Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor ? Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World : Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor ?," *Journal of European Integration*,Vol. 37, No. 1 ,2015,pp.95–112; Shibley Telhami et al., "2011 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey," *University of Maryland*, 2011.

59 Time, "Saudi Prince Says Turkey and Iran Anchor 'Triangle of Evil,'" Time, March 7, 2018, https://time.com/5189385/saudi-prince-turkey-iran-evil/.

60 Mustafa Gurbuz, "Turkey's Challenge to Arab Interests in the Horn of Africa | ACW," *Arab Center*

The rivalry between Turkey and the Arab axis escalated after Turkey had decided to interfere militarily in Libya to assist the Government of National Accord (GNA) against Haftar's forces and the backing Arab powers. Strategically, the Arab Axis has decided to resist it for two main reasons. First, to curb the allegedly Turkish Mediterranean corridor that will provide Turkey with a strong foothold in the region that will at least affect the Egyptian sphere of influence. Secondly, to contain Turkish influence and support for the Tripoli-based government, which they consider as a pro-Turkey-Muslim Brotherhood axis.[61]

US-Europe-Israel bloc

Since 2011, the US and Europe have been cautious about ensuring that the Turkish roles and status do not surpass their expectations and influence sphere. They have frequently criticized Turkey for three aspects:

1) The backsliding of democratic values, human rights, and freedoms.
2) The growing rate of anti-Western rhetoric in Turkey after 2016.
3) And the championing of religious groups in the region.[62]

The divide between them has deepened because of showdowns regarding Turkey's Syria policies and tilting to Russia after 2016. First, Washington refused Turkey's repeated requests to impose a no-fly zone in northern Syria, and instead switched to assist the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Second, divided into two pro-Russian Assad and pro-US separatist Kurdish blocs, Syria became *"a magnet that Russia used to lure in Turkey"*[63] and a testing ground for Turkey-US relations. For instance, their relationship soured after Turkey purchased a Russian S-400 air defense system and put forward a bid to purchase Su-57 fighter jets at the detriment of a US F-35 warplane deal.

For Israel, the Turkish foreign policy activism in the region seemed to suffuse its cordial relations with Turkey. A confluence of factors has accelerated the antagonism between them. Firstly, the revival of nationalism in Ankara foreshadowed an entirely new page of precarious relationship. Secondly,

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Washington DC, 2018, accessed August 25, 2019, http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/turkeys-challenge-to-arab-interests-in-the-horn-of-africa/; Giorgio Cafiero and Theodore Karasik, "Turkey's Move into the Red Sea Unsettles Egypt, Middle East Institute," *Middle East Institute*, 2018, accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-move-red-sea-unsettles-egypt.

61 See International Crisis Group, "Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters," 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/257-turkey-wades-libyas-troubled-waters.

62 *Nihat Celik. Dilek, Oguz, Emre Iseri, "Turkey 's Regional Powerhood Within Regional ,InSecurity Complex : Transformation From a Conflict-Ridden Environment Into a Security Community," Journal of Regional Security*, Vol.10, No. 2 ,2015,pp. 155–176.

63 Galip Dalay, "Why Is Turkey Betting on Russia?," *Brookings*, 2019, accessed September 3, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/07/15/why-is-turkey-betting-on-russia/.

other developments have had an impact on these relations, including Turkey's regional role enactment of three roles *'protector of oppressed Muslims'*, and *'regional leader.'* Functionally, these roles have made Turkey committed to protecting Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, and criticizing Israel for occupation and aggression using two political instruments:

1) Discursive campaigning against Israel, which represents it as a defective state that occupies Palestine, and blockades Gaza Strip. Such a campaign escalated with the 'Mavi Marmara' incident and 'Low Chair' crisis.

2) Diplomatic distancing measures, including reduction of Israeli diplomats to Second Secretary, cessation of formal economic and military ties and denormalization of all relations until Israel apologizes, compensates for the casualties, and wounded of Mavi Marmara and terminates the Gaza blockade. [64]

In reaction to Turkey's active roles, the Israeli government has often taken similar rhetorical and diplomatic measures, such as:

1) Discursively, Israeli officials frequently use a historical comparison between Turkey and Israel, portraying Turkey as a society with lesser morality. They argue that Turkey is not in the right position to protect the Palestinians since, according to Israeli General Avi Mizrahi, Turkey massacred Armenians during the First World War and oppresses Kurds.[65] Likewise, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu labeled Turkey's Northeast Syrian operation in late 2019 as *"ethnic cleansing of the Kurds and their proxies."* [66]

2) Since 2008, Israel has been interacting with Turkey through a tit-for-tat diplomatic style and political pressure from the US's powerful Israeli lobby.

Conclusion

This analysis underscored the regional role of Turkey in the Middle East in its endeavor to improve its status as a regional power. It argues that Ankara's pursuit of the status of regional power has not been a straightforward matter. In the first phase, due to regional stability and its cooperative roles, Turkey could fulfill both regional aspirations and recognition of its roles. In the second phase, after the Arab Spring, Turkey has passed through a fine line of regional politics between demonstrating continued commitment to its regional roles and facing new uncertainties and counter roles. However, Turkey has faced three competing regional blocs and counter roles, including the Russian-Iranian, the Arab, and the US-European-Israeli blocs. Each of these counter blocs has been critical of Turkey on certain regional issues.

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64   Shira Efron, *The Future of Israeli- Turkish Relations* , RAND Corporation, 2018, p.11.

65   Demirtaş-Bagdonas, "Politics of National Honor in Turkish-Israeli Relations: An Alternative Account of the Recent Tensions," p.116.

66   Jacob Magid, "Netanyahu Condemns Turkish Invasion of Syrian Kurdistan, Offers Aid," *The Times of Israel*, October 10, 2019, accessed December 1, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-pans-turkish-invasion-of-syrian-kurdistan-offers-aid/.

Second, because of the Syrian crisis, both Russia and Turkey competed in Syria on strategic and ideological grounds, where Russia worries that Turkey will extort its foothold in the Mediterranean, topple its ally, and mobilize Islamist forces in Syria. On the other hand, by meddling in Syria and across the region, Iran has impaired Turkey's regional aspirations. The rift in their relations has resulted from ideational and geopolitical competition. Ideologically, Iran's roles and discourses on Islamic issues, including the Palestinian question based on Shia heritage and revolutionary Islam, seemed to Turkey that Iran would have more regional leverage over it. By contrast, Turkey articulated its roles to export Sunni liberalism while Iran did to export Shia revolutionary Islam for its part. Geopolitically, firstly, Turkey claims that Iranian interference in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen has undermined the role of Turkey. Secondly, Iran's nuclear ambition has become a military and political source of Iranian distinctiveness, which might challenge the Turkish military status as a NATO member state.

Second, regarding the Arab bloc, Turkey's quest to gain the status of regional power passed through two stages. The period from 2002 to 2011 was a successful stage of Turkish foreign policy in both role activism and acceptance of regional power status. In the second stage following the Arab Spring era, Turkish regional power status lost momentum as it became highly debatable in the Arab world for two main reasons. Ideologically, the Arab nationalist axis has disapproved of Turkey's assertive roles in the region over supporting the Islamic opposition and Muslim Brotherhood regionally and Qatar in the Gulf. Geopolitically, the first essential reason of Arab-Turkish antagonism is about the competition over the self-ascribed role of Islamic leadership of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Second, due to the growing ambition of Turkey in the region once it built military belt bases in the Red Sea region such as in Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan, the Arab Gulf as in Qatar, and the Mediterranean as in Libya.

Third, the US-European-Israeli bloc has been critical of Turkey for ideo-political developments in the JDP's regional foreign policy. Ideologically, this bloc disapproved of Turkey's regional foreign policy owing to the perceived West-to-East shift and locally weakening democratic values and regional support for Islamist groups. Geo-politically, the US has complicated Turkish Syrian policy by opposing a no-fly zone in northern Syria and endorsing the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey's tilting toward Russia has also exacerbated the already tensions. Lastly, the JDP's rising nationalism/Islamic nationalism and assertive position in the Palestinian question have weakened its relations with Israel.

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