

The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy After July 15

Alternatives: Global, Local, Political
2019, Vol. 44(1) 6-18

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0304375419837415

journals.sagepub.com/home/alt



Bulent Aras¹ 

Abstract

This article analyzes attempts to redirect foreign policy against multiple crises in Turkey that inhibit change. The gap between the country's capabilities and resources and its regional and international commitments has overshadowed former success stories in Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) by casting an all-encompassing sense of siege, retreat, and isolation. The new narrative and guided political mobilization by government after July 15 in Turkey saw the redirection of foreign policy as a necessary response to the emerging situation, not an offshoot of failure in the previous era. A combination of efforts toward program change and problem/goal change characterized the leader-driven redirection in TFP. This article argues that despite the new narrative and authoritative control of the implementation of foreign policy, presumed redirection or recalibration is unlikely to happen in TFP in the post-July 15 era. There is not a solid plan for change and reform in foreign policy or in the state apparatus at large but rather only a rhetorical emphasis on such actions.

Keywords

Turkish Foreign Policy, state crisis, foreign policy change, institutions and foreign policy, capacity building, bureaucracy

The failed coup on July 15, 2016, has been a wake-up call for urgent need for institutional reform in Turkey. The period after failed coup not only pertains to the massive purges and changes in state cadres but also signifies a broader need to consolidate state power in Turkey. This article will analyze attempts to redirect foreign policy against the multiple crises after July 15, which are, more broadly, part of a larger state crisis in Turkey. Accordingly, the failed coup resulted in not a break with past but rather led to an attempt for fine-tuning in Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) in response to changing domestic landscape and international context.

TFP is a case in point of the growing mismatch between the ideas and worldviews of the political leadership and foreign policy practice. This mismatch has emerged as one of the driving factors in the quest for change in foreign policy in the post-Arab Spring era. The gap between the country's capabilities and resources and its regional and international commitments has overshadowed former success stories in TFP by casting an all-encompassing sense of siege, retreat, and isolation. The liberal approach in foreign policy, despite the selective pragmatic flexibility of the ruling Justice and

¹ Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University, Tuzla, Istanbul, Turkey

Corresponding Author:

Bulent Aras, Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University, Tuzla, Istanbul 34956, Turkey.

Email: bulent@sabanciuniv.edu

Development Party (AKP) leadership, turned out to be unsustainable and, eventually, a hard sell for the public vis-à-vis burgeoning crises. Foreign policy became a battleground for domestic schisms nurtured also by increasing political polarization in the country. The political elite gradually lost track of earlier commitments and a sense of ownership regarding broad regional and international issues beyond those core issues they could manipulate to achieve their domestic objectives. These elites turned against each other while, paradoxically, trying to consolidate electoral support based on vital foreign policy issues such as Syria, Cyprus, the Kurdish question, and relations with the West and Russia in general.

The half-baked plans to adjust foreign policy faced not only a deepening state crisis calling for an urgent change in the name of *raison d'état* but also further erosion of human and material resources for such an endeavor against prevalent domestic concerns. The failed coup attempt engendered a unique opportunity for adjustment in foreign policy since postcoup national consensus held the potential to minimize opposition to institutional and policy reform. However, the hope for a consensual political atmosphere left its place a deepening state crisis in a short period time that has been framed in a way to resuscitate enemy-threat perceptions among the Turkish public. In this sense, the postcoup state crisis narrative was what hegemonic actors made of it and was imposed on the opposition and the public at large. The ideational and conversational construction of the crisis was about “the mapping together of a great variety of disparate events unified through the identification of some common essence” (Hay, 1996, p. 266). On that note, the failed coup was “intersubjectively interpreted as necessitating change” (Widmaier, Blyth, & Seabrooke, 2007, p. 748).

The post-July 15 narrative elevated the degree of legitimacy for what Hermann (1990, p. 5) calls “self-correcting change” of foreign policy makers to move in an alternative course of foreign policy. Looking through the model of Kleistra and Mayer (2001, pp. 381–414), indicators for political change—that is, public support, political mandate, and vested interests—in the post-July 15 context in Turkey were interpreted as carriers of change rather than barriers. Recalibration in foreign policy emerged as a “corrective” political objective of the ruling party since July 15, even if more on a rhetorical basis. In addition, the atmosphere of uncertainty in the postcoup era created opportunity for authoritative policy making, and this role was taken over by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to impose his vision on TFP. Barnett (1999, pp. 8–9) underlines that policy makers constantly seek “to guide political mobilization toward a particular outcome and for a particular goal by using symbols, metaphors, and cognitive cues to organize experience and fix meaning to events.” The new narrative and guided political mobilization by AKP government in Turkey served to represent the redirection of foreign policy as a necessity of the emerging situation, not an offshoot of failure in the previous era. A combination of efforts for program change and problem/goal change characterized the leader-driven redirection in foreign policy. The former implies qualitative changes in the means and methods, while the latter points out the replacement of initial goals and purposes with the new ones (Herman, 1990, p. 5).

I argue that despite the new narrative and authoritative control of the implementation of foreign policy, presumed redirection or recalibration is unlikely to happen in TFP in the post-July 15 era. In this sense, the absence of a novel vision and readjusted foreign policy goals, the priority of domestic calculations over international concerns, the inability to bridge the gap between commitments and resources, among others, substantiate this argument. The AKP leadership seems to ignore the fact that “[C]rises can be conceived, following constructivist approaches, as endogenous to institutions and policies” (Natorski, 2016, p. 647). The new narrative of living constantly in “extraordinary” conditions and the need for survivalist strategies do not correspond with the requirements for capacity and institution building. Such narratives fail to address the endogenous nature of the larger crisis. Against this background, there is not a solid plan for change and reform in TFP or in the state apparatus at large, rather only a rhetorical emphasis on such actions.

The Systemic Crisis

The change to presidential system has eroded the regular functioning of parliamentary democracy without putting a well-defined constitutional order in its place in Turkey. The new power structure has accelerated the ongoing, and to some extent pending, changes in the structure of foreign policy making since the end of the Cold War. The main resistance to change was hegemonic role of the military bureaucracy, which assumed subordinate roles to all other institutions in foreign and security policy. First, the traditional power houses, such as the National Security Council, Military and Foreign Ministry, lost their previous influential positions and retained only some auditing and implementing roles. Second, the foreign policy became an extension of partisan domestic politics for the purposes of bringing victories to home in the eyes of government and eventually losses in the perspective of opposition. The idea that foreign policy should be based on national interests has become an epic of past. Third, the diminishing roles of traditional institutions paved way for rise of personalities as the main determinant factors of policy. This radical shift is also a reflection of blurring of boundaries between domestic politics and foreign policy, and politicization of latter. Namely, last decade has arguably seen “Gül’s foreign policy,” “Davutoğlu’s foreign policy,” and, above all, the overarching personal hold of “Erdoğan’s foreign policy.” Although the political leadership relies on the choices of the ruling party and supporting clientele, the personal preferences determine governmental line and alignments in foreign policy.

The turn from institutions to personalized foreign policy line further widened the burgeoning gap between ideas and capabilities in foreign policy for the sake of pursuing political agenda of the AKP and personal choices of its leadership. The early success of the AKP’s foreign policy largely relied on the convergence of the Erdoğan–Gül, top personalities in party leadership, orientation toward Europeanization, their unprecedented initiatives of conflict resolution, that is, Cyprus and Armenia, and support of the pro-European bureaucracy toward European Union (EU) integration (Aydın, Özcan, & Akyaz, 2006, pp. 77–90; Karaosmanoğlu, 2000, pp. 199–216). The quest for an ambitious policy in Turkey’s wider neighborhood gained applause but did not succeed to earn approval of bureaucratic cadres. The new grandeur forced bureaucratic elite out of their secure zone and to take responsibility, among others, in conflict geographies in neighboring geography and some faraway territories, that is, Africa and Asia (Aras, 2015). As a bureaucrat aptly put, “The Turkish bureaucracy was ill-equipped to provide an expansionist or even a more conciliatory soft power role beyond its traditionalist concerns for security and stability.”¹ In Davutoğlu era—the period between 2009 and 2015—TFP was to a large extent corresponded to political overreach and the undermining role of the bureaucracy, only if demonstrating its unpreparedness for such an active role (Yorulmazlar & Turhan, 2015, pp. 337–352). Davutoğlu attempted

to bridge this gap by bringing together his team of experts and co-opted a selective cadre including the Foreign Ministry’s top diplomats, which made a remarkable start but failed to build on preliminary efforts for outreach when the Arab revolts undermined the pillars of Turkey’s regional policy. (Aras, 2017, p. 4)

The Gül and Davutoğlu eras also represent a missed opportunity for capacity building to bridge the gap between ideas and capabilities in foreign policy structure and guiding new grandeur in particular in regional policy. This period was unique in terms of domestic stability and international environment that provided opportune prospects for new foreign policy orientation. The half-baked endeavors for capacity building left Turkey lack of necessary military, intelligence, academic, linguistic networks, and alternative sources of power projection. The ideational richness without capacity ended up with an approach of a rhetorical and, in a way, historicist-romantic understanding of its neighborhood (Aras, 2015). One also needs to take note that, despite more than 250 years of

Westernization attempts, the Turkish presence and networks in Western circles have been limited and proven unsustainable at a time of global restructuring.

Overall, the capacity gap with material and ideational components created a transitional deficiency in foreign policy. Ideationally, the absence of a foreign policy ethos among bureaucratic cadres which would corroborate to changing principles and mechanisms and harmonize regional profile and relations with international powers such as the EU, the United States, Russian Federation, and China is a major problem.² While the bureaucracy caught to the ideology of status quoist approach of “Peace at Home, Peace in the World,” which is reflection of the ideal of world peace following Kellogg–Briand Pact in 1930s’ interwar period, the AKP leadership aimed to raise Turkish profile through regional initiatives and integration. On the one hand, the conventional bureaucratic line upholds the idea that Turkish modernization was still incomplete and thus the focus should be on domestic consolidation, that is, elimination of domestic threats, on the other, the AKP government attempted to sail beyond territorial boundaries (Mufti, 2009). The lack of national debate on the validity of foreign policy approach and absence of political ownership other than AKP are main reasons for this misfit.³ As a result, Davutoğlu’s (2010) zero problems policy fell victim of institutional shortages and became dependent on stories of success by mainly personal traits and political engagements without bureaucratic encompassing of its principles, which rendered it transient.

Yet, beyond this divergence on principles and goals on foreign policy, the ruling party failed to ascertain its claim for regional role in generating the required institutional capacity and governance networks. Apart from the Turkey’s International Cooperation Development Agency’s (TIKA) development and aid projects in a geography from the Southeastern Europe to Africa, and faraway Asian territories, as a soft power projection tool, the cultural, intelligence, and diaspora components of the organizational structure of foreign policy largely remained intact. It was a bit shocking to learn that only after the coup attempt that the government accepted the need to accelerate institutionalization of foreign intelligence, which again was added to the National Intelligence Agency (MIT)’s prerogatives with a legislative change as late as April 2014.⁴ On the part of soft power, *Yurtdışı Türkler* for helping Turkish diaspora activities and Yunus Emre Institute for promoting language and culture did not succeed to evolve to active policy agencies and has been unable to foster a Turkey brand in target geographies in accordance with the ambitious foreign policy agenda (Aras & Mohammed, 2018). In addition, Turkey’s diplomatic missions, though number-wise reached to a prominent level,⁵ remained behind the requirements of Turkey’s ambitious Africa, Asia, and Latin America openings. This capacity was further weakened by high number of purges within the diplomatic cadres following July 15 failed coup. Although there is substantial progress in academic and civil society capacity through creation of new universities and burgeoning number of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the quantitative increase did not match with the needs of TFP and their input also remained marginal in foreign policy-making process.

The humanitarian arena has been a realm of TFP in which policy makers performed far beyond average. Turkey became one of the top donor countries in global terms, hosts highest number of refugees, undertaking a vital role of shock absorbing vis-à-vis Syrian quagmire. Turkey’s Red Crescent (Kızılay), official Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) organization, and humanitarian NGOs have been leading agencies in well-regarded interventions humanitarian crises beyond the border, while the education and health infrastructure proved strong enough to accommodate 3.5 million refugees. In addition, Turkey’s humanitarian NGOs took independent initiatives to help people facing humanitarian disasters in a widespread geography from Somalia to Myanmar and became civilian leg of the Turkish version of “humanitarian diplomacy” (Akpınar, 2013; Aras & Akpınar, 2015).

In this period, TFP has been marked by Erdoğan’s personal choices especially since 2014 presidential elections. The earlier framework of foreign policy which had been largely designed

by Ahmet Davutoğlu was changed according to Erdoğan's personal decisions. Erdoğan gave a message to the world that he took over foreign policy from Davutoğlu and became the ultimate decision maker. His immediate move was to cultivate relationships with his counterparts by trying to deepen his existing ties and develop new ones.

Erdoğan's foreign policy has also been determined by the blurring of the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy. The change of his discourse from conservative democracy to nationalist conservatism throughout the years has found reflection *inter alia* in his foreign policy approach. TFP received its share from the harsh and conflictual discourse of its new coxswain. In addition to challenging Turkey's traditional partners, Erdoğan did not hesitate to develop relationships controversial leaders.⁶ Erdoğan's personal decisions and perceptions have also become influential in TFP as has been evident in his criticism of Sisi or Assad, cornering Saudi Crown Prince Selman by Kashoggi murder, or his close relations with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar.

As with many countries in the region, the Arab Spring has been a turning point for Turkey as well. The positive change in TFP before the Arab Spring toward more peace, stability, and cooperation in the region was quickly and unexpectedly turned by the uprisings into a process of securitization as a result of Turkey's own domestic problems and problems pertaining in its backyard (Aras & Falk, 2016). Since the 2014 presidential election, the symbolic presidential palace (Beştepe Külliyesi) has become the mainstay for foreign relations as Erdoğan mustered a team of advisors and public relations (PR)/social media experts to undertake day-to-day formulation of policy guidelines. This selection has proven consequential in the adaptation of rhetorical animosity against the West and regional rivals. The president also appointed his senior advisors as ambassadors without portfolio, which was construed as preparation for presidential appointment of noncareer ambassadors (see Note 3). The presidential spokesperson, Dr. İbrahim Kalın, arguably received a superior position in the political hierarchy and set the tone for foreign policy as the President's Messenger-in-Chief. As an extension of the presidency's outreach, yet another novelty has been the establishment of the AKP lobby and civil society organizations in foreign capitals, which not only transgressed the prerogatives of Turkish embassies in terms of representation but also overreached via initiatives for social engineering of the diaspora against anti-Turkey groupings.⁷ The holding of elections abroad for the first time in the 2014 presidential elections also enlarged the AKP's political influence over the Turkish diaspora, especially in European countries. AKP has two offices in Belgium and Northern Cyprus and aims to open seven more in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia.⁸

President Erdoğan's quest to lead and steer a new course for the regime has earned additional, though far from consensual, political legitimacy beyond his electoral mandate. This came on top of a virtual bureaucratic shutdown with massive purges in the bureaucracy and the near elimination of power brokers in the military–security apparatus. Therefore, the government–bureaucracy relationship has turned into a one-way relationship more than ever before. The government has appeared committed to appoint purely loyalist elements of the bureaucracy to top positions. In that sense, yielding to the government's predetermined policy choices has become the default mode, while formulating alternative scenarios and cost-benefit analysis has become risky for political survival. Overall, this symbiotic government–bureaucracy relationship has carried the risk of minimizing the effectiveness of policy making and undermining the government's ability to steer the growing internal and external crises.

Erdoğan's role in all aspects of the state, especially TFP, and as the *de facto* center of power in Ankara thus set out the building blocks of the presidential system. The approval of constitutional changes on April 16, 2017, was a major step to institutionalize what has been dubbed as "the Turkish-type presidential system" (Gergerlioğlu, 2018). However, even beyond the opposition's reluctance to accept the results of the referendum, the dual system of parliamentary regime and presidential authority over three organs of the government created centralized confusion in Ankara.

While parliament still held the power to enact laws and seal the government's policies, Erdoğan's overarching personality rose above all limits of legality-institutional checks and separation of powers, which is still held as a defining element in the Turkish constitutional regime. The abnormality was that while the parliamentary system was largely upheld up until the June 2018 elections, with the cabinet members approved and supervised by the parliament, presidential decisions were kept outside the supervision of the legislative organ. This situation not only undermined the basics of the parliamentary system but also put the AKP politicians in an uncomfortable situation of defending Erdoğan's foreign policy practices before the parliament, even when the president infringed upon the political prerogatives of their respective governments.

The June 24 presidential and parliamentary elections have proven a new landmark in the transition to the presidential system. Having defied the remnants of electoral opposition to the AKP's rule, President Erdoğan now feels that, perhaps more than ever before, he has the mandate to steer a self-designed course for the Turkish government. This was expeditiously reflected in the post-June 24 bureaucratic restructuring. First, Erdoğan minimized the political and institutional authority of the ministries. Government ministers turned into appointed technocrats, lacking the political mandate of parliamentary representation. Four ministers who were elected for parliamentary seats, namely the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Finance, and Justice, had to abandon their seats in accord with the constitutional arrangement to separate the presidential authority from parliamentary oversight. Second, the presidential palace was transformed into the epicenter of policy making with new councils and offices. For example, the Security and Foreign Policies Council has the mandate to formulize alternative policies and carry out coordination with stakeholders including the ministries, civil society organizations, and experts. Even if the president and members of the council were only appointed as late November 2018,⁹ it is quintessentially designed to function similar to the National Security Council in the U.S. presidential system. Military has a subservient role in the new bureaucratic structure of security and foreign policy making and has been placed under the mandate of Ministry of National Defense in the Presidential Cabinet. Third, the president utilized his ultimate and peculiar authority to appoint top bureaucrats. The appointment of high number of noncareer ambassadors by the president to top priority posts like Japan, China, Indonesia, Holland, among others, signals transition to a bureaucratic governance of foreign policy by the president's political and managerial priorities. The foreign ministry now has three deputy ministers: one replacing the traditional political director-undersecretary post, the second assuming the tasks of former undersecretary of the EU Ministry—which was integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)—and a third assuming financial and administrative tasks. The appointments are telling of the way ahead, with the first two ministers appointed from among career diplomats and the third being a former political advisor to the minister. In this sense, while the day-to-day functioning of foreign policy is left in the hands of career bureaucrats, the future design and path of foreign policy will now be administered by AKP political cadres.

The Political Crisis

In Turkish politics, as well as in comparable political systems, the governing party is comprised of a coalition of competing political allegiances. Erdoğan's individual hold on to power within the party ranks has been a product of political exigency, not a cast process developed in foreseen stages. Erdoğan might owe his power to fighting back the resistance of the bureaucratic and oligarchic elements in the state system; yet, in any case, he has also been able to steer clear of them thanks to coalition building inside and beyond party dynamics. Occasionally, he has utilized the relations with EU and the United States and co-opted the liberal intellectuals and even the Gülenists to tame the bureaucratic leviathan. Beyond these "external" elements outside the party ranks, Erdoğan had the backing of co-opted Erbakanists-Islamists (*Milli Görüşçüler*), Europeanists, statist, nationalists,

Kurds, and neoliberalists within the AKP who were, in general, supportive of Turkey's global economic integration with different degrees of embrace of the country's defining Turkish-Islamic identity.

This whole coalition is now a relic of the past. Erdoğan seemingly has absolute control in the party and over the political system in Turkey. He has been able to marginalize the opposition, defy alternative levers of power, and isolate possible contenders for leadership within the party ranks after effectively dividing them through co-optation and/or sidelining. He rules over a regime, which has democratic legitimacy thanks to mass electoral appeal but is far from inclusive and consensual due to minimal integration of competing interests of class, religion, ethnicity, or ideology. The resultant operating system is dependent on Erdoğan alone and lacks ideological consistency and balancing factors against policy failures, let alone institutionalization.

Erdoğan's capacity to address critical issues of Turkish politics such as the Kurdish question or Turkish nationalism is one of the reasons for his ability to protect his peak position in Turkish politics. Despite the fact that these issues are not in the original agenda of the AKP, he saw no harm or risk in putting them in the agenda when he considered it to be necessary. He took uncommon walks in owning these issues and was able to gain more Kurdish votes than even the People's Democratic Party (HDP) as the pro-Kurdish party (see Note 7). When the tide turned, he was quick to abandon the Kurdish question and he took on a banner conveyor job for Turkish nationalist concerns. This pragmatic twist *inter alia* saw the seeds for AKP-Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) alliance by securitizing Turkish politics to prevent Kurdish separatist groups from maneuvering and by reclassifying the political framework according to presidential terms in order to install Turkish-Islamic exceptionalism as conclusive ethos in the state contraption.

Erdoğan has been largely criticized lately for dragging Turkey into authoritarianism, particularly by Western circles. It should, nevertheless, be noticed that he has possessed the capacity to set a conservative-nationalist alliance, which has demonstrated support for his domestic and foreign policies. His majoritarian comprehension of politics has enabled him to demonstrate prudence in molding the requests and worries of the public majority which partially clarifies his constituent achievement. However, his political heritage would extensively rely upon how this stupendous alliance of Turkish conservative-nationalists could suit the interests and worries of unheard groups in the society, for example, secularists, Kurds, Alevis, and estranged scholarly people including the bigger assemblage of college graduates and experts.¹⁰

The failed coup attempt of July 15 offered a brief moment of opportunity for Erdoğan to overcome polarization and promote cohesion within the Turkish society since the majority of the people had united against the coup (Keyman, 2016). However, the alleged "Yenikapı spirit" proved to be short-lived and the adoption of an Erdoğan-driven presidential system appeared to go out on a limb of barring non-AKP worries at the command of a majoritarian Turkish-Islamic conservatism. In its current form, Turkish politics under Erdoğan provides two alternatives for political competition: loyalty and resignation inside the governing party, protest and rebuff from the opposition.¹¹ Thus, political stability depends on either integrating the opposition's concerns or, with a short-termist outlook, their exclusion—which, for Erdoğan's transitional path, strategically sets a barrier between the discontented in the AKP and moderate elements in the opposition.

Polarization is further deepened by the dissident dynamic in Turkish politics and also affects Turkey's foreign policy discourse. Since the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy are blurred, foreign policy increasingly becomes an extension of domestic policy and any criticism thereof is considered commensurate to treachery. Western passivism against the failed coup attempt made the Turkish government and public feel isolated and created resentment. Government circles were prompt to propagate a conspiratorial crusade against Western powers that further obstructed plans for cooperation with Western partners in fixing Turkey's damages. The opposition in Turkey used this as an opportunity to disrepute Erdoğan and his government. The withdrawal of support

from Turkey's traditional partners and its external isolation as a result of new regional and international developments, the Turkish government has imported foreign policy success stories to be used for domestic consumption.

In general, the tipping point between domestic politics and foreign policy has been the Turkish government's Syria policy, which has had divisive spillover effects. Erdoğan's unwavering support for the Syrian opposition and categorical rejection of the Assad regime has caused a major rift between the government and the opposition. While the former defended the Syrian policy in humanitarian and geostrategic terms, the latter labeled it as sectarian and expansionist. Within this framework, the government has tapped into Islamic-nationalist concerns about the marginalization of Sunni interests in Syria and Iraq as well as the Kurdish march toward autonomy and independence. The opposition, in turn, has played into opposing Alevi and Kurdish concerns associated with fears of a Sunni onslaught (see Note 3). Overall, the divisive views of TFP in Turkish politics have undermined efforts to ensure security and stability inside and beyond its borders, which has further fed into multiple crises in TFP.

Following the erosion of an active and soft power approach in TFP, Turkey was left with no choice but to turn more and more insular, primarily for self-protection against heightened security risks. In that, changing geostrategic equations played a major role. First, Russian and Iranian interventionism obliterated Turkey's largely self-assigned leadership role in the Syrian transition. Second, the Obama administration's (and now Trump administration's) wobbling stance against regional crises undermined an assumed Turkish American cooperation to steer the region toward normalization. Third, the prevalence of sectarian dynamics, fanned by the Saudi–Iranian rivalry, bogged down Turkish designs, more precisely pretensions, of an all-embracing outreach to bring together moderate Sunnis and Shias (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016). Fourth, the changing dynamics of Arab geopolitics put Turkey on a collision course with pro-Western Sunni powers—that is, the Gulf monarchies (with the minor exception of Qatar), Egypt, and to a lesser extent Jordan—who were apprehensive about Turkish support for political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016). As a result, Turkey found itself embroiled in immediate multifrontal confrontation against Kurdish, Russian, Iranian, Western, and Arab interests in addition to structural discords with Israel, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, and Greece in its broader neighborhood.

Therefore, Turkey was not left with many options besides moving toward rapprochement with Russia to hedge against its growing isolation. However, how far an emerging “Turkish–Russian partnership” could serve the Turkish case for regional security and conflict resolution—from Syria to Cyprus, Armenia, and Ukraine—remains an open question. In theory, the Russian mastery of prospering in frozen conflicts contradicts the Turkish need for regional stability in order to maintain both internal political balances and economic growth. Yet, in practice, the two countries have proven adept at cooperating against the destabilizing effects of the Syrian spillover and joining forces to ameliorate the exclusionary policies of the West, particularly the United States.

The populist and more remarkably insular turn in Turkish politics, in accord also with global trends, has undermined Turkey's broader need for mending fences. First, the government-controlled media and social media channels have produced anti-American, European, British, German, Iranian, Israeli, and Arab rhetoric for domestic consumption, which has left scant room for the desired reset in foreign relations. Turkey's earlier claim to rise above extant schisms in regional and global politics has given way to staying out of hegemonic regional and global coalitions and, hence, overall isolation. There is urgent need for nuanced diplomacy, coalition building, and toning down of antagonistic rhetoric, which makes international headlines daily (see Note 1). Second, there is also need for bipartisan consensus for weathering the multiple crises in foreign policy. The divisive nature of post–Arab Spring geopolitics undermined the delicate balances in Turkish politics. Therefore, what is needed is to take into consideration the present secular-Islam, Kurdish–Turkish, and Alevi–Sunni cleavages in Turkish politics against complex geopolitical challenges. Last but not

least, Turkey's quest for recalibration and conflict resolution carries the risk of being construed as capitulation and a U-turn, which again calls for broader domestic dialogue in policy making to ensure long-term follow-up of national interests.

The government occasionally hints at its readiness for cooperative arrangements with all possible partners, yet the fine-tuning between rhetoric and policy has largely been lost. This, in turn, gave further boost to mutual mistrust with Western and regional countries. Despite a pretense for catching a tune with Moscow, and to a lesser extent with other regional capitals such as Riyadh and Tehran, Turkish regional policy is under duress from all directions and entails a broader recalibration. The Yıldırım government, which replaced Davutoğlu in May 2016, appeared hopeful of recalibration with a seemingly pragmatic understanding of foreign policy under the motto of "minimizing the number of enemies and maximizing friends" (Dalay, 2016). While at face value this did not sound much different than "zero problems," it aspired to narrow Turkey's conflict map, especially in relation to Israel, Russia, Syria, and Iraq. There was an implicit element of renunciation of the Davutoğlu era in terms of being pro-American and pro-European and, by implication, acting against Turkey's national and regional interests—hence, the repudiation of the decision to hit the Russian jet on the Turkish–Syrian border. It was a quest for denouncing the Davutoğlu era as a whole in the ensuing efforts for regime consolidation in coalition with the nationalist MHP and implicitly the ultranationalist elements in the establishment.

While Prime Minister Yıldırım might not have opted for an anti-Western course in the beginning, the failed coup attempt and the inability to garner concrete support for Turkey's cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq inevitably gave way to a rhetorical acceleration particularly against Washington, Berlin, and Brussels (both North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the EU). The progovernment papers and social media agents epitomized assumedly "anti-imperialist" discourse in order to vindicate the government's postcoup diplomacy. Alienating Western allies, the new government had to settle for reinvigorated ties with Russia, which also reflected the ideological preferences of the tacit AKP-MHP-ultranationalist (*ulusalcılar*) coalition at home (Yetkin, 2016). One of the policy implications of Turkey's growing isolation from the West was seeking Russian security guarantees for Turkish cross-border operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets and respect for Turkish interests in northern Syria in return for a negotiated truce in Aleppo and more recently in Idlib.

In general, it might be fair to say there have been two contradictory forces in TFP in the new era. First, President Erdoğan virtually shut down any alternative in foreign policy thinking, which sealed his ultimate domination in TFP. While the 2013–2018 era could be dubbed as "the elimination of opposition" through fierce politicking, social media campaigns, and electoral exclusion, the June 24 elections have marked the end of overemphasis on asymmetric threats from the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) to the PKK as well as political rivals for power. Rather, Erdoğan now feels the need to see his power accumulation have concrete policy returns against an electorate ridden with ever-recurring crises. Second, to get the country out of crisis mode, Erdoğan has to implement effective, functional, and results-oriented policy making, which would force him to seek a new middle ground with Western and regional actors. Indeed, following a Hobbesian approach to counter all opposition, Ankara has lately adopted a more conciliatory approach toward the United States and the EU following an earlier rapprochement with Russia in Syria. Turkey's handling of crises after June 24 has been visibly more nuanced, especially given the fact that Ankara relatively managed to stay out of trouble and gained diplomatic ground in Idlib, the Pastor Brunson crisis, the Khashoggi murder, and lastly, the quadrilateral meeting with Germany, France, and Russia on Syria in Istanbul in 2018. Overall, there has been a will, surely led by Erdoğan, for fence-mending to create ample room for maneuver against the burgeoning economic and political downturn of his embattled presidency for the last 5 years.

Yet this attempt for transition to moderating the gloomy crisis mode faces the challenging task of accommodating the new AKP-MHP coalitional dynamics. Above all, Erdoğan's will to get rid of checks on his power now contradicts the need for co-opting the ultranationalist and insular worldview of its coalition partner. The MHP's statist background and ingrained advocacy for a security-first outlook in foreign policy is likely to undermine the government's need to recalibrate foreign policy. On the contrary, Erdoğan now feels the political need to keep the MHP close at hand more than seeking a new balancing act to co-opt Western partners in his quest to ensure security and stability in the neighborhood.

Overall, the government's balance sheet since the July 2016 coup attempt is a testament to this foresight. Despite the large-scale erosion of the bureaucratic cadres after the purges, the government chose to conduct a three-pronged war against terrorism beyond the conventional fight against the PKK and the Islamic State (ISIS) in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, the postmodern fight against FETÖ has put much strain on the government's resources in its intelligence, security, legal, financial, and external components. The end result of this large-scale fight coupled with domestic polarization has been Turkish involvement and confrontation against a broad range of sources of instability. Although the military and security services seemingly operate under the government's control, further entanglement in conflicts might aggravate the systemic and political crises of transition in Turkey and risk further militarization of foreign policy, which would, in turn, further increase the role of the MHP in Turkish politics.

Conclusion

The July 15 signified recurrent crisis in state apparatus and became a stern blow to foreign policy making in Turkey. TFP was already undergoing a process of reset and recalibration due to policy failures in previous period. Through the lens of the model of Kleistra and Mayer (2001), the post-July 15 political environment presents indicators as the carriers of change. However, the systemic and political crises analyzed above created obstacles for reset in the foreign policy-making process, consolidated personal and partisan prerogatives in foreign policy, and decreased the room for maneuver in regional and international policy, placed inconsistent policy agenda before bureaucrats and strengthened the perception that AKP government seeks international orientation change. There is a discernible inclination to see hard power in regional policy, signs of espousing Eurasianist policy premises, prospective rapprochement with Russia and attempts to mend ties with EU and the United States. However, these changes do not satisfy the criteria of program change and problem/goal change in Herman's (1990) model. The reason for this is the government's aversion to dealing with the crises intrinsic to institutional setup and policy making and preference to initiate change through a hegemonic political narrative and coercive use of state power. I suggest that a consensual approach against the failed coup could have minimized the impact of political and systemic crises on a possible reform initiative in state apparatus and in foreign and security policy as well. Simply put, this has not been the case, and Turkey faces multipronged crises in foreign and domestic policy arenas.

The painful process of switching from parliamentary system to presidential one kept the uncertainty alive within the foreign policy cadres and in institutional structure, while accompanying political crisis blurring the line between domestic political concerns and foreign policy priorities. As a continuation of these problems, the aggravation of the security conditions resuscitated statist competitions for survival concerns within a wide spectrum of political constellations in Turkey. Consequently, "the rising concern of protecting territorial sovereignty has resulted in a psychology of constant state of emergency in the domestic arena and militarization in regional policy" (Aras, 2017, p. 12).

This article analyzes an ongoing state crisis as ruling party struggles to restructure foreign policy, in particular in the neighboring regions. There is no prospect that the recurrent state crisis would disappear any time soon, and the security situation is not likely to improve as well, even by a positive account. Turkey's difficulties in the neighborhood and declared fights against transnational terrorist and antagonistic groups require immediate action. However, the problems are not manageable by short-term measures. The challenges extending from domestic politics to the region and vice versa entail long-lasting, well-planned, and carefully implemented policies. The most pressing issues reflective of these crises are generating capacity, institution building, and interagency coordination among traditional and new agencies of foreign policy structure. There is an urgent call for serious planning and thinking on how to reset and recalibrate foreign policy, and the principles, institutions, and deliveries of a new policy line.

There remains a potential hazardous impact of deep running polarization and fragmentation over half-hearted endeavors for normalization in domestic landscape, rerouting and recalibration of foreign policy apparatus and state structure at large. The failed coup attempt was a direct corollary of weak state, which was surfaced with visible fragility and vulnerability, even preceding massive purges and uncertainty, in the state–bureaucracy relationship. As I argued elsewhere, “search for systemic change, state building, dealing with multiple security threats, economic stability, and development would depend on all-encompassing, inclusive, and participatory political processes in the country” (Aras, 2017, p. 12). In a political environment that state crisis was put at ease, the search for reset and restructuring in foreign policy would be less challenging for the policy makers. The task is to protect vital national interests in a deteriorating security situation in the neighborhood and protect previous international openings in an era of global turmoil. If this would not be the case, half-hearted and short-term measures accompanied by partisan attitudes, under the duress of political and systemic crises, would be the cause of broader failures in TFP in the period ahead.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Bulent Aras  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0199-0061>

Notes

1. Interview with a bureaucrat in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.
2. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Parti Programı (AKP, party program), August 14, 2001, Retrieved July 8, 2017, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/parti-programi#bolum>
3. Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.
4. The Law (2937) on National Intelligence Agency (MIT) restricted its missions in principle to domestic matters. This deficiency, at a time when Turkey was heavily involved in Syria, engendered political and legal debates about the government and the head of MIT.
5. “Türkiye Dünyada En Çok Dış Temsilciliği olan 6. Ülke,” *TRT Haber*, December 26, 2016.
6. Syria became one of the determining elements of President Erdoğan's personal relations with foreign leaders including his United States, Russian, and Iranian counterparts. Similar topical issues were also experienced with Israel, Germany, Egypt, Austria, Bangladesh, Iraq, and the Gulf monarchies and Venezuela.

7. Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, January 4, 2017.
8. “AK Parti’den 7 ülkede temsilcilik” *Hurriyet Daily News*, Retrieved December 29, 2018, from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ruling-akp-plans-to-expand-overseas-with-nine-new-offices-124960>
9. Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalın was appointed as the acting-president of the SPFC. “Kalın’a Yeni Görev,” *Habertürk*, Retrieved November 2, 2018, from <https://www.haberturk.com/ibrahim-kalin-guvenlik-ve-dis-politikalar-kurulu-baskanvekilligine-getirildi-2202697>
10. Interview with a former member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.
11. An emerging result of the post-15 July political atmosphere has been the alienation of the opposition, which later gave way to the Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader’s 450 km “Justice March” from Ankara to Istanbul to protest, in particular, the arrest of a CHP member of parliament.

References

- Akpınar, P. (2013). Turkey’s peacebuilding in Somalia: The limits of humanitarian diplomacy. *Turkish Studies*, 14, 735–757.
- Aras, B. (2015). Reform and capacity building in the Turkish foreign ministry: Bridging the gap between ideas and institutions. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17, 269–286.
- Aras, B. (2017). *Turkish foreign policy after July 15*. Istanbul, Turkey: Istanbul Policy Center.
- Aras, B., & Akpınar, P. (2015). The role of humanitarian NGOs in Turkey’s peacebuilding. *International Peacekeeping*, 12, 230–247.
- Aras, B., & Falk, R. (2016). Five years after the Arab Spring: A critical evaluation. *Third World Quarterly*, 37, 2252–2258.
- Aras, B., & Mohammed, Z. (2018). The Turkish government scholarship program as a Soft Power Tool. *Turkish Studies*. doi:10.1080/14683849.2018.1502042
- Aras, B., & Yorulmazlar, E. (2016). State, region and order: Geopolitics of the Arab Spring. *Third World Quarterly*, 37, 2259–2273.
- Aydınli, E., Özcan, N. A., & Akyaz, D. (2006). The Turkish military’s march toward Europe. *Foreign Affairs*, 85, 77–90.
- Barnett, M. N. (1999). Culture, strategy, and foreign policy change: Israel’s road to Oslo. *European Journal of International Relations*, 5, 5–36.
- Dalay, G. (2016, July 2). Dış politikada ölçek küçültmeli ama ölçü de kaçmamalı [There should be a limitation for foreign policy but not to a great extent]. *Karar*. Retrieved August 5, 2017, from <http://www.karar.com/yazarlar/galip-dalay/dis-politikada-olcek-kucultulmeli-ama-olcu-de-kacmamali-1523>
- Davutoğlu, A. (2010, May 20). Turkey’s zero-problems foreign policy. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved August 5, 2017, from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy/>
- Gergerlioğlu, M. T. (2018). *Türk tipi cumhurbaşkanlığı: Kurumların vesayetinden halkın iktidarına* [Turkish style presidency: Form tutelage of institutions to People’s rule]. Istanbul, Turkey: Hayykitap.
- Hay, C. S. (1996). Narrating crisis: The discursive construction of the ‘winter of discontent’. *Sociology*, 30, 253–277.
- Hermann, C. F. (1990). Changing course: When governments choose to redirect foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 34, 3–21.
- Karaosmanoğlu, A. L. (2000). The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey. *International Affairs*, 54, 199–216.
- Keyman, F. (2016, September 26). Devlet sorunu/İkilemi: 15 Temmuz’dan alınacak ders. *Karar*. Retrieved August 5, 2017, from <http://www.karar.com/gorusler/fuat-keyman-yazdi-devlet-sorunuikilemi-15-temmuzdan-alinacak-ders-256279>
- Kleistra, Y., & Mayer, I. (2001). Stability and flux in foreign affairs: Modelling policy and organizational change. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 36, 381–414.

- Mufti, M. (2009). *Daring and caution in Turkish strategic culture: Republic at sea*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Natorski, M. (2016). Epistemic (un)certainty in times of crisis: The role of coherence as a social convention in the European neighbourhood policy after the Arab Spring. *European Journal of International Relations*, 22, 195–230.
- Widmaier, W. W., Blyth, M., & Seabrooke, L. (2007). Exogenous shocks or endogenous constructions? The meanings of wars and crises. *International Studies Quarterly*, 51, 747–759.
- Yetkin, M. (2016, December 14). *PKK saldırısı, Avrasya lobisi ve ürperten senaryoya güç kattıç Hürriyet*. Retrieved August 5, 2017, from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/pkk-saldirisi-avrasya-lobisi-ve-urperten-senaryoya-guc-katti-40306102>
- Yorulmazlar, E., & , & Turhan, E. (2015). Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab Spring: Between Western orientation and regional disorder. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 17, 337–352.

Author Biography

Bulent Aras is a senior scholar and coordinator of the conflict resolution and mediation stream at Istanbul Policy Center, is a professor of International Relations in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Sabancı University, and is a visiting researcher at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. His current research interests include geopolitics of Arab Spring, nonstate actors in peacebuilding, and bridging the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy. Recent work has been published in *Third World Quarterly*, *Middle East Policy*, *International Peacekeeping*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *International Journal*, *Journal of Balkans and Near Eastern Studies*, and *Journal of Third World Studies*.