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The Dynamics of Emerging Middle Power Influence in Regional and Global Governance: The Paradoxical Case of Turkey

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Abstract

This article strives to understand the properties, potentials and limits of middle power activism in a changing global order. Extensive debate on the rise of emerging powers notwithstanding, the potential contributions of emerging middle powers in regional and global governance and the imminent challenges they face in their struggle for an upgraded status in the hierarchy of world politics is an understudied issue. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a broad conceptual framework for middle power activism and testing it with reference to the Turkish case. In this context, we aim to address the following questions: what kind of roles can emerging middle powers play in a post-hegemonic international system? What are the dynamics, properties, and limitations of emerging middle power activism in regional and global governance? Based on an extensive study of the Turkish case, our central thesis is that emerging middle powers can make important contributions to regional and global governance. Their ultimate impact, however, is not inevitable but depends on a complementary set of conditions that is outlined in this study.

Keywords: emerging middle powers, post-hegemonic world order, Turkish political economy, Turkish foreign policy

This article aims to explore potential roles to be played by the ‘emerging middle powers’ in changing regional and global governance with particular reference to Turkey. The international system is currently passing through a major transformation that is likely to alter the global hierarchy of power relations in a permanent fashion. A quasi-consensus has already emerged in International Relations and the Global Political Economy literature that multipolarity will constitute the dominant trend of the coming decades, as power is gradually shifting from advanced Western states to emerging latecomers (Kupchan 2012; Zakaria 2009; Buzan and Lawson 2014). It is quite striking that the developed economies’ share of world GDP declined from 54 to 43 percent during 2004-2014 (Kynge and Wheatley 2015). China, the most astounding ‘status seeker’ emerging power, has already surpassed the US in 2014 to become the largest economy in purchasing power parity terms (PwC 2015; Larson and Shevchenko 2010). It is expected that “in market exchange rate terms, China [will] overtake the US in 2028 despite its projected growth slowdown” (PwC 2015). The relative decline in US hegemony, in particular, injected a high dose of fluidity and uncertainty into the international system and opened up new opportunity windows for regional powers to shape respective regions in their own image (Buzan and Waiver 2003). Indeed, the global diffusion of power and the accompanied rise of emerging economies such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and near-BRICS¹ (Mexico, South Korea, Indonesia, Turkey) are contributing to the emergence of a new world (dis)order with significant possibilities for co-operation and conflict. It is now apparent that we are living in a “world of regions,” (Katzenstein 2005) in which the “emerging regional architecture of world politics” (Acharya 2007) demands a thorough analysis of the “multiregional system of international relations” (Hurrell 2007).

¹ We use the term ‘near-BRICS’ for regional powers achieving high growth performance, demonstrating regional leadership ambitions and following economy-driven autonomous foreign policy strategies. In the literature there are alternative definitions attributed to these states, such as ‘middle powers’, ‘swing states’, ‘emerging powers’ and ‘great peripheral states’. In this study we call them ‘near- BRICS’ in order to refer to the ‘demonstration effects’ of BRICS on these countries. In other words, these states possess characteristics similar to BRICS regarding their economic growth performance and rising regional and international presence; nevertheless, they are not as significant as BRICS in terms of their economic scale (see Öniş and Kutlay 2013, 1424).

An over-riding theme in this new multiregional system of international relations concerns the future of the liberal international order (Ikenberry 2010, 511; Mearsheimer 2010; Shambaugh 2013; Kagan 2008; Jacques 2009). There is no doubt that the changing power capacity, policy preferences, and role conceptions of emerging powers become key properties that inform the future of regional and global governance. However, the debate on emerging powers mainly concentrates on potentials and limits of BRICS for the future of international order. In contrast to the dominant trend in the literature that emphasizes the leading BRICS, our focus in this study is on the second group of ‘emerging middle powers’ or the ‘near-BRICS’ such as Turkey, Mexico and Indonesia, which tend to receive less attention in the existing literature. A plausible reason for this lacuna is that the middle power literature mostly deals with established middle powers such as Canada and Australia (Chapnick 1999, 2000; Ravenhill 1998; Carr 2014; Beeson 2011). There are a number of similarities and differences between established and emerging middle powers. The material capacity constraint in terms of military power, size, and demography are the common aspects of these two groups. The established and emerging powers, however, differ significantly in terms of their role model and governance capabilities within international system. Established middle powers are often considered as ‘catalysts’ for promoting a liberal international order, ‘facilitator’ for building pro status quo coalitions, and ‘manager’ for disseminating orthodox norms and practices in their respective region (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1993; Ravenhill 1998; Carr 2014). The emerging middle powers, which still remain an underexploited mine in the literature seem to have different qualifications in this aspect. First, the capacity of emerging middle powers to serve as successful role models and stability-providers is heavily constrained by the comparatively low quality of their own development and democratization experiences. Indeed, as Jordaan (2003, 171-172) points out unequal development appears to be a pervasive feature and the practice of liberal democracy still remains work in progress in such states.

Second, domestic political economy features as well as semi-peripheral position in the hierarchy of global capitalism inevitably make emerging middle powers hesitant players in legitimizing the existing liberal international order, when compared with established

middle powers (Schweller 2011, 291). Rather, as Alden and Vieira underline (2005), their critique of the international system “has been rooted in a deeper structural analysis.” States of this nature face the dilemma that they are both critical of the existing liberal order dominated by the established Western powers, and at the same time they have an incentive to be a part of an international order based on liberal norms. Given these underlying dichotomies, some intricate and intriguing questions emerge: Under what conditions can emerging middle powers play a proactive role in the current international order? What are the dynamics, properties, and limits of emerging middle power activism in regional and global governance? Our central thesis is that emerging middle powers can make important contributions by amplifying their weight in regional and global governance. Their ultimate policy impact, however, depends on a mutually interacting and complementary set of conditions, composed of four material and ideational factors (see below). Having relied on middle power literature and extending it, the second part of the paper outlines this set of conditions that enables emerging middle powers to play a proactive role beyond their borders. The third and empirical part operationalizes the conceptual framework by turning a critical eye on Turkey as a striking but mainly underexplored case of ‘emerging middle power’ with potential demonstration effects in its neighboring regions and beyond. The final part offers some generalizations that inform the broader literature on emerging middle powers in regional and global governance.

Emerging middle powers in regional and global governance: A framework for analysis

Middle power is a contested and controversial concept in the literature (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1993; Ravenhill 1998; Carr 2014) to the extent that some scholars such as Chapnick (1999; 2000) even call it as a ‘myth’ rather than an analytical category. Middle powers, as Wang and French (2013) suggest, are players with constrained material capacity in comparison to major powers in world politics and, as a result, their ability to single-handedly influence key regional or global policy agendas or conflicts is heavily

restricted. On the other hand, these actors also have the capacity to “protect themselves from the undesirable impacts of other countries’ actions” (Wang and French 2013; also see Carr 2014, 71). This structural constraint, therefore, does not mean that world politics is a game only played by great powers. Especially in a post-hegemonic world order, middle powers have more room to maneuver through a variety of instruments and policies. The newly emerging middle powers in particular are becoming more vociferous in world affairs especially in the post-crisis global political economy setting (Sandal 2014).² In fact, as Cooper and Mo (2011) underline, “middle powers can punch above their weight”. Yet how can it be possible for emerging middle powers to exert influence beyond their borders? Under what conditions can these actors punch above their weight? Having relied on the mainstream literature on established middle powers (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1993; Ravenhill 1998) and synthesizing it with the recent debates (Jordaan 2003; Wang and French 2013), we shall identify four critical conditions, which allow emerging middle powers to play a productive role in a rapidly shifting global environment. These conditions include (i) the ability to serve as role models based on their soft power resources, i.e., the quality of their developmental and democratic credentials, (ii) the capacity to build effective coalitions with both established and emerging powers on the basis of a consistent set of normative principles, (iii) governance capacity based on a recognition of the limits of middle power influence and avoiding a mismatch of expectations and capabilities, and (iv) the capacity to identify niche areas in regional and global governance where they can make a distinct and unique contribution. In order for emerging middle powers to play proactive roles in regional and global governance they need to craft a comprehensive framework that recognizes the complex interdependence and meticulous synthesis of these four building blocks. We should state at the outset, however, that these four conditions are *interactive* and mutually inclusive, rather than *hierarchic* in terms of operationalization and implementation. The building blocs are also composed of relatively definitive/stable variables latent in all countries by virtue of being a middle power —such as material capabilities— and improvable limits

² We should note that Sandal (2014) investigates middle power status/policies as a pragmatic legitimation strategy. However, we diverge from Sandal in the sense that we conceptualize middle power strategy in emerging powers more than being a legitimation strategy. We also see their roles as more than ‘mediators’ in international politics by putting emphasis on the broader conception of their role model capabilities.

—such as role model capabilities, niche diplomacy and alliance building capacity—depending on the context in which emerging middle powers operate. The importance of four building blocks might also vary according to the contextual factors, as it is the case in Turkish example that role model capacity predominates and guides other factors. This suggests that the non-hierarchic and interactive nature of the building blocks of middle power activism reflect not only pure foreign policy settings but also dynamic interaction of broadly structural and domestic political economy settings.

Building blocks of emerging middle power activism

The first criterion for emerging middle powers is related to their capability to serve as a role model both on a regional and global basis. This ability, in turn, is based on the quality of their economic development and democratization performance. South Korea is a good example of an emerging power, whose population is only 50 million. Though not a large country by the standards of China and India, its developmental performance has attracted significant international attention, as the literatures on developmental and post-developmental states clearly testify. Following a long period of authoritarian rule, South Korea, unlike many other emerging powers, has managed to successfully consolidate liberal democracy over the past three decades. Indeed, South Korea has reached a per capita income of 25,000 US dollars, which places her safely in the realm of established rather than emerging middle powers (Shin 2015). South Korea example proves a good empirical record for being a role model as there is evidence available about other countries seeking out its experience in economic growth to learn from. It also demonstrates the ability of emerging middle powers to make a transition from emerging to established middle power status based on their role model and governance capacities. The transition in status, however, takes time, as the institutional structures need to be developed consistently and steadily. The cases of Mexico and Indonesia are also striking, since the two countries have not only achieved noteworthy economic development in recent decades, but have also managed to accomplish substantial transformations of their

political regimes from highly entrenched authoritarian systems to more open and relatively democratic polities. Needless to say, both Mexico and Indonesia lag significantly behind South Korea in terms of both economic development and democratic credentials. The political regimes of Mexico and Indonesia are still in the hybrid regime category, suggesting that they have some distance to travel in terms of consolidating liberal democracy. In comparative terms, the classic examples of established middle powers such as Canada and Australia are far more advanced in terms of their levels of economic development and their long-lasting commitment to liberal democratic norms (Jordaan 2003). It is quite striking, however, that the emerging middle power category includes a significant group of countries, which are consolidated democracies or hybrid regimes with a significant potential for further democratization. For instance, the MIKTA group or the second generation BRICS are broadly more democratic and hence more homogenous than the first generation BRICS, which includes both highly authoritarian (China and Russia) as well as democratic states (India, Brazil and South Africa). What is important for our purposes is that emerging middle powers, through their role conceptions, can contribute to the economic and democratic development of states, especially within but also beyond their immediate neighborhood to raise their own regional and international standing. As Patience (2014, 212) aptly accentuates where their role conceptions do “achieve positive currency within and outside [their] borders, other nation states may try to emulate [them], thereby not only establishing or enhancing [their] international legitimacy, but also transforming the circumstances of [their] region –or even aspects of the global order.” To this end, coherent and internationally recognized role models, especially in the realm of democratization and economic development, can upgrade the status of emerging middle powers.

The second building block of middle power activism is related to effective alliance formation or coalition building. The ability of such states to form inclusive and encompassing coalitions on a consistent set of normative principles becomes a crucial variable that informs their foreign policy success (Ravenhill 1998, 312; Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1993, 19). As Keohane (1969, 296) asserted, “a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic

impact in a small group or through an international institution.” The classic cases of established middle powers such as Canada and Australia are illustrative cases in point, again. Both countries have a good record on building effective coalitions in compliance with their role models and governance capacities in niche areas (for details see Cooper 1997; Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 1993; also see below). In the current context, emerging middle powers, as well, are prone to multilateralism and strive hard to build effective coalitions at emerging international platforms like G20 with like-minded states because none of these actors are powerful enough to become influential on their own. Different than the established middle powers, given the fluidity of the current international order, the backbone of effective coalition building for emerging middle powers has two main dimensions. First, these states generally have historical links to established powers as they socialize in a US-led liberal international order. Turkey, for example, has deep historical and institutional links to the West. Mexico in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) depicts a similar pattern. However, these countries are ambitious and assertive enough to become more vociferous in the emerging regional architecture of world politics. This brings us to the second pillar of their multilateralism strategies. Given the loosening of structure-induced factors and widening scope of coalition building opportunities, emerging middle powers are now eager to hammer out regionalization agreements with other rising states. It is the premise of this article that emerging middle powers are capable of playing this dual role to immensely enhance their status, but will need to rely on building effective coalitions in line with their role conceptions and interest functions along strong and diverse networks. Their diplomatic skills to form effective, inclusive, and overlapping coalition-building will determine the extent to which they can assert their norms, values, and preferences in regional and global politics. For instance, MIKTA in this context is a noteworthy experiment, which brings together long-standing middle powers (Australia), a maturing middle power (South Korea) and emerging middle powers (Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey). It is interesting that MIKTA powers are also members of G-20, hence we have an unusual case of an overlapping coalition building, where emerging powers co-operate with other major and established emerging powers, and at the same time form their own grouping (Jongryn 2014).

The third building block of middle power activism involves the ability to achieve a balance between capabilities, on the one hand, and ambitions and expectations, on the other, which, in turn, is clearly related to the broader governance capacity of such states (Ravenhill 1998, 311). It is true that “power is now a more diffused, smarter and asymmetric concept” that provide ample space for middle power activism (Cooper 2013, 970) yet this activism should constantly be checked and calibrated with underlying material capabilities. In fact, capabilities-expectations gaps are an imminent threat that looms large over middle powers. The emerging states, as ambitious status seekers in a changing international order, can easily plunge into a kind of *power paradox*. While trying to punch above their weight, these states can end up operating well below their potential. This paradox emerges where the leaders of emerging states overestimate their power capacities and opt for overambitious foreign policy strategies while they are navigating new alliance opportunities and niche areas to expand their might. The unintended consequence of power paradox generally tends to be the unfulfilled promises and unanswered threats that massively eradicate the credibility and potential stabilizing roles these states can play. In other words, due to their overambitious foreign policy rhetoric, which is inconsistent with material capabilities, these states, more often than not, entrap themselves with bold promises that they are unable to keep, as we shall demonstrate in detail in the Turkish case below. The discrepancy between the ‘rhetoric’ and ‘action’ emanating from the fragmented governing strategies, in turn, tend to jeopardize their prestige and influence. However, if middle powers can synchronize their capabilities and expectations, they may assume an effective balancing role and contribute towards a strengthening of a cooperation-based multipolar global order.

The final element relates to the ability of emerging middle powers to identify niche areas in regional and global governance, where they can make a unique and exceptional contribution. As argued in the preceding paragraphs, middle powers tend to favor multilateralism and coalition building, due to the constraints imposed by the structure of the international system. To this end, they concentrate on certain niche areas to exert influence and gain competitive advantage in world politics. Cooper (1997), for instance,

asserts that middle powers navigate for gaps and they can fill and perform functional duties in global governance, which is called as ‘niche diplomacy.’ The established middle powers reflect successful examples of niche diplomacy. For instance, Canada is one of the countries that have exercised middle power leadership in human security agenda in global governance (Behringer 2005). Australia represents another successful example of niche diplomacy in the realms of human rights, environmental goals, and leadership on non-proliferation (quoted in Carr 2014, 74). Niche diplomacy is an increasingly crucial field of foreign policy activism for emerging middle powers as well. For example, the South Korean experience is again telling. South Korea, in the context of MIKTA has focused on building research and development capabilities and technology transfer as the key areas where it can make an effective contribution to other MIKTA members as well on a broader scale. Similarly, Brazil’s investments in global health diplomacy (Lee and Gomez 2011, 61-64), Mexico’s investments in global environmental politics, and Turkey’s achievements in humanitarian diplomacy are other striking cases of niche diplomacy that middle powers pursue in order to scale up their power and prestige. The key point in niche diplomacy, however, is that actions need to be consistent with overall capacity, foreign policy behavior and role conception.

Emerging middle power activism: The paradoxical case of Turkey

This part of the article concentrates on the Turkish example as an important but mainly underexploited case of emerging middle power activism in the literature. Turkey has demonstration capacity for other emerging middle powers and possesses a kind of critical case as recent activism in Turkish foreign policy reflects both the underlying potential and imminent constraints of emerging middle powers. There are three strands to the argument. First, Turkey is a striking case of an emerging middle power with rapid economic growth, intense democratization experience, and avowedly proactive foreign policy over the last decade. Turkish foreign policy makers during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era strove hard to position the country as a regional power, demonstrating robust forms of leadership at the regional and global platforms. Second,

the role conception of Turkey gradually shifted from a coercive actor toward a ‘benign regional power’ (Öniş 2013; Öniş 2011). Accordingly, Turkish political elites during the AKP era have become very eager to take responsibility at regional and international forums to enhance the status of the country by situating it as a role model in immediate neighborhood. Third, Turkey is a valuable case for the purposes of this paper not only because of its increasing capacity and political willingness to play an emerging middle power *per se* but also due to the failures and dramatic setbacks it encountered recently. Stated differently, the increasing discrepancy between the ambitions and capabilities in Turkish pro-activism and the unintended consequences stemming from policy miscalculations enable us derive some crucial lessons regarding the nature, potentials, and limits of emerging middle power pro-activism. The following pages, therefore, will delve into the details of the paradoxical case of Turkey in line with the framework outlined in the previous section.

The virtuous cycle: Turkey as a promising emerging middle power

The story of Turkey’s middle power activism is broadly a story of three major phases that demonstrate the ample potentials and imminent risks associated with middle power activism in world politics. The first phase, which provides illuminating examples on how middle powers can punch above their weight, is broadly the period spans from 2002 to 2007. This period corresponds to the initial term of the AKP rule proved to be a real “golden age” under the strong impetus of the EU membership process. The second phase, covering AKP’s second period in office from 2007-2011 was an episode in which the AKP has firmly consolidated its political power in the domestic sphere with the decline in the power and influence of the military elites, which hitherto constituted an important veto player in Turkish politics. In retrospect, the second phase was a period of relative stagnation as the momentum of the reform process subsided in an environment where Turkey was faced with an increasingly negative international environment, with the onset of the global financial crisis and the stalemate in the EU membership process. The third phase, between 2011-2015, in contrast to previous ones, signified a major decline in the AKP’s performance concerning three interrelated realms of economic development,

democratization and foreign policy performance, with important ramifications for its ability to act as an effective emerging middle power in its immediate neighborhood and beyond.

In the early years of the AKP, a process that was also facilitated by a favorable international environment, in particular the global liquidity boom, and the transformative impulse of the EU membership process, Turkey entered into a virtuous cycle that clearly boosted its capacity as a role model. The first pillar of Turkey's middle power activism was the unprecedented performance of the Turkish economy. Following the devastating 2001 economic crisis, Turkey embarked on a series of major economic reforms that spanned from a strict regulation of the financial sector to the establishment of a broad based macroeconomic discipline with a particular focus on the financial balances of the state. The experience of significant regulatory reforms started to be implemented by the coalition government in the aftermath of the devastating crisis of 2000-2001 and then continued during the AKP era in the presence of powerful external actors such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the EU. In the aftermath of the economic reforms that strengthened the state's regulatory capacity, the Turkish economy performed well in comparison to its own historical standards. Turkey also fared well vis-à-vis the growth performance of the world economy. As a result, in current prices, GDP increased from 233 billion US dollars in 2002 to 800 billion in 2014. Turkey's total trade also skyrocketed from 114 to 476 billion US dollars in the same period. GDP per capita rose to 10,404 US dollars in 2014, a threefold increase in current prices (see table 1). Though the increase in constant prices refers to a less impressive outcome, it is still the case that Turkish economy performed quite well in this period.

	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
GDP (US \$ billions, c. p.)	304.9	482	649	617	731.6	774	786.3	823	800.1
GDP Per Capita (US \$)	4,565	7,036	9,247	8,561	10,003	10,428	10,459	10,822	10,404
GDP Growth (%)	5.3	8.4	4.6	-4.7	9	8.5	2.2	4.3	2.9
Investment (% GDP)	17.4	21.4	21.8	17.2	18.9	22.1	20.6	20.6	20.5

Domestic Savings (% GDP)	15.5	16.0	15.5	13.2	13.5	14.4	14.5	13.4	14.9
Imports (US \$ billions)	69.3	116.8	170.1	140.9	185.5	240.8	236.5	251.7	242.2
Exports (US \$ billions)	47.3	73.5	107.3	102.1	113.9	135	152.5	151.8	157.6
CAB (% GDP)	-2.47	-4.57	-5.75	-2.24	-6.49	-9.7	-6	-7.9	-5.8
FDI (US \$ billions)	1.7	10	22	8.6	9.1	16.2	13.3	12.5	12.6
Fiscal Balance (% GDP)	-8.8	-1.3	-1.62	-5.5	-3.6	-1.4	-2.1	-1.2	-1.3
Total Public Debt (% GDP)	74	59.6	46.5	40	46.1	42.4	39.2	36.1	33.5
Unemployment	10.3	9.5	9.2	13.1	11.1	9.1	8.4	9	9.9

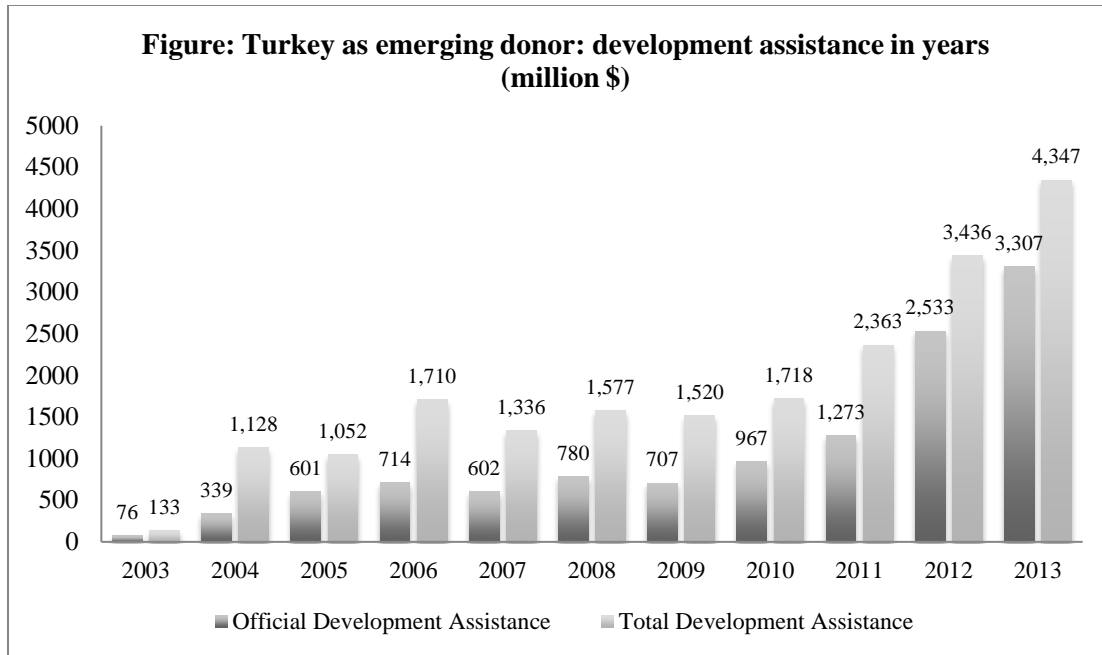
Source: Turkish Statistical Institute, The Undersecretariat of Treasury and Ministry of Development

The second pillar that helped enhancing Turkey's promise to serve as a role model for its immediate and the extended neighborhood was the inspiring speed of democratization reforms embarked on during the early part of the decade, again a process that was initiated by the previous coalition government and continued under the AKP rule. A vibrant economic environment coincided with an unprecedented wave of democratization partially thanks to the acceleration in the EU candidacy process. During this period, Turkey enacted a series of liberalizing reforms that covered a wide range of areas including improvements in human rights regime, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, gender equality, and minority rights (Müftüler-Baç 2005). Turkey also abolished the death penalty and crafted a new civil code in line with EU legislation. The anti-terror law, which was frequently criticized by European institutions, was also revised and liberalized. The rights of non-Muslim communities to build places of worship were recognized by the state and their properties were restored (Rodriguez, Avalos and Yılmaz 2013). Furthermore, the demilitarization of Turkish politics intensified and the control of the military over Turkish politics was reduced significantly as part of EU-membership process so that civil-military relations were tilted in favor of the elected politicians (Keyman and Gümüşçü 2014). The enviable economic performance and impressive democratization record catapulted Turkey into a model in the eyes of the world as the only democratic Muslim country with a functioning market economy in a region where authoritarianism constitutes a norm. The Economist, for instance, noted "With its secular democracy, booming economy and growing international clout, Turkey has become an inspiration for Muslims around the world" (The Economist 2011).

In this context, the third pillar that contributed to Turkey's ability to serve as a role model in its neighborhood was the proactive foreign policy of the government. During the course of the AKP's first two terms in office, Turkey adopted an explicitly proactive foreign policy strategy that positioned Turkey as 'an emerging soft power' in its immediate neighborhood with strong linkages with its traditional transatlantic alliance. Stated differently, the governance of Turkish foreign policy mainly relied on a set of practices that prioritized mutually inclusive coalitions with established major players and emerging regional powers simultaneously. There are two dimensions of Turkey's 'smart coalition-formation' strategy. First, the foreign policy making elite envisioned Turkey's role conception as an impartial broker in the region. The AKP government reckoned, in the words of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, that "Turkey's unique access to both the global north and south makes it a suitable mediator over a wide geographical range" (Davutoğlu 2013, 90). Accordingly, Turkey mediated Israel-Syria indirect talks in 2008 (Walker 2008); helped reconciliation between Iran and the West on the nuclear talks in a joint effort with Brazil (Hafezi 2010); and organized informal meetings among various political groups from different sects, ethnicities, and religions in the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular to mitigate the imminent conflict risks. In a similar vein, in order to strengthen its role as a 'multiregional power,' Ankara succeeded to bring Serbs and Bosniaks, archrivals in the Balkans, to join the "Trilateral Balkan Summit" in 2010 under the auspices of Abdullah Gül, the Turkish president of the time (Yinanç 2010). Another example of Turkey's honest brinkmanship was the so-called Istanbul Process, launched in January 2011, which targeted the reconstruction of Afghanistan with all neighboring countries.³⁷ Second, Turkey quested for a more visible stance beyond its immediate neighborhood in global fora. Following meticulous lobbying efforts, Ankara succeeded in becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2009-2010, which Turkish government accurately hailed as "a reflection of [Turkey's] increasing weight in international politics and the confidence that the international community has in [Turkey]" (Hurriyet Daily News 2008). As of 2008, Turkey did not renew the stand-by agreement with the IMF and upgraded its status in the IMF from a 'debtor' to a 'creditor' country. Concomitantly, Turkish policy makers opted for a more active role in the governance of global finance and development in the post-

crisis political economy landscape. It became an active member of G-20 summits, during which, the successful fisco-financial reforms adopted in the aftermath of 2001 crisis turned into an additional asset for Turkey to promote itself as a model country for emulation in the realm of global financial regulation at G-20 meetings.

In terms of niche diplomacy, Turkey targeted key areas to expand its power and influence in global governance. As part of its role conception as a soft-power oriented regional and global actor, Turkey heavily invested in humanitarian diplomacy over the last decade. In fact, in the words of Davutoğlu, “humanitarian diplomacy [has become] one of the explanatory principles of Turkish foreign policy, probably the most significant one” (Davutoğlu 2013, 865). To this end, Turkey created public institutions and reinforced the existing ones to better coordinate humanitarian activities almost all around the world. Accordingly, Turkish Airlines, TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency), Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent), TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey), and AFAD (Emergency Disaster Management Presidency) gained prominence in the foreign policy repertoire, along with a plethora of humanitarian NGOs (Haşimi 2014). This “humanitarian turn” in Turkish foreign policy was reflected in numbers: The total amount of development assistance had reached 4.3 billion US dollars in 2013, up from only 133 million a decade ago (see figure below). Turkey now hosts almost 2.5 million Syrian refugees in its borders and spent more than 8 billion US dollars as of February 2016. As a result, Ankara’s ranking ascended from 19th to 3rd among government donors of international humanitarian aid.⁴¹ As Bayer and Keyman document, niche diplomacy in this period was pursued meticulously to position Turkey as a significant humanitarian actor (Bayer and Keyman 2012). Turkey adopted comprehensive policies to fill the gap in this niche area as Turkish policy makers see it fit into their broader proactive foreign policy perspective as soft power-driven regional player.



Source: Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)

In summary, on the basis of a number of key indicators, Turkey improved its position in the hierarchy of international politics during 2002-2011. As a result, Turkey emerged as a promising middle power, which had influence and impact beyond its material power capacity. In all dimensions of middle power activism that is framed in this study Turkey became a textbook definition of how and through which mechanisms a middle power can punch above its weight. It appears that democratization, economic development, and multilateral foreign policy strategy impinged on and feed into one another, as a result of which, the country entered into an unmatched virtuous cycle. It therefore contributed to the stability and order in its neighborhood as a role model and source of inspiration.

The vicious cycle: Turkey's reversing fortunes as an emerging middle power

If Turkey's rise as an emerging middle power during 2002-2011 is the bright side of the coin, the post-2011 is equally striking since it demonstrates the conditions under which middle powers can exponentially erode their capacity and undermine their own potential. From this perspective, the Turkish case generates some crucial insights for the broader

literature on the nature and limits of emerging middle power activism. Rather ironically, Turkey plunged into a vicious cycle in terms of the democratization-economic development-foreign policy proactivism nexus during the post-2011 era, with the three elements feeding into one another and producing a powerful vicious cycle. First, there were significant setbacks and retreats on the democratization front. The 2011 general elections proved to be a crucial turning point in this context. In June 2011, the AKP succeeded in outperforming its rivals by obtaining almost half of the total votes, an exceptional achievement in Turkish political history. It was the first time for a political party to win three successive elections with increasing vote shares. This is an unusual phenomenon compared with Western style democracies, where incumbent powers have a tendency to lose their popularity over time as a result of governmental fatigue. This unprecedented success boosted the confidence of AKP elites and generated overconfidence on the part of the executive at a time when the checks and balance mechanisms that constrained the AKP and its powerful leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the previous periods were progressively dismantled. Turkish democracy in the post-2011 period suffered from the absence of effective opposition and powerful external anchors.

In retrospect, the post-2011 period signified an era of ‘electoral hegemony,’ in which the power of a party becomes so strong that “it exceeds simply being a strong majority government” (Keyman 2014, 23-24). The AKP’s third term in office is therefore qualitatively different as domestic politics was increasingly characterized by intense polarization and gradual erosion of institutional checks and balance mechanisms under the exclusive accumulation of political power. Turkey during the final phase of the AKP era increasingly moved to a state of illiberal democracy. Özbudun argues that Turkey in this period was a ‘delegative democracy’, a type of democracy in which horizontal accountability, i.e., “accountability to other autonomous institutions of the state such as the legislature or the courts”, is almost non-existent (Özbudun 2014, 162). In retrospect, it appears that the unassailable electoral hegemony of the ruling party under a dominant and influential leader injected high dose of self-confidence and material resources to “rule in the way that they saw fit” (Öniş 2015, 26). As a result, the post-2011 witnessed the revitalization of heavy-handed Turkish state, with a traditional tendency to engineer

the social and political life from above —this time in a religiously conservative form through a series of changes in the education system, religious affairs, and control over the bureaucracy (Talbot 2015).

Second, the Turkish economy also encountered important challenges in the post-2011 period. There are two dimensions that lead to the reversing fortunes of the economy. Clearly, part of the problem was external and related to the new equilibrium that emerged in international economy following 2008 global financial crisis. In the post-2009, the global markets entered into a sharp turbulence, in which, low growth rates, declining foreign investment, and shrinking space for trade has become defining parameters of the new normal. Not surprisingly, Turkish economy was also influenced from the global slump (Öniş and Kutlay 2013). For instance, Turkey's economic growth declined to 3.1 percent annually in the post-2011, from almost 7 percent in the pre-crisis period. Turkey's foreign direct investment performance also staggered due to the tightening liquidity conditions in the global markets (see table 1). Beyond the negative external influences, developments in the domestic plane also hampered Turkey's economic performance. What was quite striking in this context was the way whereby the creeping authoritarianism in the political sphere spilled over and had negative repercussions in the economic realm. The independence of regulatory institutions was increasingly undermined. A good example was the growing interventionism by political authorities in the operations of the Central Bank. This clearly made a sharp contrast with the early years of the AKP rule where independent regulatory institutions constituted the part and parcel of a strong regulatory state that contributed to economic success (Özel 2012). Similarly, increasing politicization of public tenders and various rent-extraction mechanisms jeopardized the rule-based governance logic in the Turkish economy (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Today's Zaman 2015). Another salient feature of the third phase of the AKP involved serious allegations of corruption against key party figures, a phenomenon that was conspicuously absent during earlier phases of the AKP era. These forces contributed to an episode of relative stagnation of the economy, clearly signified by the fact that Turkey's GDP per capita appeared to be stuck around 10,500 US dollars over the last five years. The Turkish economy is confronted with serious challenges. It is

increasingly identified as one of the most risky countries among the emerging countries due high current account deficits and dependence on foreign capital (Beattie 2015). The fragile situation in question raised the possibility of a new domestically generated economic crisis for the first time since 2001; thereby undermined Turkey's role model capabilities.

The vicious cycle that has entrapped Turkey reached its peak with the paradigmatic shifts in Turkish foreign policy in the aftermath of the Arab upheavals. The political earthquake that shook the Arab world also reshuffled the fundamentals of Turkish foreign policy. In fact, in the initial phases, the tectonic transformations taking place in its neighborhood provided a historical window of opportunity for Turkey to expand 'Turkish model' throughout the region because for the first time in decades the establishment of a liberal democracy with free market economy has become a genuine possibility in the Muslim world. The then foreign minister Davutoğlu even uttered in the Turkish Grand National Assembly "A new Middle East is about to be born. [And Turkey] will be the owner, pioneer and the servant of this new Middle East" (Hurriyet Daily News 2012). The post-Arab spring Turkish foreign policy, however, experienced certain inconsistencies, which undermined Turkey's effectiveness as an influential emerging middle power.

Turkey, in the new turbulent era of the Arab revolutions, increasingly suffered from rhetoric-action inconsistencies. While Turkish domestic politics experienced a striking illiberal turn under the electoral hegemony of the governing party, Turkey claimed to support democratic transitions in its neighborhood. The sharp divergence of domestic politics and foreign policy behavior clearly undermined the credibility of Turkey as a key actor of democracy promotion, in turn also undermining its ability to serve as a regional role model. Second, Turkey increasingly suffered from capabilities-expectations inconsistencies. Ankara's over ambitions to position as an 'order-setting regional power' and transform the region in its mirror image led to Turkey's over-involvement in the domestic affairs of key Arab spring countries, especially in the context of the ongoing war in Syria and the domestic turmoil in Egypt. The unintended outcome was the growing perception of Turkey as a country that increasingly contributed to instability in

the region by taking active part in sectarian conflicts that appeared to contrast sharply with its previous positive image of a benign regional power and honest broker.

The era of the Arab revolutions has been a strenuous and, on the whole, disappointing period for Turkey's middle power aspirations (Kuru 2015). In the pre-Arab spring era, Turkey has been able to position itself as a benign regional actor whose soft power was based on economic interdependence, cultural ties, and common identity. Democracy promotion was not explicit on the foreign policy agenda. From the onset of the Arab revolutions onwards, however, Turkey projected its image of a key democracy promotion actor. Beyond the turbulence and complexity of the region itself including the inherent resilience of the authoritarian structures that steadily undermined the early optimism associated with the Arab uprisings, Turkey undermined its own credentials due to a number of overlapping inconsistencies. While acting very assertively to accomplish political change in specific instances, like al-Assad's Syria and Sisi's Egypt and over-intervening extensively, the AKP government also looked in the direction of authoritarian BRICS, identifying the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an alternative to the EU, which again sharply contrasted with its democracy promotion aspirations and credentials. It was not surprising, therefore that Turkey's relations with its western allies faltered in the post-Arab uprisings. As a result inclusive and encompassing coalition building proved very hard to achieve for Turkish policy makers. While Turkey continued to be firmly anchored into Western security structures such as NATO and bilateral security ties between Turkey and the US continued to be important, the Western perception of Turkey was progressively of a country that was no longer an integral part of the Western identity. For instance, vital rifts have emerged between Turkey and the Western countries over Syria where Turkey has been single-mindedly committed to the removal of the al-Assad regime, whilst showing a certain reluctance to deal with the major threat from the Western perspective, the ISIS and the jihadist threat that it presented. Ironically, Turkey found itself increasingly isolated and once again encountered insurmountable security problems with a variety of countries in its neighborhood. Authoritarianism at home was accompanied by isolationism abroad, which key figures of the AKP foreign policy-making elite also reluctantly acknowledged, using the term "precious isolationism" and

“value-centered isolationism” to denote “Turkey’s principled loneliness” (Hurriyet Daily News 2013).

To be fair, Western powers also did not display an admirable record during the Arab uprisings. In Egypt, one could argue that the western powers failed to adequately engage with the Islamist actors preceding the coup and then failed to mount an effective challenge to Sisi’s military-based regime after the coup. Similarly, there was reluctance on the part of the Western states to challenge the Assad regime and the humanitarian crisis that it produced in the same way that they decided to deal with the Qaddafi regime in Libya. These criticisms are valid. However, they also illustrate the limits of how much Turkey could have achieved on the basis of its own actions as an extremely ambitious and pro-active actor, in a region where both great powers as well as important middle powers—including key regional actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran— have been actively involved. From a longer-term perspective, one could argue that the interests of Turkey and the Western powers did not diverge sharply. However, in the short run, major synchronization problems emerged between the parties (Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015). This, in turn, paved the way for the deepening of the capabilities-expectations gap in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey increasingly projected the image of a ‘torn country’ in the emerging geo-political axis of the new order, where it has been uncomfortably placed between the Western axis, on the one hand, and the Russia-China axis, on the other. Its foreign policy has been characterized by oscillations between excessive unilateralism, on the one hand and commitment to multilateralism, on the other. In a striking fashion, Turkey found itself in a power paradox typical to emerging middle powers: While trying to punch above its weight, Turkey turned into an actor performing well below its capabilities.

Turkey as an emerging middle power: A balance sheet			
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Outcomes/Assessment
Ability to Serve as a Role Model	Significant economic development with an important jump in the early years of the AKP Era. Significant democratization reforms under the strong impetus of the EU. The only democratic country (with Israel) in a neighborhood where authoritarianism is norm.	Weakening of economic performance coupled with a noticeable authoritarian turn in domestic politics during the final term of the AKP government has weakened Turkey's claims to present itself as a role model.	Significant potential coupled with a weakening of performance in recent years, reducing Turkey's ability to present itself as an effective role model both on a regional and global basis.
Coalition Building Capacity	Enjoys traditional links to established democracies of the West, through NATO membership and candidacy for EU membership. Has become more active in global fora and with relations to major emerging powers both through active involvement in G-20 and new organizations like MIKTA.	Oscillations towards unilateralism and inconsistency in coalition building practices. Promoting democracy in the Middle East, whilst looking towards the authoritarian BRICS and the Shanghai Corporation Organization as a new reference point in foreign policy. Weakening of the identity with the West and the EU. A combination of growing authoritarianism at home and unilateralism abroad leading to isolation.	An uneasy mixture of multilateralism and unilateralism. Again weakening of performance in recent years, which has resulted in performance significantly below the country's true potential.
Governance Capacity and Capabilities-Expectations Balance	In the early stages of the AKP era, Turkey's role has been in line with an effective benign regional power role. Rediscovering its neighborhood and forming significant economic, diplomatic linkages with the multiple regions with which it has been engaged namely, the broader Middle East, Russia and Eurasia as well as the Balkans.	A major mismatch between ambitions and capabilities, again starting from the later part of the AKP era; Over-activism abroad through engagement in the domestic political conflicts of countries like Syria and Egypt has been costly and has brought criticisms of Turkish foreign policy as being sectarian or divisive, contributing to regional instability.	Weakening of Turkey's role due to expectations-capabilities mismatch and the failure to govern Turkey's foreign policy effectively and in line with middle power capacities. From a comparative perspective, an important case that has undermined its potential through over-interventionism.
Identifying Niche Areas in Global Governance	Turkey's role conception as a mediator in key regional and international conflicts; Projecting itself as a key emerging donor and humanitarian actor, with an emphasis on helping the least developed nations; also presenting itself as a model in the area of banking regulation and financial governance following the successful restructuring in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis.	Turkey's role as a mediator undermined by its policy of taking sides in key disputes. Open door policy towards Syrian refugees in line with its claims to establish itself as a major humanitarian actor. The policy has been costly in terms of the number of refugees involved and the domestic insecurity and instability that this policy has generated.	A mixed picture; elements of success coupled with elements of failure. Elements of failure are more striking in the recent era.

In conclusion, the authoritarian turn in Turkish politics and the eroding economic performance reversed the fortune of the country as a role model in the eyes of international and regional actors in the post-2011. The overambitious foreign policy strategies and inability to form inclusive and encompassing coalitions during the post-Arab spring period undermined Turkey's middle power activism. On that note, it is crucial to underscore that domestic politics, economic performance, and foreign policy activism impinged on one another in an interactive manner so that the vicious cycle informed all building blocks of Turkey's middle power activism. As a result, Turkey, once seen as a Muslim mid-range country with a robust democratization performance and economic vibrancy, has gradually lost its attractiveness and potential to play a crucial stabilizer role in regional and global governance structures. The Economist described this sharp swing as follows: "Until recently Turkey, a NATO member that is in membership talks with the EU, was hailed as a shining example of a Muslim country where Islam and democracy can coexist. But a mix of hubris, pro-Sunni sectarianism and bad judgment on the part of the Islam-inspired Justice and Development (AK) party, has drained the country of its soft power" (The Economist 2014).

Lessons learned from the Turkish case: Implications for broader literature

This article strove to understand the properties, potentials and limits of emerging middle power activism in a changing global order. Extensive debate on the rise of emerging powers notwithstanding, the potential contributions of *emerging middle powers* in regional and global governance is an understudied issue in the literature. This study aimed to fill this gap by offering a broad conceptual framework for middle power activism and testing it with reference to the Turkish example, a striking but a neglected actor in the emerging middle power literature. To this end we offered a synthetic approach that aimed at combining mainstream literature (Cooper, Higgott and Nossal 1993; Ravenhill 1998) with recent debates (Jordaan 2003; Wong and French 2013). Accordingly, we stated four *interactive* and mutually inclusive, rather than *hierarchical* factors that condition middle power activism. The building blocs are composed of

relatively definitive/stable variables latent in all countries by virtue of being a middle power —such as material capabilities— and improvable limits —such as role model capabilities, niche diplomacy and alliance building capacity— depending on the context in which emerging middle powers operate. We maintained that the importance of four building blocks might vary according to the contextual factors, as it was the case in Turkish example that role model capacity guided the other variables. We suggested that the non-hierarchic and interactive nature of the building blocks of middle power activism reflect not only pure foreign policy but also dynamic interaction of broadly structural and domestic political economy settings. To this end, the Turkish case has some remarkable ramifications for the broader discussion of emerging middle power activism.

The first key lesson is that domestic political economy dynamics turns out to be a central driving force for emerging middle powers. The Turkish experience during the early part of the AKP era clearly demonstrates that favorable domestic political economy dynamics contributes to a virtuous cycle with positive spillover effects on its foreign policy and its ability to perform a constructive regional power role as a role model. By a similar logic, the latest phase of the AKP era shows how unfavorable political economy dynamics at home is translated into unproductive forms of foreign policy engagements, which through acts of excessive unilateralism and taking direct sides in difficult domestic conflicts of neighboring states can undermine the soft power capabilities of a potentially important middle power. These findings suggest that despite emerging middle powers have ambitions to ascertain themselves as role models and sources of inspiration in their respective regions in a changing global order, their political and economic development models still suffer from imminent domestic fragilities.

The second broad implication is that, by definition, the term ‘emerging middle power’ signifies recognition of inherent limitations as well as capabilities. A cursory examination of Turkey’s Middle East policy during the era of the Arab uprisings clearly illustrates that the Turkish policy-makers had more grandiose schemes in mind. The emerging middle powers, in an age of excessive fluidity, find themselves on a knife-edge equilibrium in the sense that if they cannot synchronize their ambitions with capacities and balance of

power dynamics, they can easily turn into actors punching well below their weight as an unintended consequence of their unchecked proactive strategies. In that sense, the expectations-capabilities gap is a key factor that can undermine the effectiveness of emerging middle powers and turn them into contributors to instability rather than security producing actors.

The third implication concerns the ability to build effective coalitions on the basis of a consistent set of normative principles. Emerging middle powers face with ubiquitous challenges in alliance preferences as well. On the one hand, they are more critical of the existing western-led world order and inclined to pursue delegitimization strategies. Stated differently, they can easily alienate themselves from their western allies. On the other hand, going unilateral or pursuing active alliances with other emerging powers prove highly detrimental for their stability and influence in global governance. In this sense, the crucial variable that ensures mutually inclusive and encompassing coalitions in an efficient manner is the set of principles that emerging middle powers rely on. The Turkish experience in the context of the Arab uprisings once again illustrates how an emerging power can undermine its international credibility and self-image through rhetoric-action inconsistency. The fact that Turkey was promoting itself as a democracy-promoting actor abroad, whilst undermining democratic principles at home is a clear example of inconsistent norms and their pervasive impact on the alliance formation capacity of an emerging middle power.

In conclusion, besides extrapolating some general tendencies in terms of the properties through which emerging middle powers can punch above their weight in global governance or suffer from acute power paradox, these cases also have certain unique characteristics as well. For instance, in the current tense verse of domestic affairs, the challenge for Turkey is whether it will have the capacity to reverse the negative political economy dynamics of the recent period and revitalize the momentum of the early phase of the AKP era, which will allow it to play a more constructive role in a highly turbulent region. From a broader point of view, the advantage of Turkey compared to other emerging middle powers is that it is located in a region where, in comparative terms,

there are more serious problems to be solved ranging from authoritarian resilience to weak economic development, failed states to jihadism. Hence, it is a region in which an emerging middle power can make a real impact, but only under the condition that it conforms to a certain set of principles that define the appropriate circumstances for effective middle power influence. Thus, in the final analysis, the framework proposed in this study should be applied by taking the contextual aspects of the regions in which these actors are embedded and socialized.

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