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TURKEY: ARAB PERSPECTIVES

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INCLUDES A COMMENTARY BY
DR. MUSTAFA ELLABBAD



TESEV

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Preface

TESEV Foreign Policy Programme has long worked on issues of interest to Turkey's foreign policy. In the last decade, Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East region has undergone profound changes characterised by increasing political, cultural, and economic engagement. With Turkey's active involvement in the region on the rise, we believe that it is crucial to explore how this proactive attitude is received by governments and more importantly by the public in the Arab countries of the region.

"The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East" was specifically designed to assess public perception of Turkey's role in the region. The survey was conducted between the 24 - 29th of July in Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq with a total of 2,006 respondents. The findings of the survey were published in a report written by Mensur Akgün, Gökçe Perçinoğlu and Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar in November 2009. Later in December 2009, the findings were discussed in a roundtable meeting with distinguished experts from the region, EU and Turkey.

The results of the survey were a pleasant surprise. The most obvious initial conclusion to be drawn from the survey was that Turkey's changing policy is not going unnoticed. Support for Turkey's role in conflict resolution and for it to play a bigger role in the Arab world was high among respondents. More interestingly, more than three quarters of respondents thought Turkey will contribute positively to achieving peace in the Arab world; Turkey's proximity to the region is significant.

This publication, written by Prof. Meliha Benli Altunışık with a comment from Dr. Mustafa Ellabbad, aims to present a comprehensive analysis of Turkey's role in this respect. The main objective of this study is to uncover different views on Turkey among opinion makers and bureaucrats as well as among the public in the Arab world. To this aim, along with the aforementioned survey data, personal interviews were also conducted and incorporated into the publication. As the report makes clear, not only have Arab perspectives on Turkey become increasingly positive in recent years but also debate of Turkey in the Arab world has become more nuanced.

We, as the Foreign Policy Programme, were delighted to work with distinguished experts during this project. Once again it was a pleasure to work with Prof. Meliha Altunışık, from Middle East Technical University. Without her endless effort and expertise, this report would have never been published. Dr. Mustafa Ellabbad from Al Sharq Center for Regional and Strategic Studies kindly contributed to the report with a commentary. During this project we have also had help from many other people. Prof. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu and Prof. Gökhan Çetinsaya kindly supported the project from the beginning with their expertise. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Jonathan Levack for editing this report and Enis Erdem Aydın for his contributions.

Further, we would like to extend our thanks to Bülent Kılınçarslan on behalf of KA Research Limited who made it possible to conduct the survey. In addition, we would like to thank the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Association Turkey Office, the Open Society Foundation – Turkey and TESEV's High Advisory Board for their support. As in every study, TESEV's Foreign Policy Programme also worked tirelessly.

We hope that this study will shed light on the process of policymaking both in Turkey and in the region.

Yours sincerely,

MENSUR AKGÜN

ADVISER, TESEV FOREIGN POLICY PROGRAMME

ON BEHALF OF THE TESEV FOREIGN POLICY PROGRAMME

Turkey: Arab Perspectives

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Arab views on Turkey seem to have transformed more positively in recent years. This paper aims to understand this transformation. To what extent have Arab views on Turkey changed? Why has this transformation occurred? What are the debates about Turkey in the Arab world? Are there differences across countries and political ideologies?

The main objective of this study is to uncover different views on Turkey among opinion makers and bureaucrats as well as among the public in the Arab world. To this aim public opinion surveys, studies and research on the issue and personal interviews were conducted. The main sources for understanding public debate on Turkey in the Arab world were interviews, discussions and personal communication with bureaucrats and opinion makers, particularly journalists, academics and think tank experts. Although an important part of the data has been collected in the last year as part of this project, the analysis is also based on years of engagement with the Arab world and observations and discussions as a result.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically Arab perspectives on Turkey were as multifaceted as they are today. In the contemporary period several turning points can be identified to influence Arab perspectives on Turkey. For instance, nationalists from different parts of the Arab world observed Turkey's war of independence closely. The reforms that followed the establishment of the Turkish Republic, however, led to mixed responses. The abolition of the caliphate in particular led to some disappointment and criticism. Islamists remained staunch critics of Turkey's secularism. Even so the then period of reform in Turkey was also a source of "admiration of Mustafa Kemal among the emergent modern elites" in Arab countries.¹

Later the dominant Arab nationalist perspective was important in framing Turkey in largely negative terms. In the post independence period the Arab nationalist narrative portrayed the Ottomans as colonizers who were responsible for the backwardness of the Arab world. On the Turkish side, feelings swung from moving away from the Ottoman heritage to a sense of "betrayal" following the Arab Revolt. Although recent historiography in particular dispute these neat categories of suppression and betrayal, relations between Turkey and the Arab world have developed within this negative historical memory kept alive through schoolbooks and cultural representations.

During the Cold War Turkey aligned itself with the Western bloc. In the early years of the Cold War however, the major Arab regimes had hostile relations with the Western bloc and popular feeling was also critical due to the support given by the West, particularly the US, to Israel. This fact further contributed to the problematic relationship. Thus, the dominant perspective in the Arab world perceived Turkey as a stooge of the US. This perspective was reinforced with Turkey's involvement in the establishment of the Baghdad pact in 1955. In the meantime, Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 created an additional rift.

From 1980 onwards there was a period during which Arab interest in Turkey once again increased. Strategic factors, such as the increasing perception of threat from the Iranian Revolution of 1979 as well as the withdrawal of Egypt from regional politics due to its peace with Israel, contributed

¹ Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and Modern Turkey: A Century of Changing Perceptions," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009) pp. 68.

to this interest. In Turkey the military regime also emphasized Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Interest in the proliferation of Turkey's relations with the Arab world continued during the Turgut Ozal era. One of the reflections of this new interest was an increasing number of Arab students studying in Turkey as well as booming tourism and trade between Turkey and the Arab world.² This interest also spilled over into the scholarly realm. Through meetings and several publications a trend emerged that emphasized the importance of revisiting common history and examining mutual stereotypes with the aim of contributing to the betterment of relations between Turkey and the Arab world.³

These attempts remained stillborn, however, as Turkey's relations with the Arab world began to depreciate towards the end of the 1980s. After Turkey launched its extensive GAP program (Southeastern Anatolian Project) to utilize the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates to irrigate vast swathes of land, relations with Turkey's Arab neighbors began to deteriorate. As Iraq was occupied with its war with Iran, the water issue had more impact on Turkish-Syrian relations. Fueled by the ideology of self-sufficiency, Damascus perceived GAP as the "Turkish control of its waters" and turned it into a Pan-Arab issue by bringing it to the agenda of Arab League meetings in the 1990s. From Turkey's perspective the main issue was Syrian support for the PKK, whose leader resided in Damascus, which further contributed to the crisis between the two countries. As a result the climate of mutual suspicion and mistrust reigned. The problems in Syrian-Turkish relations culminated in October 1998 when Turkey threatened Syria by use of force if it did not cut its support to the PKK. The row ended when Syria forced the PKK leader to leave the country and the two countries signed the Adana Accords on October 20th 1998.

In the 1990s the region immersed itself in a debate about a new Middle Eastern order in the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War eras. This debate was not only about the actors and the characteristics of the emerging regional system, but also its engagement with external powers, particularly the then emerging sole superpower. Turkey was not considered part of these debates as it was not seen as an important member of the emergent regional order.⁴ On the other hand, Turkey felt threatened by developments in the region, notably in Iraq after the Gulf War as well as Syrian support for the PKK. Turkey chose to deal with these threats by adopting policies prioritizing military means and balancing threats with alliances. Thus throughout most of the 1990s, Turkey was seen largely irrelevant to debate in the Arab world and mutual perceptions of threat and distrust characterized the relations. This atmosphere began to change considerably after 2003.⁵

CHANGES IN ARAB PERSPECTIVES ON TURKEY

The more positive evolution of perspectives on Turkey in the Arab world seemed to have occurred due to several almost parallel developments. Some of these developments are related to Turkey, while others are factors related to the region.

FACTORS RELATED TO TURKEY

Several recent developments related to Turkey led to a more positive view of the country in the Arab world: the AKP's (Justice and Development Party) coming to power in 2002; the Turkish Parliament's decision in March 2003 to refuse to cooperate with the US in its war against Iraq; developments in Turkey-European Union (EU) relations, particularly the start of accession negotiations in December 2004; Turkey's response to the Gaza War and the so-called Davos affair in 2009.

2 Ibid. P. 71.

3 Ofra Bengio and Gencer Özcan, "Arab Perceptions of Turkey and the Alignment with Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2001) p. 54.

4 Muhammed El Sayid Selim, in Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

5 For an early assesment of this change see Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, Nos. 1 & 2 (2005) pp.1-17; and for revisiting of some of its arguments see Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2008) pp. 41-54.

The election of the AKP, a party with Islamist roots, in 2002 led to interest about Turkey in the Arab world. As will be discussed in more detail below, both liberals and Islamists were interested in the AKP's victory for different reasons. But overall this development led to a rethinking of Turkey. Most importantly this development challenged the crude view of Turkish politics that perceived it through the lens of small secular elite versus the Muslim masses. This was followed by the Turkish Parliament's decision on March 1st 2003 to reject Turkey's involvement in the US invasion of Iraq. This decision challenged the long-held view of Turkey as a "stooge of the US" in the Arab world and increased Turkey's credibility in the region. In the meantime, Turkey-EU relations were progressing. In 1999 the European Council Summit in Helsinki decided to grant Turkey candidate status to the EU. This was followed by the decision to start accession negotiations in December 2004. These developments shattered another popularly held view in the Arab world that "Turkey was waiting at the door of the EU, but the EU was not interested at all." Finally, Turkey's policies during Israel's Gaza assault and the Turkish Prime Minister's reaction at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in 2009 further increased the popularity of Turkey in the Arab world. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's angry exchange with the Israeli President, Shimon Peres, during a panel discussion on Gaza made him quite popular among the Arab public and challenged the perception of Turkey as a close ally of Israel.⁶

All these developments were related to developments in the Arab world and thus had relevance to debates in the region. The overall result has been the changing in perception of Turkey both at the public and state level.

In addition to these specific events, it is safe to argue that in general Turkey's economic and political transformation as well as its new foreign policy in the Middle East has created an interest in the country which in many cases translated into more positive views. Driven by its desire to become a member of the EU and its harmonization efforts with the EU *acquis*, Turkey has engaged in extensive political reforms. Parallel to these political changes, Turkey has also been going through an economic transformation. A major shift in the Turkish economy occurred in the 1980s with the adoption of more liberal economic policies. Despite several crises, the Turkish economy has developed to a considerable degree making it the 16th largest in the world. Turkey's vibrant economy and democratic reforms have increased its soft power in the region and made it particularly attractive for reformers.

Finally, Turkish foreign policy in the region contributed to the positive evolution of perspectives on Turkey. The impact of some of Turkey's specific foreign policy decisions has already been emphasized above. However beyond these, Turkish foreign policy has seemed to have evolved in a direction that was generally positively welcomed in the region. Turkey has been able to transform its problematic relationships with its Middle Eastern neighbors and emphasized diplomacy, dialogue, and economic interdependence in its engagement with the region. Ankara has also become more eager to play third party roles in regional conflicts and is generally perceived as an impartial and constructive actor. Overall, Turkey began to promote a vision that emphasized a stable, peaceful, and prosperous region that demonstrate the capacity to tackle its own problems and argued that such a region is in the interest of Turkey as well. This new language affected how Turkey is perceived in the region.

FACTORS RELATED TO THE REGION

Political, economic and strategic developments in the Middle East also led to changes to perspectives on Turkey. Several recent developments in the region created a sense of crisis: The collapse of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process in 2000 and the deterioration of the Palestinian conflict; the US invasion of Iraq in 2003; Iran's rise as a regional power; intra-Arab divisions; for some states, like Syria, the danger of collapse led to a sense of weakness in the region. The socio-

6 "Erdoğan hailed after Davos walkout," *Al Jazeera (English Edition)*, 31 January 2009, available at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/01/20091303153967187.html> (Accessed on 31 March 2010)

economic problems in the Arab world as documented by UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports and the persistence of authoritarianism underlined the deepening legitimacy problems for Arab regimes. Thus, the Arab world entered the 21st century in a deep sense of crisis.

The main regional dynamic that encouraged Turkey's third party role has been the intensification of intra-Arab divisions and the emergence of a vacuum in regional politics. The fragmentation of the Arab world not only weakened states' capacity to tackle regional problems, such as the Palestinian issue and the Iraqi crisis, but also allowed other powers to intervene in pursuit of their interests. The second vacuum in the region was left by the US. The failure of the Bush administration once again to create a Middle Eastern order became patently clear after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Even prior to 2003 the Bush administration was largely disinterested in an Arab-Israeli peace process. The power vacuum, coupled with an ideological one, created by a decrease in the US power and credibility in the region, was filled again by regional powers like Iran and Turkey. Unlike Iran however, Turkey emerged as an "independent, credible, and respectable"⁷ third party due to its ability to talk to all parties in the region. The perception of Turkey as a fair interlocutor strengthened Ankara's position.

Thus the new strategic, political and socio-economic context not only created new opportunities for Turkey to be more involved in the region but also increased its appeal as well. However, Turkey has meant different things to different people. Perspectives on Turkey have been shaped by positions and struggles within Arabist and national contexts. It is thus not surprising to find differences between countries as well as different ideological positions regarding Turkey in the Arab world.⁸

PUBLIC OPINION

The positive view of Turkey in the Arab world seems to be reflected with the public at large. This has been demonstrated by a public opinion survey designed by TESEV⁹, which was conducted on 24-29 July 2009 by telephone in Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and face-to-face in Iraq - totaling 2,006 people.¹⁰ The survey showed a quite positive view of Turkey.

TABLE 1: WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES?

Top 2 Box (Very favorable % + Somewhat favorable %)	Region Total Weighted	Region Total Weighted*	01 ERG	02 JOR	03 LEB	04 PAL	05 KSA	06 SYR	07 IRAQ
Egypt	80	72	89	72	70	62	78	71	68
Iraq	64	61	61	51	50	60	58	67	84
Jordan	69	68	69	93	83	77	78	76	49
Lebanon	72	72	70	72	83	79	74	78	68
Palestine	62	62	58	59	54	74	63	69	67
Saudi Arabia	80	78	87	83	76	76	92	81	44
Syria	75	72	76	83	70	80	80	94	52
Turkey	75	75	72	82	76	87	77	87	69

*This calculation does not include the results of the respondents' own countries.

7 "Turkey's Foreign Policy", *The Jordan Times*, 16 September 2009.

8 Mustafa Ellabbad, "Understanding New Turkey: An Egyptian Perspective," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No.1, (2009) pp. 53-61.

9 Mensur Akgün, Gökçe Perçinoğlu, Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, *The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East*, Istanbul: TESEV Publications, 2009.

10 The number of "respondents" to be interviewed in a specific country is determined according to its population.

As demonstrated in Table 1, Turkey had a good image in all seven countries. In the ranking of the most positively regarded countries throughout the region, Turkey ranked second after Saudi Arabia with 75 percent of respondents having very favorable and favorable views. The number of respondents that perceived Turkey as very favorably or favorably was particularly high in Syria, the Palestinian territories and Jordan. In the Palestinian Territories, Turkey was the most positively regarded country and it was so in Syria after Syria itself.

The survey also demonstrated that the public in these seven countries perceived Turkey as a major actor whose opinions are listened to and which has influence. There is also clear support for Turkey's third party roles and for Turkey "to play a bigger role in the Arab world" - Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese respondents being the most supportive of this idea. According to the survey, Turkey was also seen as a successful example of the coherence of Islam and democracy and thus considered as a "model" for the Arab world. There seems to be a widespread support for Turkey's EU membership, the highest being in Lebanon.

This survey was conducted after the Gaza War and the "Davos affair," at a period when Turkey's and its Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's popularity skyrocketed. Thus, it gives us a snapshot of public opinion of Turkey at a very particular time.

The popularity of Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2009 was corroborated in the "Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey" by Zogby International with Professor Shibley Telhami as the principal investigator. The 2009 survey was conducted in April-May in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with a sample size of 4,087. The respondents were asked to list two world leaders outside of their own country they admired most. Although Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did not appear in the list of the nine most popular leaders in 2008, his name appeared in the 2009 poll. That year, Egypt included, the Turkish Prime Minister polled 9% popularity, and 16% without Egypt.¹¹ The Turkish government's attitude towards Israel's assault against Gaza and the "Davos affair" clearly played a major role.¹² One could have expected higher percentages for Erdoğan if Syria and the Palestinian territories were included in this survey as the respondents in these two countries were seen to be the most favorable towards on Turkey according to TESEV's survey.

Although the above-mentioned poll demonstrates that the Turkish Prime Minister's popularity has changed, there is also evidence that Turkey's image in Arab public was quite negative in 2002. Zogby International's survey carried out in March and April 2002¹³ clearly demonstrates this negative view. The survey comprised 600 face-to-face interviews in each of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and 400 adults in Morocco, Lebanon, Kuwait and the UAE. One of the questions measured Arab attitudes toward 13 non-Arab countries, namely Russia, China, the United States, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Japan, Turkey, Canada, Germany and the UK. Respondents' attitudes toward Turkey were found to be the most negative after Israel, the USA and the UK. During that period Arab press' coverage of Turkey was largely limited to its ties with Israel and this was linked to the country's initial cooperation with the US in preparation for war in Iraq.¹⁴ One can hypothesize that attitude started to change after March 2003 when the Turkish parliament rejected the bill that would allow Turkey's involvement in the Iraq War. However, there is no data available to support this argument.

11 Zogby International, *The 2009 Arab Public Opinion Poll: A View from the Arab World*, available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2009/0519_arab_opinion/2009_arab_public_opinion_poll.pdf (Accessed on 28 March 2010).

12 Khalaf Ahmed Al Habtoor (Chairman of the Habtoor Group) "Turkey Feels Palestinian's Pain," *The Daily Star*, 13 January 2009.

13 Zogby International, *What Arabs Think: Values, Beliefs and Concerns*, NY: Zogby International, 2002: 61 cited in Peter A. Furia and Russell E. Lucas, "Determinants of Arab Public Opinion on Foreign Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (2006) pp. 585-605.

14 For instance, see Galal Nassar, "The Axis of Evil-from Another Angle," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 7 March 2002 cited in Peter A. Furia and Russell E. Lucas, "Determinants of Arab Public Opinion on Foreign Relations," p. 599.

The increasing popularity of Turkey and the Turkish Prime Minister in 2009 supports the conclusion of Furia and Lucas's study on "Determinants of Arab Public Opinion on Foreign Relations." The study argues that "Arab publics evaluate non-Arab countries based in large part on their relatively recent foreign policy actions throughout the Middle East."¹⁵ According to the authors, the most important issue in that respect is the Palestinian issue as this problem "may serve as a 'litmus test' for their evaluations of other countries."¹⁶ Baghat Korany has also argued that the Palestinian issue has been a central political issue for Arabs throughout the Middle East and it has contributed to the creation of an Arab "public sphere."¹⁷ In the case of Arab public opinion on Turkey the importance of the Palestinian issue is clear. Similarly, according to Marc Lynch, in the last two decades Iraq also has become an important issue for the Arabist public sphere.¹⁸ In fact, Turkey's Iraq policy and its collaboration with the US in Iraq in the 1990s was one of the reasons for the negative view of Turkey in the Arab world. Thus, it can be argued that the Turkish parliament's rejection of US proposals to base troops in Turkey for the Iraq War may have contributed to a more positive view of Turkey in Arab public opinion as it did among opinion makers.

Thus, there seems to be a clear correlation between the perceived changes in Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly with respect to the Palestinian issue, and a more positive view about Turkey. However, based on TESEV's survey, one can argue that the positive view of Turkey can be explained not only by what Turkey "does" but also by what Turkey "is". This was clear in responses to questions related to Turkey's successful combination of Islam and democracy and whether Turkey can be considered as a model in terms of its political transformation. Despite this, the first trigger of change in views of Turkey most likely occurred with the perceived changes in Turkish foreign policy and then that was translated into more interest in what Turkey "is." In fact, part of the debate in the Arab world about Turkey's increasing democratization was tied to its foreign policy, such as the refusal to cooperate with the US in Iraq and Turkey's policies during the Gaza War. Some in the Arab world argued that Turkey could behave as it did because it was democratic, they did not fail to mention that this puts Turkey in a stark contrast with other Arab regimes.¹⁹ For instance:

The contrast between Erdoğan's stand and that of the Arab leaders may seem puzzling, but it is not. Erdoğan was democratically elected and, therefore, accountable to the nation that put him into office. No nation that lives in freedom and under good governance would brook injustice, even towards others. Nor can leaders elected in free and fair elections afford to ignore the feelings of their people. Is there a lesson here?²⁰

Similarly, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* praised Turkey's policy in its editorial and drew lessons for the Arab world:

This act by the Turkish Parliament not only deserves to be applauded but it is also a testimony to Turkish democracy and strength of Turkish public opinion. The overwhelming majority of Turks opposed America's invasion of Iraq. The Turkish parliament offered a lesson in morality and justice to those Arab parliaments and governments that supported the invasion, openly or not. It is clear that the Arab people will always respect and honor this noble stance of Turkey and its people.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 586.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 596.

¹⁷ Baghat Korany, "National Security in the Arab World: The Persistence of Dualism," in D. Tschirgi, ed., *The Arab World Today* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 166.

¹⁸ Marc Lynch, "Taking Arabs Seriously," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2003).

¹⁹ Also see Rami G. Khouri (Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut), *Conflict Management in the Middle East: Regional Solutions to Regional Problems?* Körber-Stiftung, Bergdorf Round Table-March 20-22, 2009, Beirut, p. 49.

²⁰ Nader Fergany, "More Arab than the Arabs?" *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 27 November 2004.

²¹ *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 4 March 2003 cited in Yousef Al Sharif and Samir Salha, *Reflections of EU-Turkey Relations in the Muslim World*, Open Society Foundation, Istanbul, 1st print (July 2009) p.10.

OPINION AND DECISION MAKERS

One can identify three general perspectives on Turkey among opinion and decision makers in the Arab world. These perspectives sometimes transcend ideological positions.

1) STRATEGISTS:

One perspective that has been dominant in the Arab world is the strategic perspective. This is the most prevalent view among the region's regimes, although some of the debates among opinion makers also reflect it. Overall one can argue that this is the new perspective of the old-style Arab nationalists. The strategic view welcomes Turkey's new interest in the region as it expects strategic benefits for the Arab world. The most important expected benefit is the significance of Turkey's involvement in regional politics on the regional balance of power.²²

One such benefit is balancing Iran.²³ It is clear that in recent years Iran has increased its power and influence in the region. The weakening of Iraq, the US troubles there, and the disunity in the Arab world has allowed Iran to emerge as a dominant power not only in the Gulf but also in the Middle East more generally. In other words, the regional balance of power has shifted in Iran's interest. Many analysts in the Arab world accused Iran of meddling in Arab affairs and expanding its "power and hegemony inside the Arab world."²⁴ Iran's nuclear program and alleged desire to develop nuclear weapons further strengthened this assumption. In addition to the strategic calculations of balance of power and threat, some Arab states clearly voiced their concerns in terms of an identity conflict. According to this view Iran's encroachment, cast as a non-Arab and Shiite power, into the Arab world was seen as a threat. For countries with significant Shiite minorities, this had domestic implications as well. Up until very recently these concerns were openly expressed in the Arab world. In 2004 King Abdullah of Jordan warned about the emergence of an ideological "Shiite crescent" from Beirut to the Gulf. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said in April 2006 that the "Shiites are mostly always loyal to Iran and not to the countries where they live."²⁵ The comments, by leaders of two predominantly Sunni countries, showed that the threat of a region-wide so-called Shiite awakening was not only a domestic political concern related to identity, as it was for some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, but also the fear of Iran expanding its regional role and power.

These arguments flared after the Shiite domination of Iraqi politics in the post-2003 political transition as well as the political crisis in Lebanon after Syria's withdrawal from that country in 2005. In this new strategic context Turkey was considered an important balancing actor; it is seen as a regional "Sunni power". The GCC countries seemed especially keen to emphasize such a role for Turkey - King Abdullah was the first Saudi Arabian monarch to visit Turkey since 1974 in 2006. This was followed by another visit in 2007. In the wake of the King's visit in 2006, the strategic importance of Turkey was summarized by Tariq Almhayed, the editor-in-chief of *Asharq Alawsat*, as follows:

Reality in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, where Iran is now the most prominent player, indicates Iran's hijacking of Arab issues transforming them into a deck of cards, something that can no longer be ignored. Riyadh is well aware of what Tehran is doing and information suggests that the Saudi authorities have repeatedly and candidly spoken to the Iranians telling them that they do not have free reign to act as they will, however, Iran does not tire of implementing what it wants, despite all the promises it had made.

The value of the summit in Turkey now becomes evident. It is an important regional power, a member of NATO and is on the doorstep of the European Union. Saudi Arabia has an evident

22 See, for instance, Dr. Radwan Al-Sayyid (Professor of Islamic Studies at Lebanese University) "Turkey and the Arabs...The Equilibrium of the New Middle East," *asharq alawsat*, 14 August 2006.

23 See, for instance, Muhammed El Sayid Selim, in Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

24 Abdullah Iskander, "Iran and the Arab misunderstanding," *Al-Hayat*, 23 December 2009.

25 Quoted in Vali Nasr, "When the Shiites Rise," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August, 2006) p. 6.

international and regional role, one we currently perceive in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. Reality tells us that Turkey is, under the current circumstances, a better guarantor of Iraq's unity than that of the Arabs, whose stances and interests remain, divided.

This is why Turkey will undoubtedly grow closer to the region, in order to balance the scales.²⁶

Although Turkey wanted to further develop its relations with the GCC countries in all areas, including in the strategic field,²⁷ Ankara made it clear that it would not play sectarian politics in the region. This position was in fact appreciated by some and further contributed to Turkey's image as an actor able to rise above the dividing lines in the new "Middle East Cold War" and reinforced the expectations on Turkey to bridge the divisions in the region.²⁸ In fact, Arab leaders who used sectarian arguments to contain Iranian influence soon dropped this discourse in probable realization of its negative consequences, as demonstrated by the Iraqi civil war. However, concerns over "Iranian regional hegemony" continued. In fact, the recent troubles in Yemen have seemed to have further flamed such concerns.

On the other hand, Arab countries that feel threatened by growing Iranian influence also seem to be concerned about a US or an Israeli attack against Iran; they fear that an attack could spread the same chaos that was witnessed in Iraq around the region. In that sense there seems to be commonality of interests between Turkey and the Arab world. Both are concerned about Iranian dominance in the region and the possibility of a nuclear Iran but prefer a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

Turkey's position on regional issues has led many Arabs to see Turkey as a "constructive actor" that works towards the stability of the region. This was frequently compared to Iran which was seen as a source of instability by most.²⁹ Within this context, Turkey's roles in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian issue and Syria became important. In all these conflicts Turkey has been perceived as a fair interlocutor, a perception that enhanced its position. As Abbas Vali argued, "(Unlike Iran) Turkey has no linkages in the Arab World. It can be more of an honest broker. For Iran, its strength is its weakness. For Turkey, its weakness is its strength."³⁰

Iraq has been one of the most difficult cases for Turkey as developments have had a direct bearing on its Kurdish problem. Thus Turkey's Iraq policy was the subject of intense debate in domestic politics.³¹ Furthermore, after its decision not to support the US war effort in Iraq, Turkey effectively ceased to have any influence in Iraq for some time. In this new context, Turkey's relations with the Kurdish leaders in the north of Iraq deteriorated amid a "war of words." Despite these negative conditions, Turkey has been able to turn its policy towards Iraq and has begun to play an increasingly constructive role in 2008. Even before 2008, Turkey brokered a meeting between Iraqi Sunni groups and the US ambassador in Iraq, making it possible for the former to participate in the 2005 elections - a significant step in the establishment of a more effective political process in Iraq. In recent years, Turkey has also managed to establish ties with all groups in Iraq and begun to "deal with Iraqi groups at an equal distance."³² The transformation of Turkey's relations

26 Tariq Alhomayed, "Will Turkey Get Closer?" *Asharq Alawsat*, 8 August 2006.

27 Lenore G. Martin, "Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 101 No. 1 (March 2009).

28 This is particularly appreciated in Lebanon, a country that has suffered a lot from sectarian politics. For instance, the views expressed by Jihad Al Zein (columnist in *AnNahar*): "Very balanced position of Turkey on the Sunni-Shiite sensitivity is more appealing to the secular-liberal elite. Turkey got out of this image especially in Lebanon" in Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul. Also Mohamed Nouredine (Lebanese University, Department of History) in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November, Istanbul, Turkey.

29 "Turkey is seen as a source of stability." Jihad al-Zein views expressed in Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

30 Abbas Vali, views expressed in Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

31 For the difficulties of Turkey's Iraq policy see Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy: The War and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 14, No.2 (2006) pp.183-196.

32 Dr. Ghassan Atiyyah (Iraqi Foundation for Development and Democracy) views expressed in Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been quite significant in this. Turkey has also been playing a critical role in training Iraqi security forces.³³ This new position gave Turkey an opportunity to engage Iraq constructively prior to the expected US withdrawal. This engagement is increasingly seen positively in the Arab world.

In the case of Lebanon, Turkey played an active role in UNIFIL II. In addition, Turkish troops reached Lebanon by land, via Syrian territory. Both were symbolic and demonstrated the changing view of Turkey in Lebanon and Syria. Together with Qatar, Turkey has also been influential in breaking the political deadlock in Lebanon.

Turkey has also played an important role with Syria by developing closer ties with the country. About five years ago, Syria had to withdraw from Lebanon; it was under severe pressure following the Hariri assassination and the Bush administration was openly hostile. Syria's only regional ally was Iran as it also had problems with major Arab countries, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.³⁴ Turkish engagement helped Syria to consolidate itself in regional politics and eased the process of its engagement with the US and the EU. In 2008 Turkey mediated indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel. Turkey also initiated reconciliation between Syria and Saudi Arabia and mediated between Iraq and Syria.³⁵

Turkey until recently had a relatively minor role in the Palestinian issue. Ankara was involved in the neutral facilitation, such as providing a safe space for meetings and conveying information and messages, between the parties to solve problems. In addition, Turkey assisted conflict sensitive development projects to create an environment conducive to peacemaking. The most prominent activity of this kind is the "Industry for Peace" initiative undertaken by the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), first in Gaza and then in the West Bank. However, when Turkey became very critical of Israel after its Gaza operation in December 2008 its third party role began to transform. Within this context Turkey tried to use its links to Hamas to help to facilitate a ceasefire agreement. Although Turkey's stance has gained it and its Prime Minister popularity among the Arab public, the same is not necessarily true for the regimes in the Arab world. For instance, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was uncomfortable with Turkey's role after Turkey's communication with Hamas intensified. Egypt also had an ambiguous attitude; on the one hand Egypt benefited from the opening of communication channels with Hamas but on the other hand it was concerned with the fact that Turkey's activism could overshadow its own role in the conflict. After realizing Egypt's concerns, Turkey was more careful in articulating its role, suggesting it was complementary to that of Egypt and that "Turkey is not trying to steal a role from Egypt."³⁶

The overall result of Turkey's third party involvement in regional disputes has been to consolidate Turkey's role in the region as well as benefit its image as a constructive player. Rami Khouri underlines this point:

The motivation for assuming the mediator's role is often the attempt to disguise the fact that one is a party to the web of relations one is operating within. I would like to call this the "camouflage approach". Turkey's goal is not only to mediate in the Middle East, but to re-enter the Middle East and to counter-balance Iran's increasing role in the region. This is a perfectly legitimate desire. Hence Turkey's mediation is symptomatic of this desire.³⁷

33 Saifaldin Abdul-Rahman, International Relations Advisor to Tariq Al-Hashimi, Vice President of Iraq, in *Iraq and the Gulf: Towards Collective Security?*, High-Level Policy Roundtable, Organized by Sciences-Po and Carnegie Europe, 29-30 June 2009, Paris, France.

34 "Syrian-Turkish relations are an important example to eliminate obstacles among Arab countries." Adnan Omran views expressed in Workshop on *Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

35 Naseer Al-Ily, "Iraqi-Syrian Officials to Meet in Ankara to Resolve Crisis," *Asharq Alawsat*, 14 September 2009.

36 Yonca Poyraz Doğan, "Davutoglu says Turkey key to convincing Hamas on Gaza cease-fire," *Today's Zaman*. Available at <http://www.todayzaman.com/tz-web/news-164558-davutoglu-says-turkey-key-to-convincing-hamas-on-gaza-cess-fire.html> 2009. (Accessed on 13 February 2010).

37 Rami G. Khouri, *Conflict Management in the Middle East: Regional Solutions to Regional Problems?* p. 49.

2) REFORMISTS:

Another dominant perspective in the Arab world is related to Turkey's political and economic transformation. Arab Liberals, Islamists and Leftists have been emphasizing Turkey's transformation and tying it to their criticism of the existing regimes in the region.

Within this context three issues in the debate about Turkey in the Arab public sphere are worthy of note:

Democratization- Liberals in particular focus on Turkey's democratization and through this raise the issue in the context of the Arab world. According to this view, Turkey's democratic transformation, modernity, secularism, its relations with the West and membership of Western institutions constitute a "model" for the states in the region. Unlike Islamists' perspectives, liberals emphasize Turkey's secularism as an important element in explaining its relative success in achieving modernity and democracy. Dr. Ghassan Atiyah calls it "faithful secularism" (*almaniyya mumine*).³⁸ This characterization is particularly important in deconstructing the understanding of secularism as unfaithfulness, which has been the prevalent view in the Arab world since the 1970s. Leftists also focus on the importance of secularism in the Turkish case. Syrian thinker Sadik al-Azm argued that:

Recent developments in Turkey form an equally instructive instance: It is certainly noteworthy that Turkey, the only Muslim country with a developed and explicit secular ideology, tradition and practice, should be also the only major Muslim society to produce a democratic Muslim political party-something like Europe's Christian Democratic Parties-capable of ascending to power without a catastrophe befalling the whole polity, as has happened elsewhere.³⁹

The liberals in the Arab world also explain Turkey's active foreign policy through its democratic system and vibrant domestic debate. Thus, Khouri argues that "this is the only country in the Middle East region that has both democratic domestic system and an activist foreign policy...in contrast with the largely passive and often dysfunctional countries across the Middle East."⁴⁰

The compatibility of Islam and democracy-Another issue relevant for reformers in the Arab world has been the compatibility of Islam and democracy. With the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkish democratization has not only been seen as an example that not only demonstrates this compatibility, but also becomes relevant to the debate about integrating Islamists into the system. This issue constitutes one of the main issues in the democratization debate in the Arab world; due to several reasons that are beyond the scope of this study Islamists parties and groups constitute the main opposition throughout the region. Thus for the liberals and leftists the question has been about the faith of the democratization process in the face of this reality. Most liberals in the region had sided with the regimes in the early 1990s in fear that Islamists would benefit from any political liberalization and that would mean going from secular authoritarianism to a religious one. However, this has been changing in recent years. Some liberals and leftists began to establish alliances with Islamists around the struggle against authoritarianism in existing states.⁴¹ For those reformists, the coming to power of the AKP and its policies demonstrated the possibility of Islamist parties participating in the democratic process. The evolution of Turkey's Islamist movement and the establishment of the AKP were seen as evidence that Islamist movements and parties can become more moderate and learn to accept the principles of democracy in the context of democratic principles. For instance:

38 Dr. Ghassan Atiyah in Workshop on *Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

39 Sadik J. Al-Azm, *Islam and Secular Humanism* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2005) p. 40.

40 Rami G. Khouri, "Turkey, the Mideast's only real country," *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2009.

41 For more on these still fragile efforts see Jillian Schwedler and Janine A. Clark, "Islamist-Leftist Cooperation in the Arab World," available at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/sco405309p.html> (Accessed on 31 March 2010); Maha Abdelrahman, "'With the Islamists?—Sometimes. With the State?—Never!' Cooperation between the Left and Islamists in Egypt," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No.1 (2009) pp. 37-54.

In the Arab world, do we have similar examples, or even initial harbingers of like experiences? Perhaps. Today, the ruling elite in Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait and Bahrain allow Islamist movements of a peaceful nature to participate in political life, either through participation in the legislative authority only (Bahrain) or by combining parliamentary representation with (current or anticipated) limited participation in the executive authority (Morocco, Algeria and Kuwait). Islamists in these four countries have developed to appear more flexible, mature and interested in ways of planning public affairs at the expense of their ideological views and oppressive rhetoric receding, and this is a source of hope. In other Arab cases, however, government oppression continues through security agencies on the one hand while Islamist excessiveness persists on the other. Consequently, the political reform and stability we are in such need of are lacking.⁴²

The AKP's victories in the elections of November 2002 and March 2007 were viewed quite positively by the majority of Islamists as well. In the first AKP victory in 2002, the Islamists "reacted with euphoria" and "they saw in this triumph a clear sign of Turkey's return to the fold of the Islamic nations, and positive proof of the failure of 'Turkish secularism' – and a defeat for all defenders of secularism in the region."⁴³ Therefore "the victory of the AKP bolstered the self-confidence of the Islamists in the Arab world and reinforced their conviction that the Islamic peoples would back the Islamists when given the choice."⁴⁴ There was also a "state of happiness amongst many of the political Islamists in the Arab world" after Abdullah Gül managed to become President – despite the vast reservations by the military and some secularists – and the re-election of the AKP in 2007.⁴⁵ Clearly, Islamist parties and movements in the Arab world adopted a discourse that put the AKP and its leaders as one of them. In the face of the AKP's adoption of a reform agenda and the passing of several "democratic packages", Arab Islamist parties started to claim that given the chance they would also enact similar policies in their own countries. In other words, some Islamists began to argue that they want to follow the "AKP example" and that the AKP experience demonstrated that their support for democracy was genuine. For instance, Mahdi Akef, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, "sent a message of congratulations to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in which he described the elections as 'evidence' of the ability of Islamic parties to achieve 'constitutional, political and economic development and social reform' when operating in a democratic, free and fair environment." Similarly, a leading member of the Brotherhood, Essam El-Arian stated that the AKP's success offered a number of lessons; it showed that "a political party does not have to be limited to Islamist members alone" and also pointed to "ways in which Islamists can reach accommodation with the West, while the AKP's economic success and its dealings with other political parties and currents in Turkey should also be reflected upon. The [AKP's] experience is quite rich... In a healthy and free environment Islamists can achieve amazing results."⁴⁶ Similarly, the secretary-general of Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD), Saad Eddine Al-Othmani, said to *Le Monde* that he was taking Turkey's AKP as an example.⁴⁷

The AKP's pragmatism and moderation is emphasized by the so-called moderate Islamist parties like *al Wasat* (Center) in Egypt. In fact, the AKP example is seen more relevant to parties like *al Wasat* than to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). For instance, Cairo University Law Professor Hossam Eissa argued that the AKP "is closer to *al Wasat* Party which does not flaunt the [MB] slogan 'Islam is the Solution' to win votes. The problem with the MB is that they do not offer a platform that appeals to non-Islamists. You are either with them or against them. You can never lead a nation with that philosophy."⁴⁸

42 Amr Hamzawy, "Islamist Lessons in Turkey," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No: 858, 16-22 August 2007.

43 Salaheddine Jourchi, "Reform Policies of the Turkish AK Party: Setting an Example for Arab Islamists?" *Qantara.de*, 10 June 2006, available at http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-591/i.html (Accessed on 25 February 2010).

44 Ibid.

45 Hussein Shobokshi (host of the weekly current affairs program *Al Tahreer on Al Arabiya*) "The Valuable Turkish lesson," *Asharq Alawsat*, 1 September 2007.

46 Amira Howeidy, "Lessons from Turkey," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 July 2007.

47 Wendy Christianasen, "Les islamistes marocains tentés par le modèle turc," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 2007, available at <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2007/08/KRISTIANASEN/14994> (Accessed on 29 March 2010).

48 Howeidy, "Lessons from Turkey."

In fact, the leader of *al Wasat*, Abul-Ela Madi, a former Muslim Brotherhood member, argued that “It’s wrong to attribute the AKP’s victory to their Islamic roots. They didn’t win simply because they have an Islamic background but because they present a moderate image of themselves and in practice have proved themselves worthy of the confidence of the Turkish voter. The AKP fought corruption, has made some outstanding economic achievements and led a successful foreign policy which made their comeback inevitable”. According to Madi, the AKP’s pragmatism explains its success: “In Islam there is something called *fiqh al-maqasid* (the higher objectives of *Sharia*). Alcohol is prohibited in Islam but it’s allowed when it’s the only thing that can keep a person alive for example. This philosophy is what enabled the AKP to maintain its Islamic roots without constraining the party. When they contested last week’s elections, they included women who do not wear the *hijab* on their slates. That’s because they want to represent Turkish society, not a strictly Islamic party.”⁴⁹

Secularists, however, became critical of the connection that Islamists started to make between the AKP’s democratic reforms and their own democratic credentials. Several writers underlined the differences they perceived between the AKP and Islamist parties in the Arab world. For instance:

In reality, however, the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its leadership that enjoys an Islamic orientation is so far removed from the Islamist movements in the Arab world that it would be extremely unfair to place both parties in the same category. The Justice and Development Party had not assumed power by killing, bombing, and causing genocide and bloodshed. Also, it never advocated *fatwas* (religious rulings) created by ignorant individuals that denounce others as infidels and divide members of the same community into categories of atheists and infidels based on ignorant and erroneous judgments. This party had not reached power by isolating itself from the world and separating its people from their surroundings or misleading them to believe that they live alone on this planet.⁵⁰

Similarly, Mona Eltahawy argued that “so little does the AK Party share with the Muslim Brotherhood - aside from the common faith of its members - that it’s absurd to use its success in Turkish politics as a reason to reduce fears over the Muslim Brotherhood’s role in Arab politics.”⁵¹

Many analysts also alluded to the differences in context. Thus, Turkey’s democratic experience, history of secularism and the EU factor were emphasized to argue that the Turkish case was different.⁵²

The EU process-Turkey-EU relations have constituted an important part of the discussion about Turkey in the Arab world. In the past, Turkey’s pursuit of EU membership was considered a “dream,” largely because many in the Arab world believed that the EU would never accept a Muslim nation as a member. The Helsinki decision in 1999 and developments since then, particularly the decision to start accession negotiations, began to challenge that perception. The Arab media were the most represented group at the European Summit in Brussels in December 2004 when the decision to start the accession negotiations with Turkey was taken - it is claimed that approximately 200 Arab journalists covered the Summit.⁵³

Turkey-EU relations became important for three main reasons: First, the developments in these relations demonstrated Turkey’s success. The EU’s decision to grant Turkey candidate status as well as to start accession negotiations underlined Turkey’s political and economic transformation. This led to increased interest among reformers in the Arab world.

Secondly, Turkey-EU relations are also seen as a test of the EU’s ability and desire to incorporate a Muslim country or whether they will reject it because of cultural differences. This became particularly important in the post-9/11 context. Increasingly negative images of Muslims in the

49 Ibid.

50 Hussein Shobokshi, “The Valuable Turkish Lesson.”

51 Mona Eltahawy, “Success of Turkey’s AK Party must not dilute worries over Arab Islamists,” *Tharwa Community*, 5 September 2007.

52 See, for instance, Ibid; Howeidy, “Lessons from Turkey”; Sayyed Wild Abak, “Turkish Islamists: A Model or the Exception?” *Asharq Alawsat*, 30 January 2007.

53 Yousef Al Sharif and Samir Salha, *Reflections of EU-Turkey Relations in the Muslim World*, Open Society Foundation, Istanbul, 1st print, July 2009.

West coupled with developments such as the US invasion of Iraq created “a profound sense of helplessness” in the region. Thus, the Brussels Summit was not perceived as simply about Turkey-EU relations but also about relations between the Islamic world and the West:

Rejecting Turkey’s membership in the EU will lead to the strengthening of nationalist and religious movements in Europe and the Islamic world alike. That is because a European Turkey would be the gateway to Europe for the Arabs and the Islamic world. It would increase exchanges in the fields of culture and civilization between all countries of the world. If Turkey were to become part of Europe we would become Europe’s neighbors. We would gain knowledge about concepts of progress and modernity that would benefit our people. This, in turn, would promote peace and security across the world.⁵⁴

Finally, some in the Arab world underlined the possible positive spillover effects of Turkey’s developing relations with the EU and eventual membership. The liberal reformists emphasized the possibility of the promotion of democratization in the region. Similarly, they argued that Turkey’s engagement with the EU could foster regional stability and peace. On the other hand, some, notably the regimes themselves, perceived Turkey’s march towards the EU as providing economic opportunities in the Arab world.

3) ECONOMIC INTERESTS:

Finally, an expanding group in the Arab world became interested in Turkey for economic reasons. Among these are regimes like Syria and Iraq - particularly the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) - that perceive Turkey as not only an economic partner but also as a gateway to the world.⁵⁵ Turkey is also considered as a source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in neighboring countries. Turkish investment in Egypt has also become quite important recently. Many Turkish textiles factories have been relocated to Egypt and contributed to job creation. On the other hand, Turkey has also been increasingly seen as an object of FDI as well, particularly in the Gulf. Turkey has signed Free Trade Agreements with Egypt, Syria and Jordan. As a result of these developments, the burgeoning business community in the Arab world has also developed an interest in increasing ties with Turkey.⁵⁶ Similarly, the Turkish business community, particularly in Turkey’s neighboring cities, has become increasingly vocal in promoting stronger economic ties with the Middle East more recently.⁵⁷

For Arab states facing serious socio-economic problems, Turkey’s economic transformation has become particularly important. Similar to the discussion on Turkey’s political reform efforts, the issue of economic development is being used by critics of the regimes in countries like Egypt and Syria who argue that the states’ policies have failed.⁵⁸

54 Hamid Kashkouli, *Civilized Dialogue*, no. 995, 2004, cited in Yousef Al Sharif and Samir Salha, *Reflections of EU-Turkey Relations in the Muslim World*, Open Society Foundation, Istanbul, 1st print, July 2009, p.13.

55 For burgeoning business elite and their increasing involvement in politics see, Amr Hamzawy, “Is business a liberalizing force?” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 February- 4 March 2009, No. 936, available at <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/936/op8.htm> (Accessed on 31 March 2010). Importance of the economic links with Turkey Adnan Omran (former Syrian Information Minister), “In economic development, Turkey can give a lot.” Views expressed in Workshop on *Turkey’s New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

56 Omran, *Ibid*.

57 Kemal Kirişçi, Nathalie Tocci, Joshua Walker, *A Neighborhood Discovered: Turkey’s Transatlantic Value in the Middle East*, Brussels Forum Paper Series, 2009, pp. 21-22.

58 See, for instance, the piece by a prominent Egyptian “moderate Islamist”, Fahmi Howaidi, “Letter from Turkey,” *Asharq Alawsat*, 27 December 2007.

**TABLE 2: TURKEY'S TRADE WITH THE ARAB WORLD-MASHREQ (2003, 2008 AND 2009)
MILLION DOLLARS**

	2003			2008			2009		
	Export	Import	Volume	Export	Import	Volume	Export	Import	Volume
Bahrain	29	15	44	308	96	404	114	24	138
Egypt	376	141	517	1.426	943	2.369	2.619	641	3.260
Iran	533	1.860	2.393	2.028	8.199	10.228			
Iraq	829	112	941	3.912	1.328	5.233	5.125	952	6.077
Jordan	150	17	167	461	25	486	455	20	475
Kuwait	165	15	180	493	81	574	211	184	395
Lebanon	148	71	219	665	178	842	687	179	866
Qatar	15	8	23	1.074	179	1.253			
Syria	410	413	823	1.113	639	1.752	1.144	284	1.428*
UAE	702	113	815	7.981	691	8.672			

*2009 figures for Syria are for 10 months.
Source: Undersecretariat for Foreign Trade, Turkey.

CHALLENGES TO A NEW TURKISH ROLE

The debate about Turkey in the Arab world is not simply about opportunities; there are some references to the challenges as well. These challenges are argued within the context of the three perspectives outlined above.

As to the strategic view of Turkey the following challenges and problems have been articulated:

- For some Arabs, particularly the nationalists, Turkey's - as well as Iran's - rise to prominence in the region occurred as a result of the "weakness of the Arab world". Thus the increased importance of non-Arab powers in what is ultimately defined by the Arab nationalists as "the Arab region" creates some degree of resentment. Several Arabs have therefore argued that the Arabs should also develop a vision and unite. For instance, Dr. Radwan al-Sayyid, a Lebanese political thinker, argued that there is a need for "an Arab presence, as well as an Arab vision and initiative."⁵⁹ Thus, this issue raises questions as to Turkey's relations with the region in the long-term.
- Another challenge to Turkey's policy and its perception in the region is related to the difficulties of making sense of Turkey's Iran policy. Although Turkey's ability to talk to Iran is generally appreciated, some questions remain. The Turkish PM's recent discourse on Iran, the nuclear issue as well as Turkey's attempts to build bridges with the Shiite leaders in Iraq have raised some concerns about the possibility of pulling Turkey into an alliance to balance Iran.⁶⁰
- An opposite criticism tries to brand Turkey as a Sunni power. Despite Turkey's attempts not to promote sectarian politics in its regional policy, some critics continue to characterize Turkey as part of the Saudi-led so-called "Sunni bloc."⁶¹ If it takes hold, this branding of Turkey clearly has the potential to limit Turkey's influence in the region.

59 Radwan Al-Sayyid, "Turkey and the Arabs...The Equilibrium of a New Middle East," *Asharq Alawsat*, 26 February 2010.

60 Tariq Alhomyed, "Why was al-Sadr in Turkey?" *Asharq Alawsat*. Also, Saleh El-Kallab, "Erdoğan'ın İran'a Bakışı Kaygı Verici (Erdoğan's view of Iran is worrisome)" *Jarida* (Kuwait), 12 November 2009, translated in *Radikal*, 13 November 2009.

61 Ghassan Ben Jeddou (Al Jazeera, Beirut Bureau) views expressed in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

- For some regimes in the Arab world a particular challenge is their concern about whether the AKP government is close to the Islamists; for these regimes their main challengers are the Islamists movements. Thus, the popularity of the AKP among the Islamists is of concern. As explained above, the AKP's policies towards Hamas led to tacit criticisms of the so-called "moderate states" in the region.
- Some critics have pointed out that some of the outstanding issues between Turkey and the Arab world, namely the water issue, are still not resolved.⁶² Thus, they emphasize the limitations these problems pose for Turkey's activism in the region.
- Another argument involves Turkey's Ottoman past. The AKP government's policy of active involvement in the Middle East has led to characterizations of Neo-Ottomanism both in Turkey and abroad.⁶³ References to the Ottoman past sometimes invoke concerns about domination and hegemony in the Arab world and thus create suspicions about Turkey's policies in the region.⁶⁴
- Recently some Arab nationalists began to argue that the AKP is in fact "implementing the US project in the Middle East."⁶⁵ This argument also seems to aim to undermine the AKP's and Turkey's popularity in the region.
- Finally, sceptics in the Arab world raise the issue of sustainability of Turkish policy. A frequently heard question in the region is to ask whether Turkey's new engagement with the Middle East would continue after the AKP.⁶⁶ This is a quite legitimate question as many analysts in the Arab world associate Turkey's interest in the Middle East with the AKP government.⁶⁷ There is also skepticism about the impact of the developments in Turkey-EU relations in affecting the country's turn to the Middle East. Again many analysts ask whether this happened because of current problems in Turkish-EU relations. A related question is about Turkey's eventual membership. The question then is that if Turkey becomes a member of the EU, to what extent would it be willing to continue its "strategic partnership" with the Arab world.⁶⁸

As to the importance of Turkey for the reform agenda there are also several challenges: The first challenge is that the reform agenda unsettles many regimes in the region. Thus Turkey faces the dilemma of doing business with the existing regimes and also being a source of appeal to the reformers in the region. This dilemma was exposed in the early 2000s when the Turkish Prime Minister and then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül made several speeches in and outside the region about the necessity of political and economic reform in the Islamic world.⁶⁹ In recent years, however, Turkey's leaders have dropped the reform discourse.

The second challenge to Turkey's relevance to the reform debate in the Arab world relates to the meaning of what it represents. The first view considered the evolution of Turkey's political Islam

62 Khair El-Din Haseeb (Center for Arab Unity Studies)views expressed in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

63 Dr. Hassan Abou Taleb (Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies)views expressed in *Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul.

64 "What are Turkey's objectives? They should be clear. There should not be dependency and domination. There should be harmony among Arab states." Khair El-Din Haseeb (Center for Arab Unity Studies)views expressed in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

65 Ibid. Also see, Bahir Salih "Türkiye ABD'nin Yeni Truva Atı" (Turkey is the US's New Trojan Horse) *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 1 February 2010, translated in *Radikal* newspaper, 2 February 2010.

66 Muhammed Abu Rumman (Al-Ghad, Jordan) views expressed in *Workshop on Turkey's New Activism and the Middle East*, organized by TESEV, 12 December 2009, Istanbul ; As'ad Abboud (Editor-in-Chief, Thawra, Syria) personal communication.

67 For instance, Mohamed Nouredine: "If the AKP did not come to power, the improvement of Turkish-Arab relations would not have been possible." Views expressed in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November 2009, Istanbul, Turkey.

68 Dr. Mohamed El-Sayed Selim (Kuwait University, Department of Political Science; Formerly of Cairo University): "Turkey is not a strategic alternative for the Arab World. Turkey is interested in the Arab world to strengthen its hand in its relations with the EU. If it becomes a member of the EU its interest would wane." *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November, Istanbul, Turkey.

69 See, Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2008, pp. 41-54.

and the coming to power of the AKP as an example of the compatibility of Islam with democracy. In particular, the Turkish 'experiment' was felt to demonstrate the possibility of moderation in political Islam, as evidenced by the party's willingness to operate under democratic norms. A corollary of this view sometimes posits that the more Turkey moves away from strict secularism and toward reconciliation with its moderate Islamic roots, the more its potential to become a model for the Islamic world as an example of moderation increases. The second view credits Turkey's history of democratization and secularism for the evolution of Turkish political Islam. According to this argument, the Turkish example demonstrates the importance of democratic and secular norms as well as the establishment of an institutional structure in the evolution of political Islam.

Clearly, what the Turkish model means and what really constitute its assets is subject for debate. Those who focus on the evolution of political Islam and the AKP government argue the Turkish example demonstrates the possibility of moderate Islam and its compatibility with democracy. This is a particularly important asset, and has been used, for instance, by the U.S. administration as a panacea for addressing the growth of Islamist radicalism in the world. Those who, on the other hand, focus on the Turkish experience in a larger context emphasize the important example Turkey sets as a Muslim nation that is democratic, secular, well-integrated economically with globalization, a candidate for EU accession and a long-term member of key Western institutions such as NATO, the OSCE, Council of Europe, and OECD. Within such a larger framework, Turkey's appeal cannot be limited merely to the AKP or the moderation of Islam; Turkey's value is the product of other factors as well. The two differing views of Turkey are demonstrated by the following two quotes:

Turkey has a unique position because it is accepted as an interlocutor both in the Middle East and the West. For the region, Turkey's Islamic character plays an important reassuring role. In the Middle East Islam has become an increasingly popular path for societies with crippled democratic practices, and this could explain, along with other reasons, why Hamas and Hezbollah have achieved such enormous popularity. In this context Turkey with its Islamic government is credited with the ability to understand regional issues and sensitivities. Furthermore, since the issue of "the leading Arab country" is a contested one, non-Arab neighboring nations such as Turkey or Iran would try to fill this vacuum. Since most of the Arab world is Sunni, it feels closer to Turkey than to Iran. On top of this Turkey's strong military power is taken into account by countries like Iraq and Syria.⁷⁰

The other perspective, however, focuses on Turkey's identity in secular terms and argues that this constitutes Turkey's main asset:

The idea that Turkey's Islamic dimension gives it credibility in the Arab world does not make sense. Turkey is accepted in the region because, on account of a state and societal attributes, it has a legitimacy and integrity no other country in the region possesses. Turkey has a vibrant economy, a legitimate government and a constitutional system that has been able to withstand incredible internal pressures. Turkey has a feeling for secularism and at the same time a sense of national pride. Its military is under civilian control. With the exception of Turkey, all of the countries in the Middle East have legitimacy problems.⁷¹

Those who challenge the existing system in the Arab world highlight additional issues about Turkey that affect its suitability as a model. Among the Islamists, there are those that criticize the AKP's Islamist credentials. Notably Salafists "see Erdoğan as an Islamist merely by name, and as someone who does not care about fundamental issues."⁷² Among the liberals, on the other hand, there seems to be concerns about the future of Turkey-EU relations as well as the consequences of the political crisis in Turkey.

70 Rola Nouredine (Diplomatic Advisor to the Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora) *Conflict Management in the Middle East: Regional Solutions to Regional Problems?* Körber-Stiftung, Bergdorf Round Table-March 20-22, 2009, Beirut, p. 48.

71 Rami G. Khouri, Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, *Ibid.*, pp. 47.

72 Tariq Alhomayed, "Erdoğan and the Islamists...Is the Honeymoon Over?" *Asharq Alawsat*, 18 August 2009.

Finally, there are also concerns about the development of economic relations. The Turkish economy has developed considerably in recent years. In this two trends have become particularly important. First, there has been the spread of industry throughout Anatolia alongside diversification and regionalization. Second, before the recent global economic crisis, Turkey's industrial and service sectors grew rapidly.⁷³ In turn, these developments emphasized the importance of regional trade. Coupled with the impact of the recent economic crisis, the geographical composition of Turkey's trade has started to change: In 1996 the EU's share in Turkey's total trade was 56%, in 2008 it had dropped to 44%. Indeed, in 1996 the Middle East's share of Turkey's trade was 9% but by 2008 it had increased to 19%. Furthermore, Turkey's trade balance with all Middle Eastern countries, apart from Iran and Qatar, is positive. At the same time "Turkey is both partner and a model to the development of the private sector in the region."⁷⁴ These developments, however, also create challenges. Arab nationalists' historical fear of domination resurfaces as Turkey is seen to benefit more from growing economic activity. It is argued that "Turkey should not see the Arab world only as an economic market."⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated three main elements in Arab perspectives on Turkey:

First, it has shown that not only have Arab perspectives on Turkey become increasingly positive in recent years but also debate of Turkey in the Arab world has become more nuanced and complicated. As interest in Turkey has grown so has knowledge about the country.

Second, contrary to the perception in Turkey about "the Arab perspective" of it, views in the Arab world are not monolithic. Differences of opinion exist not only among countries but also within countries. Furthermore, these differences are not necessarily characterized by the distinction between regime and society; both embody different perspectives. As to the generally accepted recent ideological positions in the Arab world, namely Islamists, liberals, nationalists and socialists, there are cross-cutting views on Turkey. As a result, I chose to focus on what differentiates these in their view of Turkey - namely strategic value, relevance to the debate about political reform and Islamism and finally economic importance. These categories are clearly not mutually exclusive, but for the sake of delineating the debate they were handled separately.

Third, the study showed that debate in the Arab world on Turkey is in fact about the Arab world itself. Interest in Turkey emerges from the raising and tackling of issues that the Arab world faces today, be they from strategic concerns to issues about political and economic reform or the difficult issue of Islam and politics. This is not to deny the importance of Turkey's changing foreign policy towards the region; this has provided the context within which these debates take place. Different Arab perspectives highlight different aspects of what they see as a "new Turkey". These aspects are ultimately determined by their own problems with the politics and international relations of the Arab world.

The paper also underlined some of the scepticism about Turkey's involvement in the Arab world. Although several points were elaborated above, such opinion currently constitutes a minority in the Arab world. The future of Turkey's relations with the Arab world will very much depend on the continuation of most of the factors related to Turkey and the Arab world enumerated at the beginning of this paper. Ultimately, however, rather than conjunctural factors of change, sustainability will depend on a deeper transformation. Part of this is transformation is societal. In this realm there have been several developments that will help to sustain closer ties in the long term. For instance, projects that will rewrite textbooks are already underway in some countries,

73 Güven Sak, TEPAV presentation in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November, Istanbul, Turkey.

74 Ibid.

75 Khair El-Din Haseeb (Center for Arab Unity Studies) views expressed in *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Forum*, Global Political Trends, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Arab Democracy Foundation, 21-22 November, Istanbul, Turkey.

visa free travel that started with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Libya is not only expected to further economic ties but also foster more understanding and mutual influence among the publics. Similarly the popularity of Turkish TV series in the Arab world and the launching of an Arabic broadcast by the Turkish state owned TV station, TRT, could serve for more understanding and weaken stereotypes. Nevertheless, societal interaction is not a sufficient condition for sustainability as states may ultimately decide to reverse the process. Thus, the institutional aspect of foreign policy transformation is key. This has domestic and regional aspects. Domestically, bureaucratic learning is important. In Turkey in particular, many of elements of its new foreign policy seemed to have been institutionalized in the foreign and economic bureaucracy. To what extent this is happening in the Arab world, is still a question that needs to be answered. Additionally, regional and bilateral institutional mechanisms are crucial for states to learn and redefine their interests. Although there are preliminary institutional frameworks at the bilateral level, there is lack of such mechanisms at the regional level. Thus, the future of the evolution of Turkish-Arab relations remains to be seen.

Commentary on “Turkey: Arab Perspectives”

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Turkey’s foreign policy has attracted much attention recently. Gone are the days when Turkey chose to detach itself from its immediate region; Turkey now pursues a foreign policy that advocates cooperation and engagement rather than confrontation and isolation. The country’s engagement with the Middle East has caused great debate within the region and I am thus delighted that the region’s reaction has been the subject of this paper. Foreign policy is, of course, in the very least a two-way process.

I first got involved with the work Professor Meliha Benli Altunışık and TESEV have been conducting in this field when they invited me to an event in Istanbul in December 2009 to discuss the findings of their recent public opinion survey of Arab perspectives on Turkey. The survey shone light on how citizens of the region saw Turkey in terms of its standing in the world, the region and its domestic politics. This paper expands that work and extrapolates conclusions as to what Turkey can and should do in the region as a result. Naturally they asked for a regional perspective of this work. Whilst I cannot pertain to speak for the entire Arab region, I am delighted that Professor Altunışık asked me to comment on the contents of the paper.

The paper itself is a great success. It details and explains the diverse nature of opinion of Turkey in the Arab world, looking at how and why this has changed. The paper demonstrates the author’s academic capability that is supported by her wide knowledge of the situation in many Arab countries. In most of the cases, the paper accurately portrays the results out of political events, indicators and figures. I know of no other piece of scholarly work that looks at the subject in such depth. Indeed, to my knowledge, no overview or analysis of such opinion has so far existed. Both Professor Altunışık and TESEV should be commended for commissioning and writing it.

For the sake of clarity, my comments on why it is of value will follow the structure of the paper itself, which I think is one of the key parts of its success. The paper is clear, concise and logical allowing it to elucidate on how and why debate on Turkey in the Arab world has changed. The section detailing factors relating to Turkey that may have affected opinion highlights five important factors, the first being the AKP’s rise to power. Indeed, the rise to power of the current Turkish Government is worthy of careful thought. In my opinion, the successful integration of a diverse range of political groups with an Islamic background through transparent elections has been of great interest in the Arab world. Also, the AKP’s then adherence to the basic secular principles of the Turkish system has influenced Arab opinion of Turkey.

Professor Altunışık’s discussion of factors relating to the region is also highly accurate. The notion that the Arab world entered the 21st Century in a deep sense of crisis is a problem that many in the region are acutely aware of. The mounting pressure on the Arab world reached a high point after the invasion of Iraq and the war on Gaza. The Arab world is in need of a role model and Turkey has, to an extent, met this need. With no viable support or ally, two sympathetic and supportive regional powers have emerged, namely Turkey and Iran.

Surveys of Arab public opinion are scarce. The paper successfully incorporates public opinion data into its analysis, notably TESEV’s earlier study on the perspectives of Turkey in the Arab world and Zoghby’s annual Arab public opinion survey. However, neither is perfect. Both speak of Arab public opinion yet Zoghby’s doesn’t look at Syria or the Palestinian Territories and TESEV’s does not include any country from the Maghreb region. Professor Altunışık is also right to highlight the timing of the TESEV survey, noting its proximity to Davos.

Despite this, TESEV's data is of great value. It also allows us to draw interesting conclusions about Turkey and the Arab world itself, some of which I list:

1. Saudi soft power remains highly influential in the region.
2. The positive rise in opinion of Turkey is understandable in the Palestinian Territories, given its principled stance on Gaza.
3. Likewise, the liberal lifestyle in Lebanon explains why it might feel close to Turkey.
4. The improvement in Syrian public opinion is worthy of thought. It points directly to the considerable capability of Turkish foreign policy to cross over historic, border and water resource problems. It also highlights Syria's need for regional support against the pressure exerted upon it after the assassination of the Lebanese premier Rafik Al Hariri. Other reasons can be attributed such as the positive Turkish stand on the Palestinian issue.
5. TESEV's data rubbishes the thinking that public opinion is relatively static and difficult to change overnight. The researcher notes the dramatic change in Arab perspectives on Turkey from being extremely negative before 2002 to extremely positive after that date. Arab opinion is actually quite unstable and can be easily influenced.
6. Positive views of Turkey rise in proximity to the Palestinian Territories, increasing in countries like Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and peaking in the Palestinian territories themselves. This confirms the researcher's conclusion that the Palestinian problem is still the main Arab issue.
7. However, the relative low opinion of Turkey in Egypt, which also neighbors the Palestinian Territories, is an exception to this general tendency and needs to be explained. Two issues may affect opinion here: the intense role of the official media in forming large sectors of public opinion and the feeling of competition in Egypt of the Turkish role in matters that were historically within its sphere of influence, like managing the Palestinian issue.

Clearly, public opinion is not the only driver of domestic and foreign policy in the Middle East. The paper's section on opinion and decision making elites is a strength as it seeks a new categorization of these groups into strategists, reformists and economic interests – as opposed to the traditional official – non-official distinction. Economic interests form an important part of the views of opinion and decision makers in the Arab world. As such, Turkey's role as a new regional economic player is very much a part of its newfound popularity. The influence of strategists in the Arab world is often overlooked and I am delighted that it receives the requisite attention in the paper. Namely quoting from Asharq al-Awsat and Al-Hayat acknowledges their significance in the region.

Reformists have also been keen followers of the changes underway in Turkey. The paper identifies two groups or reformists here: liberals and Islamists. The synthesis of Islam and democracy in Turkey is of great interest in the Arab world; it is a key question in our region and often leads to different reading of the Turkish example. Whereas some leftists and liberals read the Turkish example as some sort of faithful secularism or democratic Islam, Islamists tend to use it as a call for the approval of their right to be part of the political system. Likewise, any alliances between these groups based around the call for political reform remain fragile and temporary. I also think the nature of Islamist reaction to the Turkish case is worthy of more consideration. The gap between the AKP and Arab Islamists is wide; Arab Islamists have little or no commitment to democracy. The Muslim Brotherhood use the AKP as a means to highlight the autocratic nature of many Arab states, whilst movements like Hizb-ut-Tahrir Al Islami are fully opposed to it: "The Turkish secular regime represented by AKP and its leader Erdoğan have not defended the interest of the Ummah ever since they came to power. Moreover it did not hesitate, even for a moment, to implement American plans in the region"⁷⁶.

76 Statement of the Information office of Hizb-ut-Tahrir Al Islami, dated 05.03.2010. http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info/info/index.php/contents/entry_6959

Both the Arab World and Turkey face great challenges. Iran will continue to play a role in the region and Turkey will find it difficult to play an equidistant role as a non-sectarian regional power in the long run. Likewise, labels will continue to circulate, be it as an American stooge or neo-Ottoman. More relevant is the use of the AKP by Islamist groups in the region that are actually far removed from AKP's politics. This indeed may damage the AKP's standing with other reformists in the region. Turkey would be wise to be advised to be open to engagement with all powers in the region while maintaining a neutral stance with them all. It will be a huge challenge.

Lastly, I thoroughly recommend Professor Altunışık and TESEV's work to anyone interested in current developments in the region and the role Turkey plays in these. It is a thoroughly enlightening article.

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