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**TURKISH  
FOREIGN POLICY  
AFTER JULY 15**

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#### **About Istanbul Policy Center**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The July 15, 2016 coup attempt was a tipping point for the entire state apparatus in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, the post-coup process signifies an adjustment to consolidate state power in Turkey. This paper will focus on the effects of the coup on Turkish foreign policy (TFP), which was already in crisis mode even before July 15. Thus, this critical date does not symbolize a rupture but rather an adjustment in TFP in response to ongoing political trends.

The dislocation of traditional foreign policy actors, the absence of a unifying foreign policy ethos, an extremely volatile and threatening security environment, and the resultant identity crisis of the Turkish state have pushed the doors wide open for a battle of ideas, which also amounts to competition of alternative geopolitical visions. The complex post-July 15 picture is therefore better understood when analyzing the systemic, political, identity, and security crises in TFP, which have triggered occasional volte-faces to adjust to the complexity and fluidity in the domestic and external environment.

The failed July 15<sup>th</sup> coup surfaced a crisis within the Turkish state apparatus. It was also a serious blow to the foreign policy apparatus. The four crises discussed in the paper create barriers in the foreign policy-making process, hold foreign policy hostage to domestic issues and priorities, decrease flexibility in regional and international policy, result in inconsistent policy attitudes, and spark debates on Turkey's international orientation. Unified opinion against the failed coup could have resulted in a breakthrough in solving the state crisis in general and foreign and security policy in particular, leading to a countrywide consensus. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The aftershocks of the failed coup inside the country and deteriorating regional security environment made the situation worse for the foreign policy apparatus.

The most pressing issues are capacity building, institutionalization, and coordination within the foreign policy apparatus. Serious thinking on a new imagination and construction of foreign policy principles, mechanisms, and implementation must accompany sound structural components of dealing with the problems of foreign policy. The search for systemic change, state building, dealing with multiple security threats, economic stability, and development would depend on all-encompassing, inclusive, and participatory political processes in the country. In such an environment, the foreign policy apparatus would be able to recalibrate and restructure itself vis-à-vis the problems of rising insecurity in the regional landscape and the difficulties of protecting engagements and new openings in the international arena. Otherwise, operating from short-term responses and measures in such a problematic political and systematic background will be the cause of further failure within Turkey's foreign and security policies.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is written as part of the Post-Coup Opportunities on Conflict Resolution and Democracy Project conducted by the Conflict Resolution and Mediation Stream of Istanbul Policy Center.

## INTRODUCTION

The July 15 coup attempt was a tipping point for the entire state apparatus in Turkey. In that sense, the post-coup process signifies an adjustment to consolidate state power in Turkey. This paper will focus on the effects of the coup on Turkish foreign policy (TFP), which was already in crisis mode even before July 15. Thus, this critical date does not symbolize a rupture but rather an adjustment in TFP in response to ongoing political trends. TFP is far from being on a predetermined course and is open to alternative and more or less conflicting scenarios as it is exposed to multi-vector crises. The dislocation of traditional foreign policy actors, the absence of a unifying foreign policy ethos, an extremely volatile and threatening security environment, and the resultant identity crisis of the Turkish state have pushed the doors wide open for a battle of ideas, which also amounts to competition of alternative geopolitical visions. The complex post-July 15 picture is therefore better understood when analyzing the four crises in TFP, which have triggered occasional volte-faces to adjust to the complexity and fluidity in the domestic and external environment.

### The systemic crisis

With the popular election of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in August 2014, as well as the government's continuous search for the necessary constitutional amendments to legalize the president's political tenure, Turkey has been experiencing a systemic crisis. The debates surrounding the presidential system could possibly go both ways, either toward a more effective and popular democratic model as government circles advocate, or toward further centralization of power and authoritarian control of the political system as a whole, which the opposition dreads. Even if the presidential system has not yet been fully established, the institutional setup of the parliamentary system in Turkey, with alternative levers of power, has become largely *passé*.

The resultant novel practices of power have sealed the fate of a number of evolving trends in TFP, which have actually been unfolding since the end of the Cold War yet resisted change until recently due to the overriding role of the military bureaucracy. First, traditional actors such as the Armed Forces, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and National Security Council have turned into non-players and marginal bookkeepers. Second, the idea that foreign policy was more or less about bipartisan national interests has given way to a

partisan realm of victories and inevitably losses. Third, personalities rather than institutions have become the main determinants of policy, which set the stage for the politicization of foreign policy and erosion of the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy. In that sense, the personal choices of the political leadership, even if they represented or, better said, shaped an overall consensus in the ruling party, determined the foreign policy alignments and priorities of the government.

The primary result of this personalized turn has been the burgeoning gap between rhetorical goals and bureaucratic capabilities to follow up the seemingly personal and political agendas of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) leadership. The much-cherished success of the AK Party's early foreign policy stemmed largely from the convergence of the Erdoğan-Gül duo's case for Europeanization and taboo-breaking conflict resolution initiatives from Cyprus to Armenia, with the pro-European bureaucracy's overwhelming support for normalization.<sup>2</sup> The later quest for grandeur in Turkey's broader neighborhood won popular applause but failed largely to earn the consent of bureaucratic cadres, which were forced out of their comfort zone to assemble realist assessments of the neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> The Turkish bureaucracy was ill-equipped to provide an expansionist or even a more conciliatory soft power role beyond its traditionalist concerns for security and stability.<sup>4</sup> In that sense, the Davutoğlu era represented political overreach and paved the way for undermining the role of the bureaucracy, only if through demonstrating its unreadiness for a more active and assertive role. Still, Davutoğlu tried to bridge this gap by bringing together his team of experts and co-opted a selective cadre including the Foreign Ministry's top diplomats, which made a remarkable start but failed to build on preliminary efforts for outreach when the Arab revolts undermined the pillars of Turkey's regional policy.<sup>5</sup>

2 Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 199-216; Ersel Aydınli, Nihat Ali Özcan and Doğan Akyaz, "The Turkish Military's March toward Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 1 (January-February 2006): 77-90.

3 Bülent Aras, "Reform and Capacity Building in the Turkish Foreign Ministry: Bridging the Gap between Ideas and Institutions," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015): 269-286.

4 Interview with a bureaucrat in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

5 Emirhan Yorulmazlar and Ebru Turhan, "Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Arab Spring: Between Western Orientation and Regional Disorder," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015): 337-352.

One of the missed opportunities of the Gül and Davutoğlu eras was the failure to transform the foreign policy establishment through generating the necessary capacity for coping with new areas of interest in TFP, particularly at a time when Turkey grasped an opportunity moment of domestic stability and international support for its declared foreign policy goals. Despite half-baked attempts at capacity building, Turkey still lacks intelligence, military, academic, and linguistic networks and alternative tools for power projection, which undermined a theoretical and, in a sense, historicist-romantic embrace of its neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> Overall, this transitional deficiency has had ideational and institutional components.

Ideationally, Turkey failed to establish a new foreign policy ethos among its bureaucratic cadres in accordance with its changing policy goals, which sought a regional leadership role and global harmony with major centers of power such as the United States, EU, and Russia. While the bureaucracy stuck to the ideology of the 1930s' interwar period—reflecting the Kellogg-Briand Pact's ideal of world peace—and status quoist motto of “Peace at home, peace in the world,” the AK Party leadership sought to extend Turkish clout through regional integration. The traditionalist bureaucracy continued to uphold that the Kemalist reforms were still incomplete and thus preoccupied itself with domestic consolidation, i.e. elimination of internal threats, while the government seemed ready to sail beyond national borders.<sup>7</sup> This misfit largely stemmed from a lack of national debate on the validity of new foreign policy goals and lack of ownership beyond the AK Party leadership.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the so-called zero problems policy<sup>9</sup> became extremely dependent on success and lacked institutionalization, which in return rendered it ephemeral.

Yet beyond this ideational divergence on foreign policy goals, the AK Party government failed to substantiate its claim for regional leadership in building up the necessary institutional capacity and networks of cooperation. Notwithstanding the Turkish Development Agency's (TIKA) developmental aid projects over a broad geography from the Balkans to Africa and Asia, which were partially employed as soft power tools,

the intelligence, cultural, and diaspora legs of the AK Party's institutional setup largely remained ineffectual. On the soft power side, the Yunus Emre Institute for promoting Turkish culture and *Yurtdışı Türkler* for diaspora organization failed to organize themselves as active policy agencies. Moreover, Turkish diplomatic missions, even if number-wise surged exponentially, were far from leading Turkey's ambitious “Africa, Asia and Latin America policy,” which was further decapitated after the large-scale purges in the diplomatic cadres after July 15. Academic and civil society capacity also increased quantitatively, yet again their input also remained marginal in addressing the burgeoning needs of TFP.

All in all, it was in the humanitarian arena that Turkey performed far beyond average. Turning into one of the top donor countries globally, Turkey also became the number one host of refugees, acting as a shock absorber vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. Turkish state agencies, Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) and humanitarian NGOs have proven adept at responding to frequent crises across the border, while the national education and health system proved flexible enough to accommodate, even if partially, 3.2 million refugees. Beyond this, Turkish NGOs were active in humanitarian crises from Somalia to Myanmar and became the flag-bearers of Turkey's cry for humanitarian diplomacy.<sup>10</sup>

Against this shaky background, Erdoğan sat at the helm of foreign policy, especially after the 2014 presidential elections. Despite Prime Minister Davutoğlu's web of relationships with foreign leaders, President Erdoğan seemed eager to put his personal imprint on foreign policy. First, he made it clear that he was the ultimate decision-maker in TFP, which restricted Davutoğlu's earlier role as formulator and implementer of foreign policy. To that end, he tried to develop personal relationships with world leaders, engaged in almost daily telephone diplomacy, and intensified presidential foreign visits. Second, Erdoğan established a direct link between his domestic agenda and his foreign policy. His nationalist-conservative discourse at home set the tone for foreign relations, which in pursuit of foreign policy victories made it easier to engage illiberal leaders and proved thorny in sustaining stable relations with Western countries.

6 Aras, “Reform and Capacity Building,” 269-286.

7 Malik Mufti, *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: Republic at Sea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

8 Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

9 Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy/>.

10 Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar, “The Role of Humanitarian NGOs in Turkey's Peacebuilding,” *International Peacekeeping* 12, no. 3 (2015): 230-247; Pınar Akpınar, “Turkey's Peacebuilding in Somalia: The Limits of Humanitarian Diplomacy,” *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 735-757.

Third, despite his pragmatic leanings, Erdoğan's personal perceptions largely defined the course of foreign relations. This was clearly the case in relations with the Sisi regime in Egypt and categorical rejection of coming to terms with the Assad regime. While it gave an element of managerial consistency to TFP, it also increased fluidity as foreign policy decisions became more and more dependent on Erdoğan's personal terms with foreign leaders. The Yıldırım government, which replaced Davutoğlu in May 2016, appeared hopeful of recalibration with a pragmatic understanding of foreign policy under the motto of minimizing the number of enemies and maximizing friends.<sup>11</sup> While at face value this did not sound much different than “zero problems,” it aspired to narrow Turkey's conflict map, especially in relation to Israel, Russia, Syria, and Iraq under the imperatives of a de facto presidential foreign policy.

### The political crisis

In Turkish politics, as well as in comparable political systems, the governing party is comprised of a coalition of competing political allegiances. Erdoğan's personal hold on to power within the party ranks has been a product of political exigency, not a cast process developed in foreseen stages. Erdoğan might owe his power to fighting back the resistance of the bureaucratic and oligarchic elements in the state system; yet, in any case he has also been able to steer clear of them thanks to coalition building inside and beyond party dynamics.<sup>12</sup> Erdoğan's success also stems from his ability to take ideological ownership of non-AK Party issues, from Kurdish grievances to Turkish nationalism. When he saw fit he took unprecedented strides in owning the Kurdish question and receiving more Kurdish electoral support than even the pro-Kurdish political parties.<sup>13</sup> Later he disowned the Kurdish question and this time assumed a flag-bearer role for Turkish nationalist grievances, which has given leeway to the AK Party-MHP coalition, first, by isolating the PKK and like-minded political groups in Turkish politics and, second, on a broader scale, redefining the political system in presidential terms.

Despite growing criticism about Turkey's slide toward “authoritarianism,” especially from Western circles,

it must also be noted that Erdoğan has been able to solidify a conservative-nationalist bloc, which has proven fully supportive of his domestic and foreign agenda. He has a majoritarian understanding of politics yet, more importantly, has proven tactful in shaping the demands and concerns of the majority. While this explains his electoral success, his political legacy would largely depend on how this grand coalition of Turkish conservative nationalism could accommodate the interests and now increasing concerns of the groups such as secularists, Kurds, Alevis, and alienated intellectuals, including the larger body of university graduates and professionals.<sup>14</sup>

In the latter half of Summer 2016, there appeared a short window of opportunity to mend fences thanks to the coup-defying and bipartisan national mood. Erdoğan hinted at rising above partisan politics and standing as a unifying president right after July 15, which set the stage for bringing all mainstream parties together to map the contours of regime consolidation.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the so-called “Yenikapı spirit” for seeking consensual politics shortly gave way to an unwavering quest for transition to an Erdoğan-led presidential system, which seems to have accepted the risk of excluding non-AK Party concerns at the behest of a majoritarian Turkish-Islamic conservatism.

This schismatic dynamic intensifies the growing polarization in Turkish politics, which is also reflected in foreign policy debates. Namely, foreign policy is subservient to domestic politics. The immediate post-coup reactions against a perceived Western abandonment of Turkey emboldened pro-government circles to perpetuate a conspiratorial campaign against Western powers that further hindered an ideally more sober quest for dialogue and setting a mutually beneficial agenda. The opposition, in turn, tried to magnify foreign policy mistakes to vindicate their broader campaign to discredit the government. With Turkey's growing isolation due partly to ongoing changes in global and regional order, the Turkish government seems in need of foreign policy success stories to prop up domestic consolidation efforts.

The populist and more remarkably insular turn in Turkish politics, which has similarities with global trends, has undermined this broader need for mending fences. First, the government-controlled media and

11 Galip Dalay, “Dış Politikada Ölçek Küçültmeli ama Ölçü de Kaçmamalı,” *Karar*, July 2, 2016, <http://www.karar.com/yazarlar/galip-dalay/dis-politikada-olcek-kucultmeli-ama-olcu-de-kacmamali-1523>.

12 Richard Falk and Bülent Aras, “Who is the Winner of Turkey's Elections?” *Al Jazeera*, November 16, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/11/winner-turkey-elections-15110083204683.html>.

13 Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, January 4, 2017.

14 Interview with a former member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

15 Fuat Keyman, “Devlet Sorunu/İkilemi: 15 Temmuz'dan Alınacak Ders,” *Karar*, September 26, 2016, <http://www.karar.com/gorusler/fuat-keyman-yazdi-devlet-sorunuikilemi-15-temmuzdan-alinacak-ders-256279>.

social media channels continue to produce anti-American, European, British, German, Iranian, Israeli, and Arab rhetoric for domestic consumption, which leaves scant room for the desired reset in foreign relations. There is urgent need for nuanced diplomacy, coalition building, and toning down of antagonistic rhetoric, which makes international headlines daily.<sup>16</sup> Second, there is also need for bipartisan consensus for weathering the multiple crises in foreign policy. The divisive nature of post-Arab Spring geopolitics undermined the delicate balances in Turkish politics. Therefore, what is needed is to take into consideration the present secular-Islam, Kurdish-Turkish, and Alevi-Sunni cleavages in Turkish politics against complex geopolitical challenges. Last but not least, Turkey's quest for recalibration and conflict resolution carries the risk of being construed as capitulation and U-turns, which again calls for broader domestic dialogue in policy-making to ensure long-term follow-up of national interests.

The main point of contention in domestic politics over foreign policy has been the Turkish government's Syria policy, which had divisive spillover effects. Erdoğan's unwavering support for the Syrian opposition and categorical rejection of the Assad regime has caused a major rift between the government and the opposition. While the former defended the Syrian policy in humanitarian and geostrategic terms, the latter labeled it as sectarian and expansionist. In that framework, the government has tapped into Islamic-nationalist concerns about marginalization of Sunni interests in Syria and Iraq as well as the Kurdish march towards autonomy and independence. The opposition, in turn, plays into opposing Alevi and Kurdish concerns associated with fears of a Sunni onslaught.<sup>17</sup>

Although initiated on June 27 with the so-called normalization process, Turkey sought further partnership—sometimes overblown as a strategic partnership—in Russia after July 15. The Russian support for Erdoğan and the Turkish government provided extra impetus for a speedy recovery of relations. Turkish expectations for the way ahead are shaped by economic concerns, partly from the pressures among domestic agricultural producers, who paid a high price for losing the lucrative Russian market. The rapprochement also has geostrategic underpinnings, again stemming from domestic considerations, above all the need to confront PKK expansionism and a possible refugee onslaught on the Syrian side of the border. Overall, the divisive

views on TFP in Turkish politics undermined efforts to ensure security and stability inside and beyond its borders, which indirectly fed further into Turkish security and identity crises.

### Security crisis

Before the Arab Spring the Turkish security paradigm was predicated on reconciliation and democratization at home and peaceful resolution of regional conflicts for maximum regional integration abroad. Yet with the Arab disorder following failed transitions, the instability in its backyard undermined Turkish political stability, the Kurdish reconciliation process, the coalitional dynamics in Turkish politics, and more broadly, foreign policy preferences.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, political optimism was still upheld thanks to the so-called Kurdish “reconciliation process,” which was officially declared in March 2013 following a series of trials and culminated in the PKK's declaration of withdrawal to northern Iraq a month later. In itself the process heralded civilianization and de-securitization of Turkish politics and possible eradication of Turkey's number one regional vulnerability. In the case of a sustainable solution, Turkey would have ensured internal consistency, border stability, and regional outreach with a claim as the patron and ally of the Kurds.<sup>19</sup> By then, the Turkish government still did not lose track of its belief in Western ties and thus maintained ambitious goals for regional transformation.<sup>20</sup>

The AK Party-HDP divergence on the political transition to a presidential system in Turkey, the PKK's newly generated hope for state-building in northern Syria, and ISIS attacks against the symbolic Kurdish town of Kobani in northern Syria set the stage for the eventual collapse of the reconciliation process. This had proven to be the final blow to Turkish soft power, due not only to the resurgence of violence as a tool in Turkish politics but also to the revival of Turkish insecurity against Kurdish nationalism and a reverberant defensive security outlook. Turkey thus reentered the vicious psychology of the early post-Cold War era, in which multiple security crises led to claims that “Turks have no friends but the Turks”—in other words, “Sevres

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a bureaucrat in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Bülent Aras and Richard Falk, “Five Years After the Arab Spring: A Critical Evaluation,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no.12 (2016): 2252-2258.

<sup>19</sup> Davutoğlu had a broader claim, though also believed in this role vis-à-vis the Kurds as well. “Davutoğlu'ndan Net Mesaj,” *Milliyet*, April 26, 2012, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/davutoglu-ndan-net-mesaj-siyaset-1533072/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

syndrome<sup>21</sup>—and assumed foreign designs for disintegration and invasion.

The changing geostrategic equations also played a major role in the emergence of this self-protection mode in security policy. First, Russian and Iranian interventionism cut back Turkey's self-assigned leadership role in the Syrian transition. Second, the Obama administration's wobbling stance against regional crises undermined an assumed Turkish-American cooperation to steer the region towards normalization. Third, the prevalence of sectarian dynamics, fanned by the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, bogged down Turkish designs of all-embracing outreach to bring together moderate Sunnis and Shias.<sup>22</sup> Fourth, the changing dynamics of Arab geopolitics put Turkey on a collision course with pro-Western Sunni powers—i.e., the Gulf monarchies (with the minor exception of Qatar), Egypt, and to a lesser extent Jordan—who were apprehensive about Turkish support for political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Turkey found itself embroiled in immediate multi-frontal confrontation against Kurdish, Russian, Iranian, Western, and Arab interests as well as long-time accumulated conflicts with Israel, Iraq, Armenia, and Greece in its broader neighborhood.

With rising Russian presence and burgeoning clout in its neighborhood against the background of Western retrenchment, the Turkish ability to confront the regional and global challenges with a singular Western focus had largely been diminished. Turkish policymakers early on believed that the United States and Turkey had convergent geopolitical approaches from the Balkans to the Middle East, Caucasia, Central Asia, Eastern Mediterranean, and Southeast Asia.<sup>24</sup> With the Obama administration's cautious foreign policy, especially in his second term,<sup>25</sup> much of this assumed overlap was undone and will likely be further derailed with the Trump administration's hint at an ambiguous "America first" strategy. The possible U.S. focus on rolling back "radical Islam"<sup>26</sup> during the Trump admin-

istration would also put Turkish regional goals under further strain.

Therefore, Turkey was not left with many options besides moving toward rapprochement with Russia to hedge against its growing isolation. How far an emerging "Turkish-Russian partnership" could serve the Turkish case for regional security and conflict resolution—from Syria to Cyprus, Armenia, and Ukraine—remains an open question. In theory, the Russian mastery of prospering in frozen conflicts contradicts the Turkish need for regional stability in order to maintain both internal political balances and economic growth. Yet, in practice, the two countries could cooperate against the destabilizing effects of the Syrian spillover and join forces against the exclusionary policies of the West, particularly the EU.

Turkey also needs to address the Iran conundrum, especially after the turn of events favoring the Assad regime in Syria. The post-ISIS Middle East, which is the common objective of major players, is likely to empower the Iran-led "axis of resistance" from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon, which might then seek further expansion into the Gulf and Yemen. It is a given that Iran's mastery for managed chaos has trumped the Turkish case for economic integration. Moreover, the ongoing proxy wars and climate of sectarianism in Turkey's immediate borders have empowered Iran while undermining Turkish domestic balances and regional outreach. The extent to which the military-religious complex headed by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khamenei would seek hegemony in the region would also determine the tone of the Turkish response against Iran. If Iran goes further into playing the Kurdish and Alevi cards inside Turkey, a clash between the two would become inevitable. The relations are toxic and entail seeking common ground to avert the risk of confrontation on growing regional divergences.

The PKK's multi-pronged attempt to undermine Turkish interests in Syria and increasingly in Iraq—beyond conducting terror attacks inside Turkey—again rose to the number one security issue in TFP. The political track for reconciliation is long gone, and zero-sum logic prevails on both sides.<sup>27</sup> While the Turkish operation in Syria officially targeted the ISIS threat to Turkish borders, it also had in mind the possibility of separating the "Kurdish corridor" linking Afrin and Kobani in Syria. To further complicate the issue, the PKK's Syrian offshoot has become a de facto ally of the United States and is getting support from

21 Barın Kayaoğlu, "Erdogan Claims Turkey in 'Greatest Struggle' since Independence," *Al-Monitor*, December 22, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/erdogan-unfazed-fatalities-push-ahead.html#ixzz4UooyQLxp>.

22 Bülent Aras and Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "State, Region and Order: Geopolitics of the Arab Spring," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 12 (2016): 2259-2273.

23 Ibid.

24 "Davutoğlu'ndan İlginç İtiraf," *Hürriyet*, March 21, 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/davutoglundan-ilgincl-itaraf-11256171>.

25 Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *Atlantic Monthly* 317, no. 3 (April 2016): 70-90.

26 Mike T. Flynn, *The Field of Fight: How to Win the War against Radical Islam and its Allies* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

27 Interview with a member of the Turkish parliament in Ankara in correspondence with the author, January 4, 2017.

EU countries in the name of fighting ISIS. There have also been reports about the PKK's transactional links with Russia, Iran, Israel, and the Assad regime, which overall complicates Turkey's foreign relations across a wide spectrum.

The rise of ISIS further aggravated the isolation of Turkish interests. Under a siege mentality, Turkey failed to comprehend the urgency of fighting back the extremist threat. This was largely because Ankara saw ISIS as a short-term diversion, incarnated by the Assad regime to prevent the inescapable political transition. The Turkish reasoning also accounted for Sunni disenfranchisement in Syria and Iraq as a result of sectarian policies backed by Iran and pro-Iranian actors, which were construed as tools designed for marginalizing and then excluding Sunni grievances. Yet, the Kurdish-ISIS clash and the ensuing international support for the PKK and its offshoots in Syria proved a tipping point for the long-awaited recalibration of TFP.<sup>28</sup>

On top of these, the rift with the Gülenists undermined the Turkish ability to sustain Western support for its now controversial regional interests. The Gülenists delegitimized Turkish interests through magnifying Turkey's seemingly faulty policy choices and mainly shaped Western misinterpretation of Turkish insecurities, which was read mainly as anti-Westernism rather than a bitter feeling of desertion and repudiation of Turkish interests. The Western media and policy establishment, especially in Washington and other leading Western capitals, were more than ready to resuscitate the image of the "terrible Turk" whilst Turkey stood virtually alone in confronting the triple threats of refugees, terrorism, and attritional geostrategic rivalry on its own.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt, a major issue in TFP had been the need for a new security concept. There have been ambiguous hints about an emerging doctrine of preemption in TFP,<sup>29</sup> which paved the way for fighting back the PKK and ISIS across the border. Turkey, backpedalling on regional goals and more importantly under multi-frontal attack at home, needed to bring in an element of deterrence with the employment of hard power. However, a few questions arose that contradicted the sustainability of the current approach. First, Turkey's NATO membership entails coordination with transatlantic allies, and Turkish

cross-border operations have been far from consensual among NATO members because of their general policy of staying away from Middle Eastern crises. With the incoming Trump presidency, the transatlantic alliance is more than ever open to change from collective security to transactional burden sharing. This emerging trend has been one of the primary reasons why Turkey indulged its self-defense at a time when its transatlantic security identity failed to face the unconventional threats mainly emanating from Syria. Thus, certain questions arise on how Turkey would associate its NATO membership with the unconventional fight against non-state actors and to what degree it could co-opt its transatlantic ties in the name of collective defense.

Second, a conflicting reality with Turkey's NATO identity has been Russian military and aerial presence in the immediate Turkish-Syrian border. While NATO appeared apprehensive about Russian encroachments in the Baltic States and has shown a willingness to respond with defensive measures, a similar response was lacking when Russians, arguably with American approval, deployed their forces in Syria to the detriment of Turkish interests. Therefore, the Turkish response to its own "Cuban crisis," per se, has been twofold, especially after the downing of a Russian jet that violated Turkish airspace on November 24, 2015. First, the Turkish government, after a consistent denial of Turkish access to the Syrian war theater due to Russian blockage, had to revise its Russia policy. To that effect, Turkey has seen a change of government, whereby the pro-Western Davutoğlu government was replaced by the relatively "Eurasianist" Yıldırım government, which has assured the reconciliation process between Ankara and Moscow. Second, Turkey espoused a more critical tone against the alliance, especially in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of July 15, due to alleged links of the Gülenist putschists with NATO.<sup>30</sup>

Against this backdrop, the emerging Turkish security doctrine would be defined more through self-help than collective security and seek alternative engagements to face multidimensional threats. On that note, the primary Turkish goal appears to be optimum independence in military technology with special emphasis on the national defense industry to build national tanks, attack helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), satellites, fighter jets, warships, and rifles.<sup>31</sup> Turkey has also sought alternative sources for military procure-

28 Bülent Aras, "Why Turkey Went into Syria," *National Interest*, August 31, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-turkey-went-syria-17537>.

29 Metin Gürcan, "Turkey's new 'Erdoğan Doctrine'," *Al-Monitor*, November 4, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/turkey-wants-use-its-hard-power-solve-regional-problems.html>.

30 Interview with a retired army officer in Istanbul in correspondence with the author, December 1, 2016.

31 "Erdogan Aims to Turn Turkey into Major Defense Industry Power," *Reuters*, May 27, 2015.

ment, again, with particular emphasis on know-how sharing. These controversially directed efforts to seek defense ties with China and Russia ended up with insignificant progress due to objections particularly from the United States.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Turkey unprecedentedly established military bases in Qatar and Somalia on top of post-Cold War military presence in third countries via bilateral (Azerbaijan) and multilateral (Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, Lebanon, Georgia) engagements. Finally, Turkey is also seeking closer defense ties with buffer countries such as Poland, the Baltic republics, Ukraine, and other littoral countries of the Black Sea to balance growing Russian military presence in the broader region.

### Identity crisis

The identity crisis in TFP is not new and has historical roots in the country's geopolitical and geocultural position.<sup>33</sup> The quest for alternative links gave rise to the debate on Islamization, or more precisely "Middle Easternization,"<sup>34</sup> of TFP during the AK Party era, which contradictorily coincided with concurrent literature about "Europeanization."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Turkey sought a leading role in Middle Eastern affairs and opted for regional ownership in lieu of its traditional non-interference policy while it was officially sailing towards EU accession. Attempts at conflict resolution and mediation elevated Turkey's regional stature, while the Turkish blend of democratic rule and market economy in a Muslim-majority setting escalated the appeal of the so-called "Turkish model."<sup>36</sup> Before the Arab Spring, Turkey stood well-entrenched in regional equations with strong ties to the Iran-Syria-Iraq-Hezbollah-Hamas "axis of resistance" as well as pro-Western governments in the Gulf monarchies, Jordan, Egypt, and Palestine.

In the course of the Arab Spring, with heightened sectarianism and pervasive geostrategic rivalry, the Turkish ability to steer a course with the dictum of democratic (even commercial) peace theory was categorically crowded out. In its stead, Turkey had to

confront the twin threats of refugees and terrorism, which undermined Turkish regional goals. As a result, the international spotlight on Turkey in the fight against ISIS and Turkish reluctance to comply wholeheartedly impaired Turkish-Western ties, giving Turkey a lot of media headache about alleged links to ISIS. While Turkey officially denied any links with jihadist groups,<sup>37</sup> anti-Turkey groups, primarily the Gülenists, were able to lead a disinformation campaign about "anti-Kurdish and pro-ISIS" Turkish policy in Syria.

Overall, the quest for a consolidated tripod of foreign policy with Western, regional, and global ties is continuous but now has to take into account above all the domestic transition process and geostrategic pressures on Turkey. The imperatives of the post-July 15 political climate mandate that the government prioritize the need for bureaucratic consolidation, public security, and seeking alternative commercial ties to prop up economic growth.

To that end, TFP will have three priorities: first, fighting back FETÖ (Gülenist terrorist group) and cutting its domestic links to neutralize its capacity to tarnish Turkey's international reputation is on the top of the agenda. Turkey is officially after the leader of this rogue group, Fethullah Gülen, closing down of all Gülen-linked schools and business organizations, and voices this demand for cooperation in each and every foreign exchange. In this sense, there is an expectation in AK Party cadres that U.S. President Trump would be open to extraditing Gülen, who resides in Pennsylvania. While certain countries complied with the Turkish request, the failure to do so in others carries the risk of harming relations with each and every one of the 160 countries in which Gülen-linked organizations are present, including the United States.

Second, Turkey seeks to minimize the PKK's and ISIS's ability to undermine public security, thus downgrading their internal Turkish and cross-border capacities. While the fight with the PKK seemed a natural corollary of the breakdown of the reconciliation process in July 2015, the Turkish land operation against ISIS brings a new element of fighting against jihadism with all its complications for security as well as the ideational background of the AK Party's foreign policy.

Third, there is growing need to prop up economic growth. To that end, Turkey is seeking alternative markets and commercial ties. Against limited access

32 "Why Turkey Chose, and Then Rejected, a Chinese Air-Defense Missile," *Defense One*, February 3, 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/02/turkey-china-air-defense-missile/125648/>.

33 Doğu Ergil, "Identity Crises and Political Instability in Turkey," *International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2000): 43-62.

34 Tarık Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 3-20.

35 Meltem Müftüleri-Baç and Yaprak Gürsoy, "Is There a Europeanization of Turkish Foreign Policy? An Addendum to the Literature on EU Candidates," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 2010): 405-427.

36 Emirhan Yorulmazlar and Ebru Turhan, "Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Arab Spring: Between Western Orientation and Regional Disorder," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (2015): 337-352.

37 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Russia Must Focus on the Common Enemy," *The Times of London*, November 27, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/thunderer/article4624985.ece>.

to its southern neighbors, Turkey revived its economic interest in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Russia, Ukraine, Central Asian republics, Belarus, and Moldova. Turkey still has a broader claim for its presence in the African continent and is open to alternative ties with MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, Australia) countries. Nevertheless, the bulk of Turkish foreign trade is conducted with Western countries. Entering into a free trade regime with Western partners beyond the current Customs Union with the EU is on the top of the agenda, even if the Trump presidency might derail the broader Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

In the post-coup environment, limited room for cooperation with Western countries further aggravated TFP's identity crisis. While the Turkey-EU refugee deal failed to respond to Turkish demands and as anti-Turkish and anti-immigrant voices trumped the case for cooperation with Turkey, Erdoğan's remaining hopes for a constructive relationship with the West were dashed. The ensuing deterioration of relations with the West in general was due to a perceived lack of support for the democratically-elected government in Turkey and Western inability to disassociate itself from the Gülenists, which was literally harbored in the United States and Europe, particularly in Germany, in terms of human resources and lobbying power.

In any case, the brinkmanship policy vis-à-vis the EU is risky for Turkey given its restricted capacity to introduce political reforms against its strenuous efforts for domestic consolidation. Still, there is the overriding perception among Turkish policymakers that the EU has deserted the democratically-elected government at its direst hour of need and failed to make up for this in its aftermath. The public displays of tolerance for the PKK and Gülenists in European capitals added insult to injury, which overall feeds the conspiratorial mindset that "the EU is for disintegrating Turkey." In an ideal scenario, Turkey and the EU should work hand-in-hand against the common challenges of refugees and terrorism, stand together against Russian and Iranian encroachments in its neighborhood, and formulate security and economic policies to stem the looming insecurity tides reaching their shores. While the EU is divided and unclear about its future after Brexit and rising waves of populism, the realistic expectation should be to lower expectations with an end to recriminations, minimizing the impact of refugees for their respective domestic balances, intelligence and security cooperation against terrorism on a common platform, and developing a feasible perspective for the future of Turkey-EU relations based on mutual economic

and political interests rather than an all but evasive membership process.

Against this murky background, Turkish policymakers appeared ready to embrace alternative formulas to meet Turkish needs for security and trade. The reemergence of the idea of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) membership had more to do with Turkish frustration with its Western identity than a commitment to bandwagon Russian and Chinese leadership in the Eurasian region. If the real Turkish goal was to "pivot to Asia," Turkey has Western and regional ties such as Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea that could have been utilized to reach out to the continent.<sup>38</sup> There is also a rather ambivalent interest in the Eurasian Economic Union, which would aim to deepen relations with Belarus and Kazakhstan but would have to sidestep Armenia and Kyrgyzstan due to outstanding political issues.

Also related, the post-coup attempt climate tore down the remnants of barriers against the rising influence of Russia in Turkey. Behind the spotlight, the pro-government elements are engaging with "Eurasianist" groups in Russia reportedly with the intermediary of the ultranationalists, who came to present themselves as possible coalition partners with the AK Party. The publicized presence of Alexander Dugin<sup>39</sup> in Ankara on July 14-15 and his meetings with the higher echelons of the AK Party, including Prime Minister Yıldırım and Mayor of Ankara Melih Gökçek, is a signal for a likely pro-Russian and Eurasianist turn in Turkish foreign policy. Erdoğan sounds enthusiastic about convergence with Russia, from geostrategic goals to economic and military cooperation. Again, to what extent this Russia-led Eurasianism could make up for deteriorating Western ties is the biggest moot point in TFP.

38 Interview with a bureaucrat in Ankara in correspondence with the author, December 21, 2016.

39 "The Unlikely Origins of Russia's Manifest Destiny," *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/27/geopolitics-russia-mackinder-eurasia-heartland-dugin-ukraine-urasianism-manifest-destiny-putin/>

## CONCLUSION

The failed July 15<sup>th</sup> coup surfaced a crisis within the Turkish state apparatus. It was also a serious blow to the foreign policy apparatus, which had already been in the process of reshaping and recalibrating under the imperatives of the preceding era. The four crises discussed in this paper create barriers in the foreign policy-making process, hold foreign policy hostage to domestic issues and priorities, decrease flexibility in regional and international policy, result in inconsistent policy attitudes, and spark debates on Turkey's international orientation. Unified opinion against the failed coup could have resulted in a breakthrough in solving the state crisis in general and foreign and security policy in particular, leading to a countrywide consensus. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The aftershocks of the failed coup inside the country and the deteriorating regional security environment made the situation worse for the foreign policy apparatus.

The search for systemic change from parliamentary to presidential rule preserves the uncertainty in the structure of the foreign policy apparatus, while political and identity crises blur foreign policy-making and implementation. Related to these challenges, security crises implant statist fear for survival among the ruling political elite. In this sense, the rising concern for protecting territorial sovereignty resulted in a psychology of constant state of emergency in the domestic arena and militarization in regional policy. There is an associated disharmony and omnibalancing in international relations which holds outside actors responsible for pressing issues in the country.

This paper was written at a time of serious state crisis in Turkey as policy makers attempted to recalibrate foreign policy, in particular regional policy. The crisis is not likely to disappear soon, and the regional situation will not get any better in the foreseeable future, even by optimistic accounts. The problematic situation is far from manageable through short-term measures. Turkey's multiple fights against terrorist groups necessitate immediate measures. However, Turkey could contribute to more lasting solutions by addressing the four crises discussed in this paper, namely systemic, political, security, and identity crises in foreign policy. The most pressing issues are capacity building, institutionalization, and coordination within the foreign policy apparatus. Serious thinking on a new imagination and construction of foreign policy principles, mechanisms, and implementation must

accompany sound structural components of dealing with the problems of foreign policy.

One vital requirement, more important than all, is to address the polarization and divisions in Turkey that would jeopardize the attempts for normalization on the horizon. The failed July 15 coup surfaced from state weakness, which is indicative of the fragility and vulnerability against societal and foreign policy crises in a polarized country and increasingly insecure regional environment. The search for systemic change, state building, dealing with multiple security threats, economic stability, and development would depend on all-encompassing, inclusive, and participatory political processes in the country. In such an environment, the foreign policy apparatus would be able to recalibrate and restructure itself vis-à-vis the problems of rising insecurity in the regional landscape and the difficulties of protecting engagements and new openings in the international arena. Otherwise, operating from short-term responses and measures in such a problematic political and systematic background will be the cause of further failure within Turkey's foreign and security policies.



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