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# Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity

CENK SARAÇOĞLU\* and ÖZHAN DEMIRKOL\*\*

**ABSTRACT** *The argument of this paper is that the new foreign policy orientation of Turkey under the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government is a constitutive component of a new nationalist project, constructed and carried out by the AKP over the last decade. The article expounds the ways in which the AKP has reformulated the notions of nation, national history, homeland and national interest and demonstrates the role foreign policy has played in this reformulation. Our point of departure will be the patterns we have observed in the statements and political practices of the AKP government and its officials, particularly the incumbent minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, whose book, *Strategic Depth*, presents a more systematic explanation of the major principles and assertions of AKP nationalism and foreign policy. We will also argue that after the Gezi protests in June 2013 this new conception of nation and nationalism has faced with a deep crisis, which has also exacerbated the problem of pursuing an ambitious foreign policy strategy in international arena.*

## Introduction

As Turkish politics have undergone a rapid transformation under the rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) since 2002, an immensely rich literature dealing with the ideological orientation of this party and its foreign policy has arisen. Most of the scholarly articles written on this subject posit a qualitative break in the AKP period with a traditional foreign policy assumed to be overwhelmingly shaped by a Kemalist ideological framework.<sup>1</sup> These works seek to sketch out the main tenets of this new foreign policy—generally referred to as the rise of ‘neo-Ottomanism’—and assess its possible outcomes in the context of the rapidly changing dynamics of world politics. Nevertheless, while strongly

\*Cenk Saraçoğlu, Faculty of Communication, Ankara Üniversitesi, İletişim Fakültesi, Cebeci, Ankara, Turkey.  
Email: [csaracoglu@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:csaracoglu@ankara.edu.tr)

\*\*Özhan Demirkol, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey

1. Birgül Demirtaş, ‘Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Governments: An Interplay of Imperial Legacy, Neoliberal Interests and Pragmatism’, in Gamze Yücesan-Özdemir and Simten Coşar (eds.), *Silent Violence: Neoliberalism, Islamist Politics and the AKP Years in Turkey* (Ottawa: Red Quill, 2012), p. 214.

emphasizing the transformative effect of this rupture with Kemalism on the strategic thinking of dominant political actors, such works do not sufficiently discuss the resonances of the AKP's own nationalist vision within its new foreign policy strategy.<sup>2</sup> The argument of this paper is that the new foreign policy orientation is a constitutive component of a new nationalist project, constructed and carried out by the AKP over the last decade, and intricately related to the party's quest to build a new kind of nationalism and a new conception of the nation.

The importance of foreign policy in building or consolidating a nationalist project in domestic politics is not something unique to the AKP period in Turkey. Throughout modern history, it has been commonplace for foreign policy to contribute to the construction of national identity and to the perpetuation of nationalism by addressing an 'other' or 'outside' against which the interests of nations are to be protected.<sup>3</sup> Foreign policy discourse in a country is generally considered to be an extension of the state's official ideology, which is more stable, rigid and general compared to party ideologies which are more populist, pragmatic and flexible. The significant degree of consonance between the AKP's new understanding of nationalism and the foreign policy discourse/practice presented in the last 10 years suggests that the party's conception of nationalism is now becoming the new official ideology of the Turkish state.

The relationship between the AKP's domestic, nationalist project and its so-called neo-Ottomanist foreign policy at the international level is threefold. First of all, the AKP's nationalist position has functioned as the major ideational framework and ideological justification for its new foreign policy orientation. Secondly, this new foreign policy orientation and the concomitant foreign policy discourse play a vital role in the formation and solidification of the AKP's nationalist-hegemonic project at home. Thirdly, and as a logical consequence of these first two points, the 'future' of neo-Ottomanism at the international level is not only contingent upon the course of inter-state relations and balances of power in global politics but is also highly reliant on the success or failure of the nationalist project at the domestic level. Such an intricate relationship between the AKP's nationalist project and its foreign policy implies that the AKP's international politics should also be subject to a sociological analysis, as its major elements and possible trajectory have evidently become part of ideological and political struggles in Turkish society. Asking whether Turkey could continue to pursue its neo-Ottomanist foreign policy is, at a certain level of abstraction, tantamount to asking whether the AKP's new vision of nation and its newly defined nationalism is able to achieve hegemony in Turkish society.

The argument of this paper is that this new conception of nationalism has informed the AKP's foreign policy discourse and practice, and that this policy has functioned in turn as an ideological site where this new form of nationalism has gained political appeal and substance. We will expound the ways in which the

2. For examples, see Hasret Dikici-Bilgin, 'Foreign Policy Orientation of Turkey's Pro-Islamist Parties: A Comparative Study of AKP and Refah', *Turkish Studies*, 9(3) (2008); Nicholas Danforth, 'Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP', *Turkish Political Quarterly*, 7(3) (2008); Alexander Murinson, 'The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6) (2006); Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, 'Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy', *Insight Turkey*, 10(1) (2008).

3. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Gertjan Dijckink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

AKP has reformulated the notions of nation, national history, national homeland and national interest and try to demonstrate the role foreign policy has played in these reformulations. At this point we need to highlight that we do not simply claim that the AKP's conception of nation and nationalism is primarily produced through its foreign policy discourse and that Ahmet Davutoğlu, as the minister of foreign affairs, has been the sole architect of this nationalist orientation. This new conception of nationalism has become an integral part of AKP's political discourse in the course of its struggle to construct and consolidate its ideological hegemony in Turkey and to deal with certain 'destabilizing' longstanding problems such as Kurdish question. AKP's foreign policy vision and discourse has become one of the important political domains where this nationalist outlook is reproduced and substantiated. The reproduction and reinforcement of this nationalism in foreign policy is particularly important, because, as stated above, foreign policy discourse in a country represents state's official ideology. In this respect the intricate relationship between AKP's own nationalist discourse and foreign policy discourse point to the fact that the party's struggle for hegemony has progressed far enough to dominate the state discourse.

Accordingly in this paper, we will turn our attention specifically to those official statements where we could see the linkage between AKP's nationalist project and its foreign policy. The excerpts used in this article are not some sporadic statements or isolated expressions that were just found and selected to strengthen the argument of this paper. Rather, they are some of the most demonstrative examples of a coherent foreign policy orientation that AKP gradually built since it came to power in 2002. In this respect the excerpts in this article are elaborated and presented in relation to a general evaluation of the historically specific features of AKP's nationalism and its general foreign policy strategy.

As such, our point of departure will be the patterns we have observed in the statements and political practices of the AKP government and its officials, particularly the incumbent minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu. We will also pay a particular attention to Davutoğlu's well-known book, *Strategic Depth*, which presents a more systematic explanation of the major principles and assertions of AKP nationalism and foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Although it was written just one year before AKP came to power, *Strategic Depth* the ideas in this work have been used as a major reference point for the construction of AKP foreign policy discourse.<sup>5</sup> *Strategic Depth* has provided AKP officials including Tayyip Erdoğan himself with ideas and metaphors for use in daily domestic political language as well. Davutoğlu's books and statements, in other words, have functioned as one of ideological reservoirs through which the AKP officials have enriched their own nationalist discourse in domestic political struggles.

### **AKP's Conception of Nationalism**

Since the AKP came to power after the 2002 elections in Turkey, scholarly publications dealing with its political and ideological orientation have generally focused on the party's relationship with Islamism. This was quite reasonable

4. Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

5. Aras, Bülent, and Aylin Görener, 'National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 12(1) (2010), p. 81.

during the early period of its rule, as the party was founded by some leading Islamist political figures who had dissociated themselves from the RP (Welfare Party), the main Islamist political actor in Turkey to 1998. Such articles tended to discuss whether the AKP could be conceived as a mere continuation of the Islamist politics of the RP in a new guise or whether it represented discontent and hence rupture with traditional Islamist politics that were doomed to become obsolete in the face of the current forces and requirements of globalization.<sup>6</sup> Another mainstream discussion concerned the AKP's relationship with conservatism and liberalism in both the political and economic senses because, at least in the early years of its rule, the party accelerated the EU-led reform process on the one hand, and adhered strictly to neoliberalism in its economic perspective and practice on the other.<sup>7</sup> The final reason that the nationalism of the AKP was downplayed is a pervasive intellectual tendency to presuppose an internal and necessary relationship between Kemalism and nationalism, as though the latter could not exist independently of the former in the realm of ideologies in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> As the overlapping arguments around 'liberalism' and 'Islamism' have dominated discussion in the literature, the AKP's relationship with nationalism and its nationalist character have remained relatively neglected, being the subject of only a few studies.<sup>9</sup>

Nationalism, when organized as an ideology of state, configures the 'moral' and political bonds between citizens and the state, and thereby manufactures the consent or compliance of citizens to the existing social establishment and political rule—a process which is referred to as hegemony in Gramscian sense.<sup>10</sup> The core and common ideational elements that constitute the backbone of hegemonic strategies based on nationalism are the notions of nation, national history and a conception of common/collective national interest.<sup>11</sup> Nationalism, at the most general level, presupposes the historical presence of a particular nation, whose members share some common interests (national interest) that are to be prioritized over any other individual or sectarian interests. Nationalism emerges as a political discourse and position in a society when political actors combine these ideational

6. Metin Heper and Şule Toktaş, 'Islam, Modernity, and Democracy in Contemporary Turkey: The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan', *The Muslim World*, 93(2) (2003); Menderes Çınar and Burhanettin Duran, 'The Specific Evolution of Contemporary Political Islam in Turkey and Its 'Difference'', in Ümit Cizre (ed.), *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Murat Somer, 'Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: Implications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy', *Third World Quarterly*, 28(7) (2007); Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, 'Justice and Development Party at the Helm: Resurgence of Islam or restitution of the Right-of-Center predominant Party?', *Turkish Studies*, 11(1) (2010).

7. Erhan Doğan, 'The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance', *Turkish Studies*, 6(3) (2005); Ziya Öniş, 'Conservative Globalism at the Crossroads: The Justice and Development Party and the Thorny Path to Democratic Consolidation in Turkey', *Mediterranean Politics*, 14(1) (2009); William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

8. See Yasin Aktay, 'Politics at Home Politics in the World: The Return of the Political in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 21(1) (2010).

9. Cenk Saraçoğlu, 'İslami Muhafazakar Milliyetçiliğin Millet Tasarımı: AKP Döneminde Kürt Politikası', *Praksis*, 26 (2011); Simten Coşar, 'Turkish Nationalism and Sunni Islam in the Construction of Political Party Identities', in Ayşe Kadioğlu and Fuat Keyman (eds.), *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011); Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013).

10. Ana Maria Alonso, 'The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicity', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994), pp. 389–390.

11. Michael Freeden, 'Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology', *Political Studies*, XLVI (1998), pp. 751–765; Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 188.

elements in their discourse and practice so as to offer, defend and ‘hegemonize’ a normative political/social project.<sup>12</sup>

However, the ‘concrete content’ of nationalisms can vary in accordance with the different ways in which these elements are discursively defined. The idea of the nation occupies central place and possesses an over-determining effect on other elements since, as Alan Finlayson states, ‘the nation represents a naturalized sphere, a level at which certain values, habits and customs are taken for granted’. For Finlayson, ‘The discourse of national identity may be conceptualized as a matrix, a background against which certain things may be considered, a setting into which a people that considers itself a national people constructs and carries out political projects’.<sup>13</sup>

As opposed to the way it is conventionally portrayed in the literature, nationalism, formulated as such, is at the very centre of the ideological orientation of the AKP and a critical and integral element of its hegemonic strategy. Nationalism is here understood as an ideological instrument of political hegemony, that is, an attempt to win the consent of, ‘interpellate’, and, when necessary, mobilize large sections of society for a particular political project.<sup>14</sup> The AKP’s foreign policy can thus be seen as one of the aspects or ‘moments’ of hegemonic struggle in Turkish society, and its possible trajectory can only be accurately predicted if this domestic dimension is adequately acknowledged.<sup>15</sup> Nationalism provides the AKP with discursive and symbolic instruments with which to constitute durable ideological ties between the party, the state and society when justifying its neoliberal economic policies and defending and formulating its foreign policy discourse and practice. Therefore, the party’s understanding of nationalism and its symbols and ideas are not only a state discourse or rhetoric of party cadres but are also embraced and reproduced in social relations.<sup>16</sup>

The AKP’s ideological orientation possesses the aforementioned definitive features of nationalism: primarily, it envisions a ‘nation’—a homogenous political entity with the members sharing some common characteristics; it also presumes that the members of the nation share a common past; and it assumes a set of common national interests that concerns and cuts across every member of the nation and transcends ‘individual’ and sectarian interests. Nevertheless, the AKP also represents a distinct and, in some respects, a novel form of nationalism in Turkish political history. The ways in which this party has formulated and constructed the conceptions of ‘nation,’ ‘national history’ and ‘national interests’ has differed qualitatively from Kemalist nationalism, which had largely dominated the official ideology of the Turkish state until the AKP consolidated its power as a government party. Thus, what Elias Canetti states in his *Crowds and Power* for different forms of nationalism also holds true for the difference between Kemalist and AKP nationalisms:

12. Umut Özkırımlı, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 33.

13. Alan Finlayson, ‘Ideology, Discourse and Nationalism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3(1) (1998), p. 102.

14. Alan Finlayson, ‘Nationalism as Ideological Interpellation: The Case of Ulster Royalism’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19(1) (1996).

15. Faruk Yalvaç, ‘Strategic Depth or Hegemonic Depth? A Critical Realist Analysis of Turkey’s Position in the World System’, *International Relations*, 26(2) (2012).

16. White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, p. 3.

It must not be assumed that all these national ideologies have the same content. It is only in their importunate appetite and the claims they make that they are alike. They want the same thing but in themselves they are different... people overlook the fact that the concrete contents of these national claims, the real ideologies behind them, are very different from one another.<sup>17</sup>

### **The AKP's Conception of the Nation**

Nationalism is an ideological instrument of building hegemony in a social formation; but at the same time it is a 'subject' or site of hegemonic struggles in the sense that different social forces struggle to represent nationalism and articulate it to their political projects. This struggle also involves attempts to define the nation in a particular way and to determine who is included in or excluded from its scope. This is why in certain social formations 'competing and even contradictory notions of the nation may well exist side by side'.<sup>18</sup> This was also the case with post-Soviet Russian nationalism in the early 1990s. In the process of remaking of Russian state in the 1990s, Russian nationalism became an ideological site where different social and political forces indulged in a fierce struggle to define the scope of Russian nation and homeland. The contentions between Eurasian Russian nationalism, Slavic-oriented Russian nationalism and the nationalist vision centred on the Russian federation in the early 1990s testifies to the fact that the conception of nation could be subject to political controversy and struggle especially in the wake of large-scale and rapid political transformations.<sup>19</sup> This holds also true for Turkey which has been witnessing since the AKP's rise to power a startling struggle revolving around how to define 'nation'.

The historical specificity of AKP's nationalism lies in its ideological endeavours to build a conception of the nation that challenges the premises of Kemalist nationalism. This explains the rise of the AKP's distinct conception of nationalism as a part of an ideological struggle aiming to dispossess Kemalist nationalism of the notion of the nation and redefine it in a way better suited to its own political project. This does not mean that the AKP's nation does not share any common symbolic and discursive elements with Kemalist nationalism; but these elements acquire a qualitatively different meaning with different concrete contents as they become a part of the new ideological framework.

The most striking and significant change in AKP's conception of nationalism is the role attributed to Muslimhood in determining the identity and the scope of nation. It is true that religion had been an important element of Kemalist nationalism as well. In the early Republican period, the nation-building process and the construction of Turkishness went hand in hand as the national identity was defined along the relatively secular lines of the marker of 'Turk.' Nevertheless, the 'scope' of Turkishness—the criterion for belonging to the Turkish nation—was primarily determined by religion since the idea of Turkishness was perceived and built as an instrument to gradually assimilate the ethnically non-Turkish Muslim peoples in Anatolia into one 'nation.' While Islam did not define what it meant to

17. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 197.

18. Finlayson, 'Ideology, Discourse and Nationalism', p. 113.

19. Vera Tolz, 'Conflicting Homeland Myths and Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia', *Slavic Review*, 57 (2) (1998), pp. 267–294.

be a Turk itself, Muslimhood as a cultural marker of Turkishness was, besides language and willingness to adopt Turkish identity, one of the determinants which would be included in the category of nation.<sup>20</sup> Despite the precariousness of and occasional shifts in the official or social definitions of Turkishness, its role in addressing and absorbing the ‘Muslims’ of Anatolia has remained intact.

In the AKP period, not only has the relative weight of Muslimhood in the ‘concrete content’ of the nation increased but the nature of its role has also undergone a dramatic change. In AKP’s nationalism, Sunni-Muslim values are no longer conceived solely as *one* of the common cultural features of ‘Turkishness’ itself, but have become the *core* element defining what the ‘nation’ is.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Islam is no longer a cultural component of Turkishness, but has rather become an independent identity in itself, and is no longer necessarily derived from or instrumentalized for the idea of Turkishness.

Yet the AKP’s approach is not the only example of non-Kemalist nationalist political currents attempting to reformulate the relationship between Turkishness and Muslimhood in Turkish political history. The ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis,’ for example, was embraced as the state ideology in the aftermath of 1980 coup.<sup>22</sup> Originally formulated in the early 1970s by a network of nationalist and Islamist intellectuals called the ‘Intellectuals’ Hearths’ (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), the Turkish-Islamic synthesis sought to demonstrate the perfect compatibility of Islam and Turkishness and thereby assert the centrality of both as an essential element of Turkish national identity.<sup>23</sup> The qualitative and the critical difference between AKP’s nationalism and the Turkish-Islamic synthesis is that the main claim of the latter was that Turkishness and Islam cannot be listed in order of priority and cannot be treated as separate identities.<sup>24</sup> As the word ‘synthesis’ itself suggests, their major goal was to strengthen the symbolic power and popular appeal of ‘Turkishness’ by blending it with Islamic values. This is not the case for AKP’s nationalism, however, since, as stated above, this party conceives Islam and Muslimhood as the core and integral element of the national identity, which is not necessarily synthesized or combined with the idea of Turkishness.

One could also question, at this point, the extent to which AKP’s nationalism is different from the ideological position of the ‘National View’ (Milli Görüş) of the preceding Islamist political tradition—represented by the MSP (National Salvation Party) (1970s), RP (1990s) and SP (Felicity Party) (2000s)—from which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the leading cadres of today’s AKP dissociated themselves in 2001. Despite its overtly traditional Islamist political stance, the National View also embraces a nationalist outlook which, like the AKP, designates Sunni-Muslim identity and the Ottoman legacy as core elements of the

20. Gökhan Çetinsaya, ‘Rethinking Nationalism and Islam: Some Preliminary Notes on the Roots of Turkish Islamic Synthesis in Modern Turkish Political Thought’, *The Muslim World*, 89(3–4) (1999), pp. 362–363; Ayşegül Aydıngün and İsmail Aydıngün, ‘The Role of Language in the Formation of Turkish National Identity and Turkishness’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 10 (2004), p. 424; Mesut Yeğen, ‘Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(6) (2004), p. 58; Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 15.

21. White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, p. 48.

22. Hakan Yavuz, ‘Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism’, *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 7(12) (1998), p. 30.

23. Mustafa Şen, ‘Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of Justice and Development Party’, *Turkish Studies*, 11(1) (2010), p. 61.

24. Çetinsaya, ‘Rethinking Nationalism and Islam’, p. 374.



nation.<sup>25</sup> The key difference in AKP's position lies in its attempt to downplay anti-capitalist and anti-western discourses associated with this traditional Islamist perspective and to make it more compatible with the needs of the dominant neoliberal economic vision.<sup>26</sup> While it is true that AKP discourses depict the Western world as a civilization in cultural crisis, this position does not lead it to denounce or defy the world capitalist system itself. The National View, on the other hand, argued from an Islamic Third Worldist perspective that the cutting of ties with Western capitalism was one of the preconditions of fulfilling the national interest and increasing the national wealth.<sup>27</sup> The AKP, by contrast, has depicted neoliberal strategies of growth as necessary to strengthen the position of the nation in the international arena. This seemingly slight revision in fact leads to a qualitative transformation in the 'functions' attributed to the nationalist discourses, symbols and values by the National View. In AKP's nationalism, Islamic values and the Ottoman heritage are not brought to fore as a means of delegitimizing, rejecting or challenging Western capitalism *per se*. Rather, as İbrahim Kalın, the chief foreign policy advisor to Erdoğan makes clear in one of his articles, these features of Turkey's culture are conceived and introduced as historical assets in its drive to become a regional leader and a respectable state within existing global power relations.<sup>28</sup>

In its official political statements, the AKP, quite understandably, avoids making direct references to Sunni Islam as the core element of nationhood. However, one can easily infer the central role of Islam in AKP's conception of nation from its political practice as well as the discourse of its officials. In the AKP period, the inclusion of elective Qur'an courses in the school curriculum has gone hand in hand with controversial statements by Prime Minister Erdoğan, including 'We will raise a religious generation' or 'We have four red lines: One state, one nation, one flag, and one religion.'<sup>29</sup>

Nowhere is the centrality of Islam more evident than in the political strategy that the AKP has used to deal with the longstanding Kurdish question in Turkey. As opposed to the erstwhile Kemalist official ideology that adopted a rigid assimilationist policy of denying the existence of a separate Kurdish ethnic identity, the AKP has attempted to recognize the Kurdish presence in Turkey. This has revealed itself not only in the statements of the AKP officials but also in such historical reforms as the opening of an official state TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish. Nevertheless, this 'recognition' does not mean the acknowledgment of the Kurds as a separate nation *per se* but signifies a redefinition of the Kurds as an ethnic or cultural component of AKP's Muslim-oriented conception of 'larger' nation.<sup>30</sup> What has made it possible for the

25. Berrin Koyuncuoğlu-Lorasdağı, 'On the Question of Islam and Nationalism in Turkey: Sources and Discourses', in Aysel Kadioğlu and Fuat Keyman (eds.), *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2011), p. 146; Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), p. 178.

26. Umut Bozkurt, 'Neoliberalism with a Human Face: Making Sense of the Justice and Development Party's Neoliberal Populism in Turkey', *Science and Society*, 77(3) (2013).

27. Lerna Yanık, 'Constructing Turkish "Exceptionalism": Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy', *Political Geography*, 30 (2011), p. 86; Coşar, 'Turkish Nationalism and Sunni Islam', p. 173.

28. İbrahim Kalın, 'Debating Turkey in the Middle East: The Dawn of a New Geopolitical Imagination', *Insight Turkey*, 11(1) (2009), pp. 91–92.

29. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 1 February 2012, Party Headquarters Meeting, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 4 May 2012, AKP Adana Congress.

30. Burhanettin Duran, 'Understanding the Ak Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and Its Limitations', *Insight Turkey*, 15(1) (2013), p. 94.

AKP to present such a manoeuvre in state discourse is its distinctive understanding of nation and nationalism. As long as the nation is defined along the lines of common Muslim cultural values and a shared Ottoman history, the Kurds, as well as other Muslim ethnic groups in Turkey, can be incorporated into the ‘nation.’ One of the most explicit expressions of this Muslim vision of nation appeared in the AKP’s election rally in June 2011, where Erdoğan devoted his whole speech to addressing the common religious values that are supposed to unify Kurds and Turks under a common national identity. The following excerpt from this speech presents a clear expression of how the AKP combines its nationalist discourse with its recognition of Kurdish identity.

Brothers, please look: Do they not all sleep in Çanakkale side by side? Turks, Kurds, Laz, Arabs, Greeks—do they not sleep side by side? Do our martyrs not sleep side by side in Sarıkamış? In Kut-al-Amara we achieved that victory together. We founded this republic together... Diyarbakır, we are brothers. We are eternal brothers... Oh, brothers, the community praying in Ulus Mosque turn towards the same Kiblah as the people in Suleymaniye [Mosque] in Istanbul, in Selimiye [Mosque] in Edirne, and in Hacıbayram [Mosque] in Ankara. See, we have the same Kiblah. [Is there] any separation? No!<sup>31</sup>

Erdoğan made a statement on similar lines during the historical visit to Diyarbakır by the leader of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Northern Iraq, Massoud Barzani. In this speech, Erdoğan clearly reveals what he means by ‘the nation’:

Rejection, denial, and assimilation have ended with our government. I can call a Turk a Turk, a Kurd a Kurd, a Laz “my brother Laz.” We are one nation with all these differences. Within this concept, within the concept of the nation, there are Turks, Kurds, Laz, Circassians; one nation in its entirety. And, my brothers, this nation has one flag only. One flag... We do not need other flags... I love all of you for the sake of God, not because you are Turk, Kurd or Laz or this or that. I love you just because God, who created me, also created you.<sup>32</sup>

This new formulation envisages an overarching national identity based on Muslimhood that encompasses other ‘ethnicities’ as cultural components. Kurdish ethnicity can reveal and exhibit itself as a separate culture as long as it is not used to galvanize a claim for a separate Kurdish nationhood in Turkey that could compete with and subvert the AKP’s Sunni-oriented conception of nation. The AKP’s motto, ‘one nation, one state, and one flag,’ does not necessarily contradict its recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity as long as ‘one nation’ is coupled with the idea of ‘one religion’ as the most primary marker of what it means to be ‘the nation’.<sup>33</sup>

31. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Diyarbakır Meeting, 1 June 2011.

32. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Diyarbakır Speech, 16 November 2013.

33. AKP’s conceptions of nation and nationalism, while resting on traditional elements of Turkish right, has constantly evolved and gained substance in the process of facing domestic and international challenges to its hegemonic project. Among these challenges were the secularist/Kemalist resistance within the state bureaucracy and army (early years), Kurdish opposition and dissidents of a deepening neoliberalism and authoritarianism (later years). Therefore AKP’s nationalism is neither a longstanding but a dormant political position which found a convenient ground with AKP coming to power nor a completely novel ideological composition that was solely invented by the AKP. It is rather a still-evolving ideological project which has also some symbolic and ideational roots in the traditional streams of Turkish right.

## The Geography of Nation and Foreign Policy

Ana Maria Alonso asserts that ‘the bounding of the nation as a collective subject, as a superorganism with a unique biological-cultural essence replicates the enclosure of national territory’.<sup>34</sup> A nationalist project can only be persuasive in a society to the extent that it represents the space of nationalist projects as the homeland of nation.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of homeland, as the integral geographical component of any nation-building process, is also a subject of ideological and political struggles and susceptible to change depending on the course of these struggles. For this reason, ‘homeland’ should be treated as much a social and political artefact as ‘nation’.<sup>36</sup>

Geography, in accordance with this assertion, constitutes an integral element of AKP’s new conception of nation. It is true that Islamic values and Muslim identity that AKP presents as the backbone of ‘nation’ signifies and encompasses a worldwide community much larger than the people living in the Turkish national homeland. In AKP discourse, however, common Islamic values are instrumentalized as a *component of national identity* only for people living within the borders of Turkey without necessarily including the entire Muslim world in the definition. The seemingly universalistic references to ‘Islamic civilization’ and an endorsement of the Sunni-Islamic political forces such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt reveal the Islamist overtones in AKP’s worldview. However, this should not mislead us to assume that AKP’s imagination of nation is determined by an Islamist universalist perspective. AKP’s hegemonic project and its nationalist discourse should not be seen as a necessary extension of an overdetermining ummah-based Islamist cause. On the contrary the degree to which universal Islamist values and Islamic civilization occupies AKP’s political discourse is reliant upon its domestic nationalist project. ‘Islamic world’ typically becomes a part of AKP’s political rhetoric when highlighting the ‘historic mission’ of the nation, that is, acting as the leader of former Ottoman territories as a ‘central country’. Therefore, AKP’s emphasis on Islamic civilization could be seen as a part of the quest for designating and highlighting the distinctive character of the nation (limited to the borders of Turkey) in history and for building the national identity on a social and historical basis different than that of Kemalism.

In several speeches of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as also formulated in a more academic language in Davutoğlu’s *Strategic Depth*, AKP cadres tend to conceive the existing nation-state structure and national borders as an artificial creation of European colonial powers. In their perspective, throughout the twentieth century, these official borders have been an obstacle to developing ‘intimate’ relations with rest of the Islamic populations that share the same religious values and some cultural traits as well as a common Ottoman past. Nevertheless, AKP officials and intellectuals organically linked to this party have so far never proposed such a radical project as collapsing these borders and ensuring the full political unification of these societies. Rather, they presented the presupposed contradiction between so called ‘geocultural’ integrity/ ‘historico-cultural affinities and legal international borders as an advantage for Turkey in its involvement in

34. Alonso, ‘The Politics of Space, Time and Substance’, p. 384.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

36. Tolz, ‘Conflicting Homeland Myths and the Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia’, p. 268.

neighbouring regions.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, the declared goal of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP is not to create an integrated Islamic world that completely rules out the existing official borders but rather to ‘make territorial borders *de facto* meaningless’ in order to increase the political effect of Turkey itself in the region.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, it can be argued that a universalist Islamist perspective does not independently determine AKP’s ideology and its foreign policy but it becomes a part of this party’s political discourse only in relation to its quest for building a new nationalist hegemony within Turkey.

In this respect, despite its evident references to universal common Islamic values, AKP’s conception of nation has a territorial delimitation. This territorial specification enables the AKP to differentiate itself from a classical Islamist political project that aims to unify the entire Sunni Muslim World, or *ummah*, as a single and coherent political unit with particular interests. This does not mean, however, that territories beyond Turkey are of no significance for the construction of national identity. On the contrary, it is through the reformulation of the relationship between the ‘region’ and the ‘homeland/nation’ that the AKP devises its own conception of nation. AKP’s imagining the countries in its vicinity not as separate nation-states but as former Ottoman territories is vital for its distinct conception of national identity.

Erdogan and other AKP officials occasionally mention the former Ottoman lands stretching from the Arabic peninsula to the Balkans as territories ‘entrusted’ to Turkey.<sup>39</sup> However, these places are not simply conceived as the original homeland of ‘the nation.’ Rather, AKP’s foreign policy discourse asserts that ‘our ancestors’ (*ecdadımız*) heroically appropriated and included these places within the imperial borders but then unjustly lost them to the European powers. In this understanding, which some authors refer to as ‘civilizational geopolitics,’ the former Ottoman lands continue to reveal an embedded Ottoman spirit in their social life and, most importantly, in their architecture.<sup>40</sup> In this discourse, ancestry/the nation did not spring from these places, but did leave an irreversible and ineradicable mark in the cultural makeup and cognitive world of the people living in these regions. In other words, the nation is constructed through ‘substantiating Turkey’s geographical location with a historical narrative’ that exalts and eternalizes the Ottoman Empire’s influence over the territories it ruled.<sup>41</sup>

Davutoğlu coins the term ‘*tarihdaş*’ (people sharing the same history) to refer to the ties between the state/nation and the people living in the former Ottoman territories. In his discourse, the active foreign policy of Turkey in the former Ottoman lands means the fulfilment of the nation’s historical responsibility towards its *tarihdaş*. In one speech to the Turkish parliament, Davutoğlu stated that:

37. Bülent Aras, ‘Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy’, *Seta Policy Brief*, (2009), p. 7.

38. Can Kasapoğlu, ‘The Turkish-Israeli Relations under the Davutoğlu Doctrine in Turkish Foreign Policy’, *Ege Strategic Research Journal*, 3(12) (2012), p. 3.

39. Yakup Pilch, *Turkey’s Recent National Role Conceptions and Shifts in Its Foreign Policy* (Unpublished MA thesis, Central European University, 2012), p. 27.

40. Pınar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç, ‘Turkey’s “New” Foreign Policy toward Eurasia’, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 52(2) (2011), p. 190.

41. Kadri Kaan Renda, ‘Learning New Roles and Changing Beliefs: Turkish Strategic Culture in Transition’, paper presented at *UACES Student Forum Conference*, University of Surrey, 30 June–01 July 2011, p. 16.

All these lands, all these regions are our *tarihdaş*. As the state of the Turkish Republic we are obliged to protect the rights of our citizens, as a nation preserving the past ties with our *tarihdaş* is our historical mission. In this context, regardless of their ethnic and sectarian origins, we are determined to embrace all of our *tarihdaş* and eliminate all the existing barriers between us and our *tarihdaş*; this is why we are pursuing region-wide policies; this is why we are establishing trilateral and multilateral mechanisms; and this is why we are in pursuit of new initiatives within our bilateral relations.<sup>42</sup>

While people living in these neighbouring regions are not represented as a natural part of ‘the nation,’ thanks to the deeply rooted cultural and socio-psychological influence of the Ottoman culture, they are supposed to wholeheartedly aspire to the strong presence of the Turkish state, the heir of the Ottoman Empire, in their lands and see it as the ultimate solution to their longstanding political problems.<sup>43</sup> In other words, under the contemporary conditions marked by modern nation-states with stable and internationally recognized borders, these places are perceived as historically legitimate spheres of interest for AKP’s nationalism rather than a true part of the national homeland.

One should note that this foreign policy vision leads to a striking change in the perception of the original homeland; the territories under the authority of the Turkish state today. While Kemalist nationalism construed Turkish territories from a ‘defensive’ perspective as a homeland that had been liberated from and had to be protected against the supposedly unending conspiracies of foreign and domestic ‘enemies,’ AKP’s nationalism sees the same geography from a rather more ambitious position; as a cultural and political ‘centre’ from which the political influence of the Turkish state, as the heir of the Ottoman Empire, could be extended into the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East.<sup>44</sup> This perspective begets a unique exceptionalist understanding that imagines Turkey neither as a ‘bridge’ connecting two continents as the conventional rhetoric on Turkey asserts, nor as a frontier country, but rather as ‘a central country’.<sup>45</sup> The following example of such thinking is an excerpt from a speech Davutoğlu gave in Sarajevo on 16 October 2009:

Yes, whatever happens in the Balkans, Caucasus, or Middle East is our issue. Sitting in Ankara, I drew a thousand-kilometer circle around my office. There are twenty-three countries. All of them are our relatives and they expect something from us . . . Our foreign policy aims to establish order in all these surrounding regions. For a Western or other diplomat from another part of the world, a Bosnian issue is a technical issue to deal with, like a technical process. For us, it is a life and death story . . . Like in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the rise of the Ottoman Balkans was the center of world politics, we will make the Balkans, Caucasus and Middle East together with Turkey the center of world politics in the future. This is the objective of Turkish foreign policy and we will achieve it.<sup>46</sup>

The ‘compass’ metaphor that Davutoğlu and his proponents in the media have occasionally used to describe his foreign policy vision is reflective of this distinctive perception of the relationship between nation and territory. The Turkish state’s sphere of influence, this metaphor suggests, geographically encompasses

42. TBMM Tutanak Dergisi Vol. 87, Session 37, 2011, p. 58, quoted in Renda, ‘Learning New Roles and Changing Beliefs’, p. 16.

43. Aras and Görener, ‘National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation’, p. 83.

44. Ömer Taşpınar, ‘Turkey’s Strategic Vision and Syria’, *Washington Quarterly*, 35(3) (2012), p. 130.

45. Yanık, ‘Constructing Turkish “Exceptionalism”, p. 87.

46. Quoted in Demirtaş, ‘Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Governments’, pp. 236–237.

those lands that fall within the circle drawn on a world map by a compass with its needle centred on Anatolia. As such, AKP's foreign policy discourse does not only redefine and classify 'other' nations or peoples as *tarihdaş*, but it also reconstructs 'the (our) nation' through a new narrative of common history, a new representation of the nation's geography, and a new mission assigned to 'the nation' in accordance with this geographical and historical vision. It should be noted that the same 'compass' metaphor has also been used by some columnists writing in conservative newspapers as well as Erdoğan and other AKP officials, which exemplifies how the foreign policy discourse of the AKP could be transferred to domestic political struggles.<sup>47</sup>

### **National History and Foreign Policy**

The construction of a common national history, accompanied by the fashioning of a common memory, is an integral element of any nationalist project, playing a critical role in the naturalization of nationalist ideas and claims.<sup>48</sup> A common national history is important not only for building a sense of national belonging and identity but also for legitimating nationalist projects and actions. The Sunni basis of AKP's conception of nation and nationalism can be most explicitly seen in its tendency to address the Ottoman past as a shared history and an 'epic past' of the members of the nation. This is also the most convenient vantage point from which to see the qualitatively different ideational framework of AKP nationalism as compared to Kemalism. Kemalist nationalism either addresses the foundation of the Turkish Republic as the origin of the nation or traces this genesis all the way back to ancient Anatolian civilizations. Yet, in no interpretation of Kemalist nationalism can one see the Ottoman past as the primary marker of the 'nation'.<sup>49</sup> Rather, in Nora Fisher Onar's words, 'the persistent negation of Ottoman Islam and Ottoman cosmopolitanism is echoed in Kemalists' vision of Turkey's role in world affairs'.<sup>50</sup> The contrary is the case for AKP nationalism in which the 'nation' is supposed to have reached its mature form in Ottoman times, and the people living within the borders of Turkey are considered the descendants of the Anatolian Muslims of the Ottoman period. The Ottomanist overtones of AKP nationalism can be seen not only in the statements of AKP officials but also in various areas of social life from the architecture of Turkey's cities which now feature many *kitsch* Ottoman symbols and structures to the tremendous increase in books and novels exalting the Ottoman past as a golden age or lost paradise of the nation.<sup>51</sup>

In the last 10 years of the AKP period, and especially during the foreign ministry of Davutoğlu, foreign policy discourse and practice have played a critical role in the process of redefining the nation along the lines of the Ottoman past. As stated above, AKP officials and Davutoğlu in particular tend to justify the recent unprecedentedly active role of the Turkish state in Middle Eastern conflicts as a natural responsibility of a Turkish state which is the heir of the Ottoman

47. PM Erdoğan employed the same metaphor in his election rally in Konya on 3 June 2011.

48. Alonso, 'The Politics of Space, Time and Substance', p. 387.

49. Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent*, p. 178.

50. Nora Fisher Onar, 'Echoes of Universalism Lost: Rival Representations of the Ottomans in Today's Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(2) (2009), p. 233.

51. White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, p. 8; Onar, 'Echoes of Universalism Lost', p. 235.

Empire. In this discourse, the former Ottoman territories are proclaimed to be a legitimate ‘sphere of influence’ where the Turkish state can bring a new *Pax-Ottomana*, that is, the alleged ‘peace’ and ‘justice’ associated with a highly romanticized view of Ottoman times. This indicates that foreign policy in the AKP period has become also a critical ideological realm where this party’s own nationalist vision has been produced and concretized.

Such romanticization of the imperial history is, to a certain extent, reminiscent of ‘new-Right Eurasianism’ that appeared as an influential political line of thinking in Russian politics throughout the 1990s. In the wake of a search for a ‘new national identity’ and a ‘new foreign policy vision’ in Russia after the demise of the Soviet Union, Alexander Dugin, the most prominent figure of the new Eurasianist perspective, had initiated the idea that Russia, as the heir of a continental Empire, has the legitimate right to resecure control over Eurasia.<sup>52</sup> This legitimacy, according to Dugin, springs from the ‘unique’ role that Russia had played in history, as a ‘benevolent Empire that respected difference, and in which the spread and promotion of the Orthodox faith did not undermine cultural co-existence as claimed by Western historians and geopoliticians.’<sup>53</sup> Despite sharing a similar tendency of deriving a new geopolitical strategy and national identity from a romanticized view of imperial history, we should note that the new-Right Eurasianism qualitatively diverges from neo-Ottomanism in its explicit defiance of the US hegemony and ‘Atlanticism’ in world politics, which has never been a central theme in AKP’s nationalist discourse and in its foreign policy orientation.

The ideational roots of an Ottomanist conception of nation can be found in Davutoğlu’s well-known book *Strategic Depth*, written one year before the AKP came to power. This book engages in a kind of theoretical discussion of the ideal foreign policy strategy that Turkish state needs to adopt in the post September 11 period. Davutoğlu conceives the Ottoman past as the core cultural essence of the nation and criticizes the Kemalist period and its foreign policy for repressing and consciously disregarding this essence. From Davutoğlu’s perspective, this essence, submerged but still deeply ingrained in the make-up of nation, represents an unrealized potential; one that could make the Turkish state an influential actor in world politics if it is seen as the basis of a general foreign policy strategy. Davutoğlu combines this essentialist and culturalist logic with an uncanny idealism when he describes the Ottoman legacy as an independent historical force which unavoidably imposes its own ‘will’ on daily politics, which, again, evokes anti-rationalist overtones in Dubin’s Eurasianism<sup>54</sup>:

This situation is nothing but the weight of the element of history as one significant parameter of power making itself felt. Turkey, which has been seen as the inheritor of 700 years of Ottoman history, is still seen as a political center by the people in its close territorial basin. The Ottoman remainder in Turkey’s close territorial basin make these groups see Turkey as the power to protect them in their original land or as a place of refuge in case of a possible attempt at abolition. This leads Turkey to come face to face with new regional missions oriented by the parameter of history. This is nothing but an expression

52. Alexander Dugin, *Rus Jeopolitiği: Avrasyacı Yaklaşım* (Küre: İstanbul, 2010).

53. Graham Smith, ‘The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism’, *Royal Geographical Society*, 24(4) (1999), p. 484.

54. Alan Ingram, ‘Alexander Dugin: Geopolitics and Neo-fascism in Post-soviet Russia’, *Political Geography*, 20 (2001), p. 1033.

of the fact that history exceeds the wills limited to particular periods and exerts its authority over daily politics.<sup>55</sup>

From Davutoğlu's perspective, one of the preconditions for this foreign policy strategy to be successful is to eradicate the 'alienation' or 'dementia' (*benlik bölünmesi*) that Turkish society and politicians have suffered from for the last hundred years as a result of the top-down modernization process.<sup>56</sup> The Kemalist modernization project created, from this perspective, a discrepancy between the existing profile of the society and its cultural/civilizational essence. This discrepancy also posed an obstacle to the harmony between a foreign policy shaped by the historical (Ottomanist) strategic mentality and the people/society as a potential force to be used as a parameter of power.<sup>57</sup> As such, the realization of 'strategic depth' (the ideal foreign policy strategy) entails a societal transformation that would ensure the full development of a 'sense of social belonging constructed upon a strong historical socio-cultural basis'.<sup>58</sup> This could be only achieved by an active and strong state able to 'reach the depths of the nation and ensure spiritual unity based on the common value system lying in these depths'.<sup>59</sup> Davutoğlu's foreign policy strategy thus also includes the idea of societal transformation or social engineering via state power and hence a quest for political hegemony.

### National Interest and Foreign Policy

Nationalism rests on a particular conception of historic national interests. The specificity of AKP nationalism can also be seen in this party's distinct formulation of where the nation's interests lie. As the nation's identity is reconstructed with reference to the Ottoman past, the national interest is defined as becoming a 'great nation' or creating as grand and powerful a country as the Ottoman Empire. This redefinition of national interest goes hand in hand with a critique of an earlier—supposedly Kemalist—conception of foreign policy which, according to this perspective, tended to isolate itself from the Middle East because of its obsessive antipathy towards Islam. Kemalist foreign policy, in this discourse, has been accused of adopting an unnecessarily passive stance vis-à-vis world affairs and failing to make use of the potential stemming from its history, geography, and culture. Davutoğlu's recent statements reveal how AKP officials perceive the historic mission of the Turkish state:

The other states say to us, 'do not engage in adventures in foreign policy, do not follow an active politics.' And we keep saying 'Turkey has always been a subject, can never be objectified. We have always been a subject, and no one can make this nation an object. Today, could anyone, particularly Palestine, oppose anything in the Middle East without the presence of Turkey? We should do what our history necessitates. This nation has always been a subject of history and will continue to be so.'<sup>60</sup>

Here again, Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* is illuminating for understanding the ideational foundations of this conception of national interest. Davutoğlu claims

55. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 143.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

60. *İhlas News Agency*, 3 March 2013.



that every nation inherits from history a 'geo-cultural and geopolitical basin', i.e. a sphere of hegemonic influence, which may transcend and conflict with its existing legal borders. Nations, and especially those with imperial history, naturally seek to go beyond their national borders and claim activity in their historically determined spheres of influence.<sup>61</sup> As such, Turkey, with its imperial history, should devise a rational-strategic plan employing methods of infiltration into its own historically determined basin. National interest could be achieved insofar as Turkey successfully puts into practice effective strategies to maximize its influence in these regions.

### **Domestic and International Limits of AKP's Nationalism**

With its emphasis on Sunni-Islam and Ottoman history, the AKP vision of the nation and its brand of nationalism cannot fail to categorically exclude large sections of society in such a country as Turkey where a great many people do not share Islamic religious values as guiding principles for their lives or identities. Not only does the (originally Shia) Alevi population make up almost 15 per cent of society, but those who have internalized a secularist worldview have, from the outset, also shown an explicit skepticism if not antagonism to the AKP nationalist project.<sup>62</sup> The AKP response to this overt exclusion of certain segments of society has been to rigidify its Islamic conservative nationalist discourse. Especially after the elections in 2011, during which the AKP proved its electoral power, the party has tended to dismiss dissident voices by resorting to the discourse of 'national will' as revealed in the ballots, which, according to party officials, has authorized the government's exercise of an unfettered executive power.

This dismissive and on occasion intimidating attitude towards the groups who do not belong in AKP's new national project suggests the concept of 'two-nations hegemony'. Bob Jessop et al. use this concept to characterize the ideological and political strategies that Margaret Thatcher utilized throughout the 1980s to create the appropriate conditions for the turn to a neoliberal accumulation strategy. For them, Thatcherism represented a rupture with traditional British politics which attempted to integrate 'the poor, deprived, and underprivileged into membership of the community' into 'one nation' through certain economic and ideological strategies.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, Thatcherism explicitly excluded the various pauper classes from the idea of the nation and presented 'an image of social divisions based on a *single, vertical* cleavage stretching from top to bottom of society [opposing] the productive to the parasitic'.<sup>64</sup> In the context of a deepening neoliberalism in Britain, the underlying objective of this 'two-nations' project, was to increase the productivity of labour-power and ensure the 'consent' of the working class employed in 'productive' sectors for the Thatcherite transformation by juxtaposing them with the so called 'unproductive' segments of society; that is, groups dependent on state subsidies.

As a new form of hegemonic project in Turkey, AKP nationalism resembles this two-nations strategy in terms of consciously pushing certain segments of society

61. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 20–21.

62. White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, p. 12.

63. Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley, and Tom Ling, *Thatcherism: A Tale of Two Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 87.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

out of the scope of a nation defined by its conservative Islamic values. Nevertheless, unlike Thatcherism, the line of division between the two nations in the current AKP discourse is cultural rather than economic. Recent AKP discourse has constructed national boundaries on the basis of Islamic-conservative values, which are now given the status of 'national values.' As shown throughout this paper, the foreign policy discourse and practice of the AKP has been consonant with this two-nations strategy and contributed to its further solidification in Turkish politics.

This exclusionary hegemonic strategy has enabled the AKP government to address dissident sections of society as domestic 'foes' and an internal hindrance to the realization of the national will and the achievement of national development. Through this two-nations strategy, the AKP has juxtaposed its electoral supporters to those sections of society falling outside its definition of nation, crafted an idiosyncratic political identity for itself, legitimized its attempts to assert its power, and thereby consolidated its own popular base.

This strategy, which seemed to work well thanks to the series of sweeping AKP electoral victories, faced a grave crisis in June 2013 when popular discontent with its exclusionary strategies led to an outburst of rage against the government during what is known as the 'Gezi Protests'. The protests started as a reaction to the government's attempt to build a shopping mall on Gezi Park, one of the few public parks in downtown Istanbul, and immediately faced extreme police violence. The repressive tactics did nothing but turn the protests into country-wide demonstrations against the AKP government. From the slogans, demands, and concerns raised during the protests, one could see that the Gezi resistance encompassed and mobilized the very people excluded from AKP's definition of nation; a loose bloc of secularists, anti-capitalists, Alevis, youth, and women disturbed by the government's Islamic conservative practices and discourses. The emergence of such a bloc and its categorical rejection of AKP policies provoked an ideological crisis for the AKP, as it became evident that those excluded from its Sunni-based conservative conception of the nation could emerge as a counter-hegemonic political dynamic that could defy and subvert it. It is obvious that, after the Gezi protests, it has become more difficult than ever for the AKP to claim to represent the entire nation or devise ambitious domestic and foreign policy strategies in the name of its interests.

There is an intricate connection between AKP's nationalist hegemonic project at the domestic level and its foreign policy in the international context, and a crisis on one front necessarily instigates a crisis on the other. As of 2014, it can be observed that the AKP has been suffering deep setbacks not only in its domestic politics but also in foreign policy. Although, the AKP government attempted to play an intrusive role and pursue ambitious foreign policy goals after the initial Arab uprisings in 2011, it started to experience serious challenges in the face of changing political balances in the Middle East. The AKP interpreted the electoral victory of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as the emergence of a new strategic partner in Middle East that could facilitate Turkey's political and ideological impact in the region. However, the coup of 3 July 2013 and the consequent removal of Mohammed Mursi from power dashed the raised hopes of AKP government. AKP's insistent anti-coup stance in the aftermath of the removal of Mursi was not shared by many countries in the region as well as leading international powers that took rather a much more circumspect attitude towards

the new Egyptian regime represented by General Abdelfattah al-Sissi. Another significant challenge appeared in Syria where the AKP government has openly supported the Free Syrian Army and some radical Islamist opposition groups against the Bashar Al Assad in order to take initiative and have a say in the new political climate that was supposed to appear after the expected fall of Baas regime. As the Sunni-oriented opposition groups could not succeed in overthrowing Assad Regime, radical Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organizations took the upper hand in the war, and consequently the Syrian revolt took the character of a civil war reaching a stalemate as of 2013. When, even under these circumstances the AKP government continued to give unconditional support to opposition forces, its foreign policy strategy led to scepticism on part of USA and its allies in the region, i.e. Saudi Arabia, which tended to support opposition rather in a more strategic and cautious manner. The emergence of a de-facto Kurdish entity in Northern Syria in the midst of the conflict was another complication facing AKP's Syrian policy. Under the leadership of the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD), this new Kurdish entity not only posed an obstacle to AKP's ambition to significantly expand its sphere of influence in Syria but also added some new regional dynamics to the Kurdish question in Turkey's domestic politics.

## Conclusion

The new foreign policy orientation and official foreign policy discourse adopted during the AKP period in the last decade have been a crucial component and instrument of building a new nationalist hegemonic project in Turkey. Through a neo-Ottomanist foreign policy outlook AKP has attempted to reconstruct the conception of nation in Turkey and redefine the notions of national history, national homeland and national interest. The roots of the connection between this new vision of nationalism and foreign policy can be found in the discourses that AKP officials deployed in domestic and international politics, which has been highly inspired by the perspective of incumbent minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu. Davutoğlu's well-known book, *Strategic Depth*, provide us with the intellectual and ideological underpinnings of this new perspective and new hegemonic project.

Despite the fact that AKP government has taken 'bold' steps in both international and domestic arena to crystallize this new neo-Ottomanist vision of nationalism, they have recently faced some grave political challenges in sustaining and substantiating its hegemonic project. The wave of anti-government protests during the Gezi Uprising in June 2013 that mobilized millions of Turkish citizens all across Turkey indicated the fragility and vulnerability of this new hegemonic project through undermining and invalidating the legitimacy of AKP's new vision of nation. The recent unsettling developments in the Middle Eastern politics that changed the balances of power in the region seriously have been another dynamic that obstructed the sustainability of AKP's new foreign policy orientation and discourse.

Such overt discrepancy between AKP's neo-Ottomanist discourse and the predicaments occurring in its foreign policy discourse practice would normally put some limits in the party's use of foreign policy for the purpose of consolidating its nationalist project and hegemony in domestic politics. While the government is

still seeking to downplay and avert the repercussions of the Gezi protests at the domestic level, it is also trying to cope with the gradual collapse of its foreign policy vision in the Middle East. In the context of these unstable political conditions, AKP's nationalist project and its neo-Ottomanist manifestations in foreign policy seem to be heading towards a deepening crisis.