

THE POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS
AND THE ZERO-PROBLEM POLICY WITH SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to analyze both the evolution of Turkish-Syrian relations during the period of the AKP governments and the emergence of the Syrian revolt in March 2010. With the popular revolts in many Arab countries starting in December 2010, Turkey's general foreign policy vision, which had already undergone considerable changes from the traditional foreign policy of Turkey under the rule of the AKP government, was deeply affected by the Arab revolts. With the newly-emerged political and social conjuncture in the Middle East and due to the lack of foresight for any kind of a regime change or the collapse of secular and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, the vision of zero-problem policy with neighbors did not easily adopt to the radical changes in the region. Nonetheless, the AKP government expected that the Assad regime would remain in power for only a few weeks, since the ruling elite in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya were toppled in a short time. Afterwards, she provided unilateral support to the Syrian

National Council, which was later replaced by the Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syrian Army by legitimizing her policy through humanitarian reasons. This thesis argues that the confrontation between the Sunni and Shia political entities, due to the rising sectarianism in the Middle East during the Arab revolts, led to the alienation of Turkey to her neighbors and therefore, Turkey's zero-problem policy with Syria failed.

Keywords: The Zero-Problem Policy, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkish-Syrian Relations, Justice and Development Party, The Syrian Revolt.

ÖZ

SURİYE KRİZİNİN SİYASİ ANALİZİ VE SURİYE İLE SIFIR SORUN POLİTİKASI

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Bu tez, AKP Hükümetleri dönemindeki Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinin evrimini ve 2010 Mart’ında ortaya çıkan Suriye’deki isyanı analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır. Aralık 2010 tarihinde birçok Arap ülkesinde başlayan halk ayaklanması ile birlikte, Türkiye’nin halihazırda AKP hükümeti döneminde önemli değişiklikler geçirmiş olan genel dış politika vizyonu, Arap isyanlarından derin bir şekilde etkilendi. Ortadoğu’da yeni ortaya çıkan politik ve sosyal bağlam ve bölgede herhangi bir rejim değişikliğinin veya seküler ve otoriter rejimlerin çöküşünün beklenmemesi neticesinde, komşularla sıfır sorun vizyonu bölgedeki köklü değişimlere uyum sağlayamadı. Bununla birlikte AKP hükümeti, Mısır, Tunus ve Libya’daki yönetici elitin kısa bir sürede devrilmesi sebebiyle, Esad rejiminin sadece birkaç hafta görevde kalabileceğini düşündü. Böylelikle, daha sonra Suriye Ulusal Koalisyonu adını alacak olan Suriye Ulusal Konseyi’ne ve Özgür

Suriye Ordusu'na politikasını insani sebeplerle meşrulaştırmak suretiyle tek taraflı olarak destek sağladı. Bu tezde, Arap isyanları süresince Ortodoğu'da yükselen sekteryanızmin neden olduğu Sunni ve Şii politik kimlikler arasındaki çekişmenin Türkiye'nin komşularına yabancılılaşmasına sebebiyet verdiği ve bu sebeple Türkiye'nin Suriye ile sıfır sorun politikasının başarısızlığı uğradığı belirtilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sıfır Sorun Politikası, Türkiye Dış Politikası, Türkiye-Suriye İlişkileri, AKP, Suriye İsyancı

To labor, peace, love and my family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this thesis is to understand the evolving nature of the Turkish-Syrian relations during the period of the AKP government. Therefore, the roots of the recent tension between the two states after the emergence of the Syrian revolt in March 2011 will be examined thoroughly. The research question of the thesis would be read as to search *why the zero-problem policy of Turkey with Syria failed* through the analysis of Turkish-Syrian relations until the beginning of 2013.

This thesis has four concerns at stake. The first one is to reveal the differences and similarities of the AKP governments' foreign policy approaches vis-à-vis traditional foreign policy understandings of the past Turkish governments. The AKP governments' foreign policy approaches are examined by analyzing the significance of cultural, historical and economic motives in the making of foreign policy. Ahmet Davutoğlu, who is theorizing the AKP governments' foreign policies for more than a decade, criticizes the traditional Turkish foreign policy in terms of its alleged conflict-creating features with the neighboring states. Davutoğlu suggests that traditional Turkish foreign policy was directed by the principles of Kemalism since the emergence of modern Turkish Republic in 1923. Accordingly, he argues that Kemalism is a western-oriented ideology and contains apathetical elements towards the Middle Eastern geography. In the final analysis, Davutoğlu claims that previous Turkish governments remained indifferent to the Middle East affairs since 1923.

Davutoğlu asserts that Turkey's indifference to the mentioned formed part of the foundations of the reign of the AKP government. Davutoğlu states that Turkey's alienation from her neighbors came to an end with the Middle Eastern states with the emphasis on the cultural and historical heritages during the successive AKP governments. Thus, it is obvious that the zero-problem policy of Turkey with neighbors had emerged in such an environment where Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government is defined to be as an ambitious and self-assured [foreign] policy that is also underlined in the writings of Ahmet Davutoğlu himself. Accordingly, it was expected that the development of cultural and historical ties with neighbors would have direct influence on the solution of Turkey's problems with her neighbors and economic development of Turkey would have been achieved. In a short period of time, confrontational foreign policy of Turkey towards neighbors was replaced through cooperation in economic and political issues during the AKP governments and Turkey spent effort to strengthen her ties with neighbors considerably.

However Ahmet Davutoğlu's zero-problem policy with neighboring states was formulated on the basis of protection of the status quo in the Middle East. In this context, the emergence of Arab revolts symbolizes a significant rupture from the past and, hence revealed a new political conjuncture in the region. In other words, the emergence of the Arab revolts negatively affected Turkey's zero-problem policy with neighbors that was prevalent in the 2000s. Initially, as a result of the Arab Spring, Turkey emerged as one of the victors and she was crowned as having both a stable democracy and a stable economic growth pattern simultaneously in the Middle East. Afterwards, since Turkish foreign policy makers did not expect the downfall of the brutal regimes of the Arab states one after another, Turkey has not been able to formulate a new or an updated vision in the evolving context and environment of the region. As a result, the

Turkish government largely followed the US and the EU policies in order to position herself in the ongoing conflicts of the area.

With the fall of the Hosni Mubarak regime in Egypt in January 2011 and the international military intervention in Libya, the Turkish government expected that the al-Assad family and the ruling elite would be overthrown in Syria and the opposition would come to power. Thus, the AKP government sponsored both political (Syrian National Council and later, Syrian National Coalition) and military (Free Syrian Army) wings of Syrian opposition groups. Although it has been over two years since the beginning of the demonstrations, Turkey's efforts for a regime change in Syria failed as a result of the effects of both the international conjuncture and the disorganization of the opposition groups that have not paved the way for the collapse of the al-Assad regime. Moreover the tension between the two states brought the countries to the edge of an armed conflict. In the past few months, Turkey attempted to handle the Syrian conflict with more commonsense and as a settling maneuver, the Istanbul-based Syrian National Council was replaced by the Doha-based Syrian National Coalition afterwards.

Another goal that this thesis is contemplating is to show that the possible international military intervention in Syria would bring about serious consequences for Turkey's internal problems. First of all, the Kurdish problem [of Turkey] once again came top ranked into the agenda of the Turkish government partly in parallel with the developments in the Syrian conflict. Although the peace process between the Turkish government and the PKK started in January 2013, the solution of the Kurdish problem of Turkey is still fragile and hence open to provocations. To eradicate the negative impact of the Syrian revolt before the peace process, Turkey attempted to stay away from the internal affairs of her neighbor. Second, the increasing number of refugees in Turkey brought

about a heavy burden on Turkey in terms of financial and psychological aspects. It is for sure that the rising level of struggle between the Syrian regime and the armed opposition groups is prone to bring more and more Syrian refugees to the Turkish border. Thus, it is likely that, even if she avoids it, Turkey will be more involved in the Syrian conflict and will be suffering more from the ongoing war than expected.

As the third matter, there is the cultural potential that Turkey's increasing involvement in the Syrian conflict could give rise to a sectarian tension between the Alevi and Sunni people in Turkey. It is clear that the Alevis feel disturbed by the Turkish Prime Minister's usage of sectarian undertones to characterize the civil war in Syria. Against this background, Turkey's close relations with the Syrian regime during the AKP governments up until the beginning of the Syrian revolt would bring into mind that the consequences of the Arab Spring crystallized the rivalry between Shia and Sunni regimes in the Middle East. In other words, the sectarian division among Muslim states under the categorization of Shia and Sunni regimes is evident in the Middle East. Turkish government's close ties with Syria's Sunni majority can be considered to illustrate that Turkey takes part an active role in the confrontation of Shia and Sunni regimes in the Middle East. In fact, this division among Muslim states puts Turkey's internal stability in jeopardy since Turkey is not a homogenous country in terms of sects. Moreover, the rising sectarian character of the Syrian conflict increased the tension between Turkey and the supporters of the al-Assad regime in the international community. Consequently, one ends up with a Turkey whose relations with Iran, Iraq and Shia organizations have deteriorated. Despite the fact that Turkey did not remain silent as thousands of people were being killed along Syrian border, it must be taken into account that the conflict will play a destabilizing role both for Turkey's

domestic stability and the balance between the two polarized (Sunnis and Shias) groups in the Middle East.

As mentioned at the very beginning, the fourth and last concern of this thesis would be to argue that the revolt in Syria is different from the other Arab revolts in the Middle East regarding its character and hence, the question of why the Syrian regime is still in power despite the past two years since the beginning of clashes needs to be answered. Especially heterogeneous character of Syrian society in terms of sects, religions and ethnicity formed the grounds for disunity of the opposition groups in Syria. Moreover, the pressure of Russia, China and Iran in order to not allow any international military intervention in Syria makes a possible ending of the conflict in short and medium runs more and more difficult.

The Methodology of the Thesis

This dissertation primarily uses empirical research and is the product of an empirical analysis of related books, articles, newspapers and websites. It is interesting to see that there is not a great deal of scholarly books and articles on these issues although Turkish-Syrian relations revolved through the water problem, the Hatay issue and the PKK issue historically. This situation is the same for the changing nature of Turkish-Syrian relations during the AKP governments as well. Since there are a limited number of books and articles on Turkish-Syrian relations, they are the newspapers websites, such as *BBC World News*, *Al Jazeera*, *Jadaliyya*, *Daily Star*, *CNN International*, *Reuters*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Hürriyet*, *Sol*, *Radikal* and *Cumhuriyet*. Those significantly were made use of for conceptualization of content of this dissertation. On the other hand, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Insight Turkey*, *the Middle East Quarterly* and *the Middle East Journal* provided indispensable articles for my research. Moreover, *the website of*

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was crucial to provide official information and views of the Turkish government concerning a variety of foreign policy issues. Within the content of the thesis, various other articles, books and websites are also covered to further focus on why relations with Syria after the emergence of Arab revolts failed. Throughout the thesis, the views of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister since March 2009, are given a considerable attention. His books, including “*Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*” (Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position), “*Küresel Bunalım*” (Global Depression; and his article “*Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007*” published in the journal “*Insight Turkey*” together with his other various articles, speeches and interviews in “*the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs*” are also extensively covered.

The Content of the Thesis

This thesis includes 5 chapters. It starts with the Introduction and the second chapter examines the history of Turkish-Syrian relations until the emergence of the AKP government to understand the main reasons behind the problematic nature of Turkish-Syrian relations. Within this context, especially the emergence of the water problem will be examined by considering its importance on the socio-economic development of Middle Eastern states and related to the development of the water problem, the Kurdish issue of Turkey with respect to the emergence and the rise of PKK in the 1980s and 1990s will be shed light. Moreover, the chapter will cover the rising tension between Turkey and Syria just before the deportation of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1998. The thesis also gives place for the revelation of the international context of Öcalan’s deportation. In addition, the consequences of the Adana Protocol signed between Syria and Turkey in

late 1998 after Öcalan's deportation from Syria will also be covered. The chapter further includes the analysis of the AKP government foreign policy approach and hence, evaluates Turkey's new Middle Eastern policy. For that reason, first, Turkey's traditional foreign policy towards Middle Eastern states is analyzed by referencing Turkey's indifference and her limited relations with Middle Eastern affairs for decades. Second, the general and peculiar aspects of the AKP government's foreign policy are assessed with regard to the writings of Ahmet Davutoğlu and his critics in the international relations literature. Afterwards, the roots and consequences of the AKP government's activism in the new Middle East are thoroughly examined within the context of the discourse of Ahmet Davutoğlu. In the last part of the chapter, Davutoğlu's zero-problem policy with neighboring states is discussed, especially in the context of Turkey's relations with Iraq, Iran and Israel.

In the third chapter, Turkey's zero problem policy with Syria and the process of normalization of relations will be detailed in terms of rising economic relations between the two states and political détente period visible during the reign of the AKP governments. Concerning the success of the zero problem policy with Syria, it would be manifested that the change of the leadership in Syria with the death of Hafez al-Assad in 2000 and his replacement by Bashar al-Assad, Turkish and Syrian endeavors for economic cooperation, the end of Syrian support for the PKK organization and the AKP governments' new foreign policy activism led to the beginning of a new period in relations. Also, Turkey's political attitude towards international isolation of Syria due to the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 is covered in order to demonstrate how Turkey gave prominent support to her neighbor in a difficult time for the Assad regime. At the same time, the increasing level of economic relations with the removal of visas, the formation of the Strategic

Cooperation Council and the military cooperation between the two sides are addressed. The third chapter also analyses the emergence of the Syrian revolt. The main factors surrounding the beginning of the Syrian revolt including the liberalization of Syrian economy, the unequal distribution of income, the rising corruption of Syrian politicians and the recent droughts are examined. In addition, the role of parties to the Syrian conflict, namely the Assad regime, the armed-opposition groups, Syrian military, Alawis, Kurds and Christians are discussed to better outline the causes and development of the conflict. Moreover, the sectarian tension between majority Sunnis, and minority groups, mainly Alawis and Christians of Syria are covered and hence; the heterogeneous structure of the Syrian society are monitored. Overall, it is manifested that each actor in the ongoing conflict has different interests for the post-Assad period. The chapter also examines the international context of Syrian conflict. This is an important point since international actors play a significant role in the continuation of Syrian conflict and Turkish foreign policy is affected by the international developments. In this sense, the converging and diverging political and economic interests of US, EU, Arab League, China, Russia and Iran with respect to Syrian crisis are evaluated. It is also argued that the interests of the international players concerning the ongoing conflict in Syria are motivated differently. In order to make it more concrete, it is stated that while China, Russia and Iran worked to limit the US and other western states' influence in the Middle East and to provide support for Shia regimes; US, EU and Arab League favored Sunni regimes during the Arab uprisings. In this regard, it is concluded that the sectarian rivalry between Muslim states has once again been on the political agenda of the Middle Eastern states.

In the fourth chapter, the failure of the zero-problem policy with Syria just after a few months after the emergence of the Syrian revolt in

March 2011 together with Turkey's close relations with Syrian opposition groups are examined. In addition, Turkish support for the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army are discussed in terms of sectarian closeness of the AKP government with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. On the account of the developments in Syria, the AKP government's position regarding the Kurdish problem in Syria is covered. It is argued that the Kurdish issue is critical for Turkey's regional interests as well as the internal stability of Turkey. Moreover the refugee problem and its influence on Turkey's domestic problems due to ongoing clashes along Turkish-Syrian border are stressed. Also, Turkey's close relations with non-regional international actors (US and EU) concerning the solution for Syrian conflict are covered with respect to the Annan Plan and the emergence of the Friends of Syria Coalition. Thus, the reasons behind Turkish government's endeavors for the international military intervention in Syria are analyzed.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF TURKISH-SYRIAN RELATIONS AND THE ZERO-PROBLEM POLICY WITH NEIGHBORS

2.1 The History of Turkish-Syrian Relations until the Reign of the AKP Government

Until the emergence of the AKP government in 2002, bilateral problems (the Hatay problem, the water problem and the PKK issue), the legacy of the Ottoman past, the stereotypical images of each other as well as the Cold War rivalry had considerable influence on the evolution of Turkish-Syrian relations (Tür, 2010: 164). In essence, since the formation of modern Turkey in 1923 to the reign of the AKP government, Turkey's relations with Syria was limited at large due to Turkey's indifference to the Middle Eastern affairs for long decades. Also, the Cold War atmosphere affected the bilateral relations considerably especially after Turkey's participation in NATO in 1952. With this move, Turkey sided with the western powers vis-à-vis the alleged Soviet threat in the Middle East. In February 1955, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and the Great Britain formed the Baghdad Pact in order to eliminate the alleged communist threat in the region (Bishku, 2012: 37). However as it is obvious, Arab states except Iraq were not involved in the Pact since on the ideological/political level, Arab nationalism and socialism which are against crony capitalism and imperialism were on the rise in the Middle Eastern geography. As a result, nonalignment became popular among Arab states and the Baghdad Pact was dissolved just after the actualization of the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Against this background, the Syrian Baath Party and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt became closer for cooperation in many fields. For instance,

in October 1955, Egypt and Syria constituted a war council and joint war command. As a response to that Turkey warned Syria in that Turkey would consider Syria's close relations with Egypt as a hostile action to her interests (Bishku, 2012: 38). Despite Turkey's severe warnings, 3 years later, Syria and Egypt formed a political union known as the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958 although Syria succeeded from the Union in 1961. During the 1960s, "*illegal border crossing and smuggling, the mutual restrictions on the property of citizens of the other country, the apportionment of waters*" and especially Syria's allaged support for Turkish and Kurdish leftists militants, and for Armenian political/military organization known as the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) in the 1970s hindered the normalization of the relations dramatically (Bishku, 2012: 41). However these issues had little importance on the evolution of the bilitarel relations compared to the major political and technical issues revealing in the 1980s and 1990s.

Some issues were introduced to Turkish foreign policy in the 1980s and 1990s. These issues, namely, were the water issue and the Kurdish issue. First, the water problem was associated with two vital rivers of the Middle East: Euphrates and Tigris. By using the timeline of Aysegül Kibaroğlu (2008: 185-186), it is possible to categorize the evolution of the water problem of Turkey. From 1920 to 1960, the water issue was perceived as a national problem. Henceforth, although the riparian states, namely Syria-Iraq-Turkey, were interested in "*the development of water and land resources in each country*", there was no salient development project in those years. As opposed to that, from 1960 to 1980, competitive transboundary water relations were set in place. Since the vital role of the water for the economic development in the Middle East region was discovered, the riparian states were more concerned with socioeconomic development through the introduction of the water-based development

models. To illustrate, the Baath Party of Syria introduced the Euphrates Valley Project in the 1960s. In a similar vein, the Baath Party of Iraq worked for agricultural and irrigation projects in order for guaranteeing the food security of Iraqi people.

It is clear that, compared to Iraq and Syria, the most complex development project was Turkey's Lower Euphrates Project. The project aimed to build a series of dams on the Euphrates. The name of the Lower Euphrates project was changed with the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) in the late 1970s (Kibaroglu, 2008: 186). Afterwards, the GAP aimed at developing agriculture and industry in the southeast of Turkey. Due to the competitive and uncoordinated nature of the water development projects, technocrats of the riparian states came together. However the attempts to solve the water issue backfired. As a result, concerning the water problem in the 1980s, there was a transition from low politics to high politics in the Turkish foreign policy (Sever, 2008: 187). In other words, using diplomatic and technical channels for the solution of the water problem failed.

In fact, there were two catalysts related to the water issue that played significant role in the escalation of the tension between Syria and Turkey. First, since Turkey worked to construct new dams, for instance, Keban Dam (1964-1974) and Karakaya Dam (1976-1987) on the Euphrates, Syria became hostile to Turkey. Second, to respond to Turkey's constructed dams, as Böyükbaş (1999: 29) claims, Syria logically supported the separatist movement, namely the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) by welcoming the leader and militants of the organization in the 1980s. As a result, the PKK became active along the Turkish-Syrian border. The high tension between Syria and Turkey would have reached its peak in 1998 when Turkey directly threatened Syria by sending troops to the Syrian border for the deportation of PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan (Hale, 1992: 682). Consequently, during

the 1980s, the PKK was backed by the Syrian regime in order to decrease the Turkish control over the waters of the Euphrates.

During the 1990s, with the disappearance of the Soviet Union, Syria lost her most important ally in the international arena. It is known that Soviet Union supplied military equipment to Syria. Yet, relations between Soviet Union and Syria were not only limited to military support. At the same time, the trade between Soviet Union and Syria developed to a certain point. Nonetheless, due to the domestic problems occurred in the Gorbachev ruling in late 1980s, the significance of Syria for the USSR declined dramatically (Sönmezoglu, 2006: 557). The fall of the Soviet regime coincided with another development in the Middle East. In this sense, the occupation of Kuwait in August 1990 by Iraqi military forces commanded by Saddam Hussein is notable. Since the Syrian-Soviet Union relationship became less and less important for both sides in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet regime, Syria remained isolated by the western powers as a result of her close relations with a socialist state. To get rid of international pressure deriving from the western powers, Syria benefited from the consequences of the occupation of Kuwait by Iraqi forces. Having occupied Iraq, the US and western powers concentrated on Saddam. This change of regional context eased the pressure on Syria; hence as Sönmezoglu (2006: 558) claims Syria took an important chance to restore her relations with the western states.

The Turkish-Syrian relationship changed its path in the beginning of the 1990s. During the 1990s, one critical topic was introduced to the agenda of the two sides. This was obviously the increasing numbers of the PKK activities with the logistical support provided by the Syrian government. As it was mentioned before, what mainly triggered the Syrian regime for supporting the PKK was associated with the water issue or the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) developed by Turkey (Güner, 1997: 109). The PKK

issue had an impact on Turkish domestic policy decisions and its implications in the 1990s. The killings of hundreds of the Turkish soldiers in the fight against the PKK organization led to the mobilization of Turkish society. Consequently, Turkish nationalism was on the rise during the 1990s. With the stressful atmosphere experienced in the 1990s, the elimination of the PKK became the ultimate aim. At the same time, relations with neighboring states sponsoring the activities of the PKK deteriorated. In this context, Turkey carefully watched the Syrian influence in the development of the PKK attacks in the middle of 1990s. In this regard, the speech delivered by Turkish Foreign Minister of the time, Deniz Baykal, is sufficient to demonstrate how the tension between Turkey and Syria increased dramatically during the 1990s. According to Baykal:

Syria, as a neighbor country, should stop being the headquarter of a terrorist organization. It can be thought that hands with the blood of terror could be washed with more ‘water’. However, Turkey will never bargain the use of terror for war (Tür, 2010: 164).

Afterwards, Turkey changed her stand on Syria due to the continuous support of Syria to the PKK activities. Within this atmosphere, Turkey and Syria experienced quasi war. So, a plan of action for targeting Syrian military units was approved by the National Security Council (MGK) of Turkey. Under the leadership of General Hüseyin Kırıkoğlu, at the time the Chief of Staff, additional 10.000 troops were mobilized along the Syrian border. At the same time, Kırıkoğlu emphasized that there was an undeclared state of war condition between Turkey and Syria (Kirişçi, 2004: 287). As a final maneuver, Turkish television channels were invited to the Turkish-Syrian border to demonstrate how serious Turkey's military preparations were for the military intervention against Syria (Aras, 2012:42).

The Turkish pressure on Syria resulted in some consequences. First, Öcalan was forced to leave Syria on the 17th of October in 1998. Additionally, to restore diplomatic ties with Syria, Turkey and Syria signed the Adana Protocol on the 19th and 20th of October in 1998. Mainly, the Adana Protocol included the elimination of Syrian support to the PKK. As a result of the signing of the Adana Protocol, the PKK issue was removed from the Turkish-Syrian political agenda for at least a decade. So, the Adana Agreement was one of the cornerstones in the Turkish-Syrian relations (Bishku, 2012: 45). The major reason behind expelling of Öcalan was related to the weaknesses of the Syrian military capabilities vis-à-vis the Turkish military capabilities. On the other hand, Bashar al-Assad expressed that the deportation of Öcalan was:

not out of fear but because we preferred you. We would either be friends with the Turkish people or prefer the Kurds and lose you. Because our preference was with you, we sent Ocalan out (Tür, 2010: 164).

Assad exaggerates the position of Syria while he underestimates Turkish military and diplomatic pressure on Syria. In order to decrease the tension between Turkey and Syria, the shuttle diplomacy of Cairo and Tehran was critical in sending Öcalan out. Moreover Turkey took the support of the US when Turkey's pressure over Syria increased dramatically on October 1998 (Bishku, 2012: 46). Lastly, in response to Syrian support for the PKK, Turkey developed her cooperation with Israel in terms of security issues. In this context, it is plausible to say that Syria would have been outpowered if Turkey and Israel cooperated on the military level. In October 1998, the declaration of the Reliant Mermaid II operation with the participation of Israel, the US and Jordan gave rise to the isolation of Syria in the Middle East (Altunışık, 2000: 187). As a result of the Adana Accords, bilateral relations started to develop. On Turkish side, domestic security concerns were reduced. To illustrate, Turkey's President at the time, Ahmet

Necdet Sezer, attended the funeral of Hafez Assad in 2000. Sezer's participation in the funeral and the deportation of Öcalan paved the way for the normalization of relations and from 1998 to 2000, the rapprochement between Turkey and Syria was emerged.

2.2 Turkish Foreign Policy during the AKP Governments

The AKP government was the product of the crises period of the 28th February 1997 event which created a polarization between Islamists and secularists in Turkey. On the 28th February 1997, the military intervened in Turkish politics for eliminating the influence of the Islamists. In this sense, the aim of the military was toppling down the government of Necmettin Erbakan who was accused of being the enemy of the secular regime of Turkey. As a result of the military intervention in the Turkish politics, on 16th of January in 1998, the Welfare Party was banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court. Yet, just after banning of the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party was founded by the former members of the Welfare Party. Nonetheless, on June 2001, the Virtue Party was also banned by the Court (Yeşilada, 2002: 62). After the banning of the Erbakan government, Turkey experienced another coalition government formed by the Democratic Left Party (DSP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Motherland Party (ANAP). The most important event witnessed during this coalition government was the deep economic crises of 2000 and 2001. As a result of the elections held in 2002, members of the Turkish coalition government suffered significant losses.

At the same time, Turkey's domestic problems were serious before the AKP government came to power. According to Akkoyunlu, Nicolaidis and Öktem (2013: 21):

Many of the socio-economic and institutional problems of the previous decade still loomed large in the early 2000s: fragile coalition governments, economic crises, spiralling inflation, widespread human rights abuses and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, corruption, state collusion in organised crime and weak democratic institutions kept in check by the Kemalist-controlled military-bureaucratic establishment.

Against this background, in August 2001, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) was founded by some former members of the Virtue Party. In the election campaign, the AKP promised to be the party of all segments of the Turkish society. Yet, secularists and nationalists as well as the leftists did not support the AKP in the elections. Taşpinar (2007: 125) stresses that according to the opponents of the AKP, the Party was the implementer of a hidden agenda designed by foreign powers which indicates that the Sevres Syndrome was still influential on many. After just a year since its establishment, the AKP received more than 34 percent of the total votes in 2002 elections. After the election, Erdoğan's first visit was to Rome and then to Greece, Brussels and Madrid (Müftüler-Baç & Güney, 2005: 290). That fact revealed how Erdoğan government will be different from Necmettin Erbakan whose first trip was to Iran.

During the reign of the AKP governments, traditional foreign policy was considered as an obstacle before socio-economic development of Turkey. In this sense, new Turkish government followed a different path from the previous governments' alleged conflict-creating foreign policy preferences. Ahmet Davutoğlu is the name behind the formulation of the AKP governments' foreign policy. He was appointed as Foreign Minister of Turkey by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the 1st May in 2009. Before being appointed to this position, he was chief advisor of Erdoğan on foreign policy issues. Overall, as Öniş (2011: 53) argues Davutoğlu's foreign policy decisions determined the AKP government's new foreign

policy both in rhetoric and practice. Davutoğlu explains the new foreign policy understanding of Turkey as follows:

As a scholar of international relations, I have long asserted that a major reason for Turkey's relative isolation from its neighborhood had to do with the framework that dominated the mindset of Turkish foreign-policy elites for decades - a mindset that erected obstacles between Turkey and its neighbors physically, mentally, and politically. The new AK Party government hoped to reintegrate Turkey with its surroundings, and this new strategy necessitated a major break with the old foreign-policy culture. In its electoral platform, the AK Party resolved to improve relations with Turkey's neighbors and pursue a more dynamic and multidimensional foreign policy. This was a foreign-policy vision I had been advocating in academia, and was thus more than happy to make my own contribution toward the realization of that new approach.¹

Mainly, Turkey's new foreign policy was in parallel to the strategic depth doctrine of Davutoğlu. According to Davutoğlu (2001: 41), Turkey is located in the center of civilizations and she was born from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire's geopolitical and historical heritage. Hence, he asserts that Turkey could be involved in the situation in larger geographies and she should follow proactive foreign policy to increase her influence in the international arena. Overall, Davutoğlu (2001: 117; 2008: 79) claims that Turkey's geopolitical location is significant for opening to the world and for becoming an important international actor not only in the Middle East but also in the larger geographies including Mediterranean, the Caspian Sea, Caucasia, the Balkans and Central Asia. Davutoğlu expresses that:

Turkey's strategic depth rests on its geographical and historical depth. Our long history provides us with a unique set of relations with countries and communities all around us. Our geostrategic location in the midst of a vast geography, on the other hand, places us in a position to relate to and influence the developments that are

¹ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-published-in-foreign-policy-magazin-2.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

key to the future of the world. So the question is not achieving the strategic depth, but using it for regional and global peace. This requires us to engage with the countries with which we share a common past and geography in a way that will promote our shared interests and create a mutually beneficial framework for cooperation and dialogue. Today, with its strong democracy, vibrant economy, and active foreign policy, Turkey has more opportunities to capitalize on its strategic depth. And we have been working very actively to this end.²

Furthermore Davutoğlu remarks that ideological preferences of Turkish governments downgraded the importance of historical and cultural parameters in the formulation of Turkey's foreign policy. In essence, what Davutoğlu means by using "*ideological preference of Turkish governments*" is associated with taking Kemalism and its principles as a touchstone for foreign policy agenda. According to Davutoğlu (2001: 42), Kemalist foreign policy which considers neighbors as security threats rather than partners is responsible for Turkey's problematic relations with Middle Eastern states. Moreover, Davutoğlu (2002: 142) claims if Turkey trusts on her cultural and historical values, she can open to the world easily. In this logic, Turkey's cultural and economic geography is larger than her political geography. He also criticizes Turkey's historically-rooted strategic alliance with global powers concerning the Middle East region since Turkey alienated to her cultural and historical heritage with the Muslim states as a result (Davutoğlu, 2001: 42). He also claims that as Turkey becomes more involved in the Middle Eastern region, she can develop more close relations with western powers (Davutoğlu, 2002: 193).

Davutoğlu's foreign policy understanding was also linked to the development of economic relations with neighboring states considerably. In

² http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

this sense, during the AKP governments, Turkey's economic influence in the Middle East increased in parallel to her growing economy (Grigoriadis & Kamaras, 2008: 53). In order to improve her economic relations with neighboring states, the AKP government signed free trade agreements. To illustrate, Turkey signed free trade agreements with Morocco, Tunis, Palestine and Syria in 2004, with Egypt in 2005. Besides, the Strategic Cooperation Councils were formed in order to increase the level of trade. Also, the encouragement of foreign investment in Turkey is the priority of the AKP government (Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, 2010: 404-405). Moreover, the government encouraged Turkish investment in the Midde Eastern states. With the increasing role of economic motives in foreign relations, political problems with neighboring states began to lessen. Ahmet Davutoğlu also emphasizes the significance of economic relations with neighboring states as follows:

Our foreign policy is also shaped by our economic interests. Turkey has a big population, young people constituting half of it, and a vibrant economy, striving to be among the top ten economies of the world by 2023, which is the one hundredth anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Additionally, the Turkish private sector is very active and has a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This requires us to widen the scope of our outreach as an economic actor. Increasing the level of economic cooperation with as many countries as possible becomes an important priority for Turkey. It compels us to reach out and enhance the scope of our relations on a global scale. This is also why we have increased cooperation and engagement with the emerging powers of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, all of which have become priority areas in terms of our strategic interests.³

It seems that Turkey is becoming an integral part of the Middle Eastern politics after long decades of isolation since Turkey redefined its

³ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

geopolitics in the period of the AKP governments. Overall, it could be argued that opening to the Middle East is the ultimate aim for foreign policy makers of the AKP government. As it is obvious, Davutoğlu wants Turkey to be active in the huge geography of the Ottoman Empire. Thereby, by being influential within the old boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, Davutoğlu aims to put an end to the alienation of Turkey from neighboring states (Larrabee, 2007: 2). Davutoğlu (2008: 80-83) also asserts that Turkey pursued substantial foreign policy principles during his term. He argued that Turkey did not sacrifice democracy to security concerns during the AKP governments. As a result, Turkey emerged as a reliable country with a working democracy in the Middle East. Second, with the formulation of the zero-problem policy with neighboring states, Turkish foreign policy was de-securitized compared to the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, economic relations with the neighboring states improved Turkey's economy. Third, Davutoğlu claims, during his term, Turkey's relations with the west and east developed simultaneously.

Furthermore Davutoğlu claims that Turkey must follow autonomous foreign policy in order to be a central state and hence, he suggests Turkey should trust on her vision and potential to emerge as a leading figure in the newly-shaped international power relations. According to Davutoğlu:

our foreign policy will be conducted autonomously. We suffer from a perception that other powers design regional politics and we only perform the roles assigned to us. We need to do away with this psychological sense of inferiority which has permeated in many segments of our society and amongst political elites. Today, we determine our vision, set our objectives, and execute our foreign policy in line with our national priorities. We might succeed or fail in our initiatives, but the crucial point is that we implement our own policies. We do not receive instructions from any other powers, nor are we part of others' grand schemes. In particular, our policies towards neighbors are devised with careful consideration of our own evaluation of the situation. As has been the case so far, we will continue to coordinate our policies with those of our Western

*partners as we see fit, but will never let such partnership negatively affect our relations with neighbors.*⁴

In essence, the international context also favored the AKP government. Regarding relations with the EU, the distinction of Ziya Öniş (2007: 247-248) could be useful. According to Öniş, paradoxically, whereas defensive nationalists (Kemalists, major unions, ultra-nationalists, radical Islamists) are in favor of entry to EU in their rhetoric, conservative globalists (moderate Islamists, Kurdish reformers) are the main impetus for the EU reforms. Accordingly, especially in the early years of the AKP government, becoming full member to the EU was targeted by the first AKP governments. As a result, on the 17th of December 2004, Turkey and the EU started negotiations which were supported by the US as well. Dependent on the EU road, Turkey's adoption of harmonization packages of the EU was critical for the democratization of Turkey in terms of individual freedom and human rights. As Akkoyunlu, Nicolaidis and Öktem (2013: 22) emphasized:

Between 2001 and 2005, Turkey's governments adopted far reaching democratising reforms with unprecedented political will and popular support in conjunction with the EU's 'harmonisation packages'. These included the abolition of the death penalty, the adoption of a new civil code, stricter measures against human right abuses and torture, legal amendments to safeguard the freedom of expression and minority rights, as well as security sector reforms that started tilting the civil-military balance in politics in favour of the former for the first time in more than four decades.

In addition, the AKP government implemented the EU reforms to pacify the military and took support from Turkey's Islamists and liberals in the name of reducing the role of military in politics. As a result, Bilgin (2007: 750) stresses that the hegemonic role of the military in Turkish domestic

⁴ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/bakanmakale_tepev.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

politics was undermined by the EU reforms; yet reforms came to a halt in the second term of the AKP government. Nevertheless, during the reign of the AKP government, civil-military relations entered a new phase in which military was distanced from politics. The AKP government also moderated Turkey's hard-line stance towards the Cyprus problem in order to develop her relations with the EU. To illustrate, the AKP government, especially by using the United Nations channel under the guidance of Kofi Annan, who at the time was Secretary General of the United Nations, strived to solve the Cyprus issue. Yet, the AKP government's attempt to solve the issue resulted in failure when the Annan Plan was rejected by Greek Cypriots in April 2004 (Sözen & Özersay, 2007: 139). All in all, while the AKP governments received increasingly higher votes in the parliamentary elections (2002, 2007 and 2011); the democratization process through the EU reforms strengthened the hand of the AKP government vis-à-vis military. Turkish government also attached importance to the views of business associations including MÜSİAD, TUSKON, TOBB, and TÜSİAD regarding the making of foreign policy. Similarly, to de-militarize the foreign policy decisions, the influence and the numbers of think-tanks increased dramatically. ASAM, SETA, USAK, ODAM, and TUSAM are among the famous think-tanks during the AKP governments (Kanat, 2010: 220). As a result, the decreasing influence of the opposition and the military led to the emergence of the AKP government as an unrivaled decision maker in Turkish domestic and foreign politics.

Similar to the EU, the US supported the reforms of the AKP government in all levels, however Turkey's relations with the US was not clean-cut. Especially, after the rejection of the resolution for the deployment of the US forces in the southeastern part of Turkey on 1st of March in 2003 due to public pressure, relations deteriorated between Turkey and the US at the diplomatic level for a short period of time. Nonetheless, as Yeşilyurt and

Akdevelioğlu (2010: 391-392) argues Turkey became a part of the *Greater Middle East Project* in order to renew strong ties with the US. By a member of the Greater Middle East Project, the foreign policy makers of Turkey aimed at the protection of stability in the Northern Iraq, having good relations with Israel and the isolation of Iran in the Middle East region. Overall, Turkey's integration to the Greater Middle East Project recovered relations and Turkey's political reforms and active foreign policy in the Middle East was supported by the US.

2.3 The Zero Problem Policy with Neighboring States and its Implications with regard to Relations with Iraq, Iran and Israel

Turkey's traditional indifference to the Middle East politics lasted for decades, though there were exceptions. For instance, during the 1970s, Turkey worked hard to have close relations with Arab states because of rising prices of the energy resources. Nonetheless, since Arab states did not support Turkey in the Cyprus issue, the normalization of relations with the Arab states ended in failure (Kirişçi, 1998: 21). In the formulation of the zero-problem policy with neighbors, it is suggested that Turkey has historical responsibility in the Middle East because of her shared history with neighbors. In a similar vein, Erdoğan named the Arab states "*not only as friends, but, at the same time, brothers.*"⁵

First, the zero-problem policy with neighboring states is based on the assumption that economic interdependence with Middle Eastern states could reduce the perception of threat in Turkish foreign policy (Oğuzlu, 2012: 12). In this sense, Turkey tries to expand its economic relations with the Middle

⁵ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-ak-party-perfect-intermediary-between-israel-and-arabs.aspx?pageID=438&n=the-ak-party-perfect-intermediary-between-israel-and-arabs-2008-05-14>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Eastern countries. Thus, in the imagination of Davutoğlu, by abstaining from use of hard power in its relations, Turkey emerged as a trading state rather than a military state. Second, by the pursuit of the zero-problem policy with neighboring states, Turkey led to become an important mediator in the regional problems. In his writings, Davutoğlu also underlines the point that Turkey should play an active role in mediating the Middle Eastern conflicts (Davutoğlu, 2001: 453). To illustrate, Turkey played a role in the mediation of the Israeli-Lebanon, Israeli-Palestinian, Israeli-Syrian and Iran-EU conflicts. Turkey's effort to mediate conflicts in the Middle East is one of the reasons why the prestige of Turkey soared in the Middle East in recent years. In this sense, during the AKP governments, Davutoğlu claims:

*Turkey has added a relatively new aspect to its foreign policy in recent years which indeed complements its global vision via helping third countries in resolving their domestic as well as bilateral problems through facilitation and reconciliation. Indeed Turkey is now playing a more active role compared to the past in mediation and resolution of conflicts. While doing so Turkey prioritizes opportunities and initiatives improving cooperation and friendships between states based on a win-win principle rather than perceived problems and threats*⁶

Third, as suggested by Davutoğlu, the zero-problem policy requires maximum cooperation and minimum problems with neighbors (Zafar, 2012: 147). According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's problematic relations with Syria after the beginning of the revolts did not eliminate the continuation of the zero-problem policy as one of the main Turkish foreign policy principles and hence, Turkey's problematic relations with Syria did not come to mean that Turkish foreign policy vision failed at large. In this regard, on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, the following information is given to understand why relations between Turkey and Syria have become increasingly tense:

⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Today, the "zero problems" vision means that we cannot make a decision that will alienate us from the hearts and minds of our region's people. If the main challenge to that vision of peace comes from those who deny the people's basic rights by oppressive means, we cannot remain silent. If we don't stand against oppression today, we cannot face the future generations with dignity. We also might erect new and lingering barriers between Turkey and the region, which would hinder our efforts at reintegration. The "zero problems" principle, in the sense of friendly relations with regional states, still forms the basis of our policy in the region. We still pursue stronger ties with rulers who respect their people's demands for freedom and offer a secure and stable domestic order. In the countries that are going through a political transition, we are doing our utmost to help reestablish a balance between freedom and security. Our "zero problems" initiatives in the Middle East in the years preceding the popular uprisings also enabled us to establish valuable ties not only with neighboring regimes, but also societal actors. The leverage we gained in this process put us in a better position to address the challenges of the current regional transformation.⁷

Against this background, in the next paragraphs, the implications of the zero problem policy with neighbors including Iraq, Iran and Israel will be addressed.

It is obvious that the American promise to provide peace and security in the Middle East failed just after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. That fact created a power vacuum in the Middle East. After the occupation of Iraq, non-Arab states of the Middle East, namely, Turkey, Iran and Israel gained more importance in the region. For instance, Iranian officials established strong ties with Shia majority of Iraq beginning with the US occupation of Iraq. Likewise, Turkey was very influential in Northern Iraq after the demise of the Sunni regime (Terhalle, 2007: 75). In fact, Turkey was extremely anxious about the economic losses and the future of the Kurdish problem just before US occupation of Iraq. Actually, both Turkish society

⁷ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-published-in-foreign-policy-magazin-2.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

and Turkish media were against the occupation. This fact affected the decisions of the AKP members in the Parliament on supporting the US war effort in the Middle East. Similarly, the negative attitude of Turkey's intellectuals regarding the Iraqi war and anti-war demonstrations throughout Turkey were influential in pre-war period.

As it is emphasized before, in the eyes of Turkish society, Turkey was not to support the US occupation forces in Iraq. As a result of the increasing level of pressure on the AKP government, the Turkish Parliament did not allow the US military forces to use the Turkish territory in the war. Afterwards, the rejection of the US demands led to high tension between Turkey and the US. However the US response to Turkey's decision was also very humiliating since the members of the Turkish special team located in Sulaymaniyah were captured by US soldiers who placed hoods over the former's heads. Consequently, as Müftüler-Baç (2005: 74) notes, confidence between Turkey and the US deteriorated. Moreover, the influence of the Kurdish rule in northern Iraq increased dramatically after the occupation of Iraq as Barzani's demands regarding Kirkuk raised the tension between Turkey and northern Iraq. So, the overthrow of Saddam led to the securitization of the Turkish foreign policy against Iraq once again in the history of Turkey.

Although the Turkish government was against the increasing power of Barzani in the Northern Iraq, Kirişçi (2009: 479) rightly argues that Turkish private firms continued to play a significant role in the construction activities and trade there. So, one can deduce that, during the AKP's reign, economic relations and political problems are thought separately in relation to Iraq. In contrast to high level of economic relations between Turkey and Iraq, Turkey intervened in northern Iraq in order to eliminate the PKK camps in December 2007 (Ruys, 2008: 335). The military operation of Turkey was not supported by US authorities. Afterwards, the tension

between the AKP government and the regional government in northern Iraq survived up until 2013.

Similar to relations with Iraq, Turkish-Iranian relations revolved around the PKK issue during the AKP governments. The struggle between Iran and the PEJAK, the Iranian wing of the PKK, resulted in the elimination of support coming from Iran to the PKK in the middle of 2000s. Hence, relations between Iran and PEJAK changed its course in the beginning of 2003. Afterwards, the militants of PEJAK and the Iranian army attacked each other. So the year 2003 meant change in the Turkish-Iranian relations which turned from conflict to cooperation with regard to security issues. As a result, in July 2004, Iran identified the PKK as a terrorist organization (Çağaptay, 2004: 47). In addition to collaboration on the PKK issue, another factor could be the changing nature of the Turkish-Iranian relations. In this context, the energy demand and energy security of Turkey are worth to mention. Natural gas reserves of Turkey are not sufficient to meet her demand. Hence, as Altinay (2007: 5835) stresses Turkish economy has always been vulnerable to the price of energy. In order to meet Turkey's demand on energy, the Turkish-Iranian natural gas project started in 2001. In essence, this project was initiated by Erbakan government in 1996 (Kinnander, 2010: 7)⁸. The AKP government continued to support the energy projects with Iran during its term.

Turkey's relations with Iran are also on the agenda of the US. The US pushed Turkey to limit the deepening of the Turkish-Iranian relations. Perthes (2010: 2) claims that the main motivation of the US for supporting the AKP government in the Middle East was the assumption that while Iran influences Shia population of the Middle Eastern states by sponsoring Shia

⁸ <http://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/NG38-TheTurkishIranianGasRelationship-ElinKinnander-2010.pdf>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

organizations, Turkish government is considered as a leader of the Sunnis of the Middle Eastern states in order to make the Party an alternative to the increasing influence of Iran in the Middle East region. The US also plays a vital role in the Iranian nuclear issue. For instance, beginnig from 2003 onwards, the US objected to the Iranian activities for the acquisition of nuclear energy. Afterwards, the US criticism against Iranian nuclear energy program reached a high degree. Turkey followed the US policy in the nuclear energy issue silently. Nonetheless, to take a precaution against Iranian nuclear energy program, despite popular resistance, Kürecik Missile Shield Plan was put into practice by the AKP government (Gürzel & Ersoy 2012: 44). Overall, the US poses a limited effect to the Turkish-Iranian relations during the AKP governments.

Concerning relations with Israel, Turkey's position is unclear. Basically, relations between Turkey and Israel are affected by two important factors, namely the US interests in the Middle East and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the beginning of 2002, the AKP government maintained the already-existing relations with Israel. However, the emergence of the Second Intifada due to the collapse of the peace talks between Palestine and Israel in Camp David in June 2000 and its implications for the future of the relations changed the rhetoric of the AKP government against Israel in a considerable manner. In essence, before the AKP government came to power in 2002, the coalition government ruled by Bülent Ecevit condemned Israeli policy against Palestinian civilians. Ecevit named the Israeli aggressiveness towards Palestinian people as genocide (Uzer, 2013: 104). Likewise, in 2004, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stressed that Israeli assassinations targeting the leaders of the Palestinian organizations were harmful to the peace process. As a result of the continous attacks of Israeli side, Erdoğan called the attacks as state terror (Zalewski, 2010: 102).

In fact, whereas the rhetoric used by Erdoğan for the Israeli attitude towards Palestine was tough, it did not lead to important changes in the nature of relations. To illustrate, Erdoğan visited Israel in 2005 and he accepted the provision of intelligence by the Israeli state on terrorism issue. However, interestingly enough, in February 2006, the leader of Hamas, Khalid Mashal, visited Turkey.⁹ Mainly, Mashal talked with Erdoğan on the problems of Palestinian people and Palestinian elections.¹⁰ Lastly, the Davos crisis must be underlined to understand the recent tension between Turkey and Israel. The Davos Crises could be considered as one of the most serious tensions between Turkey and Israel. In the Davos meeting, Erdoğan condemned Israeli attacks against Palestinians and left the meeting room angrily due to the format of the panel (Ulutaş, 2010: 6)¹¹. As a result of the crisis, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu emerged as defenders of the Palestinian cause in the Muslim world. At the same time, the popularity of Erdoğan reached its peak in the Middle East streets.

The stressful relations between Turkey and Israel deteriorated further as a result of the Mavi Marmara incident. On 31 May 2011, the Turkish-owned Mavi Marmara flotilla which carried aid to the Gaza Strip was attacked by the Israeli commandos when the ship was in the international waters. Due to the clashes between the activists and the Israeli commandos, nine activists on the flotilla were killed by Israeli security forces. The murdered activists

⁹<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/07/20/turkey.hamas.visit/index.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

¹⁰<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/26179/surprise-visit-of-the-hamas.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

¹¹http://setadc.org/pdfs/SETA_Policy_Brief_No_42_Turkey_Israel_Fluctuating_Ufuk_Ulutas.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

were originally from Turkey.¹² After the Israeli intervention to the flotilla, relations between Israel and Turkey came to a halt. Initially, Turkey withdrew her Ambassador in Israel. Afterwards, the joint military exercise between Turkey and Israel was cancelled. Besides, Turkey sent Israeli Ambassador back to his country.¹³ However on 22 March 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized from Turkey for the losses and he accepted to pay compensation to the families of those killed. Erdoğan accepted the Israeli apology in the name of the Turkish people.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the full restoration of relations could take some time.

¹² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/31/israel-kills-activists-flotilla-gaza>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

¹³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10203726>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

¹⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/9948868/Israel-apologises-to-Turkey-over-flotilla-incident.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

CHAPTER 3

THE ZERO-PROBLEM POLICY WITH SYRIA

AND THE SYRIAN CRISIS

3.1 The Zero-Problem Policy with Syria

Whereas the regionally-based foreign policy understanding of İsmail Cem, the former Foreign Minister of Turkey, was critical to the normalization of relations with the neighboring states before the AKP government came to power in 2002, the radical change in relations coincided with the reign of the AKP. The development of Turkish-Syrian relations up until the emergence of the Syrian revolt was remarkable. In essence, as Aras (2012: 42) points out there were several reasons for opening a new page in relations including the need for economic development for both sides, the efforts of Syria to get rid of international isolation and the change in the leadership of Syria with the Presidency of Bashar al-Assad in 2000.

After the deportation of Öcalan in 1998, the first collaboration between Turkey and Syria was about security issues. To illustrate, the Syrian Army Staff visited Turkey and the two sides signed military cooperation agreements afterwards (Altunışık & Tür, 2006: 240).

In addition to the collaboration on security issues, the occupation of Iraq by the US forces in 2003 affected Syrian-Turkish relations considerably. As a result of the US occupation of Iraq, Turkish involvement to the Northern Iraq became apparent. Likewise, Zafar (2012: 153) argues that Turkey was afraid of the restart of Syrian support to the PKK organization which was fighting for establishing free and independent

Kurdistan in Turkey. In contrast to the prediction of the Turkish authorities, the occupation of Iraq increased the US pressure on Syria. In this sense, the years which symbolized the normalization of relations between two sides coincided with Syria's isolation in the global context by the US.

According to US authorities, Syria supported international Islamic terrorist organizations which were held responsible for the 9/11 attacks in 2001. As a result, the US named Syria on the list linked to terrorist organizations (Litwak, 2000: 48). In this context, the Syrian government worked for the elimination of international isolation by coming close to a pro-western neighbor state, namely Turkey. Consequently, the mobilization of Syrian government for supporting the PKK vis-à-vis Turkey was not possible in the context of the Iraqi war. As it is mentioned before, the beginning of the Iraqi war deepened the level of relations. To illustrate, the ethnic and religious tension in Iraq led to cooperation on providing the unity of Iraq. Otherwise, the separation of Iraq according to ethnic and religious elements would likely influence Turkey and Syria with regard to their Kurdish minority.

Although relations between Turkey and Syria started to normalize, the actualization of the joint-military exercises by the Turkish and Syrian states were opposed by the Turkish military and the Turkish Foreign Ministry because of Syrian demands on Hatay. To benefit from the US pressure over Syria, the Turkish officials pressured for the solution of the Hatay problem and the water problem. In this regard, the Turkish Foreign Ministry prepared principles for the solution of conflicts on the basis of respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of the two sides. In accordance with the Turkish efforts for rethinking issues between Syria and Turkey, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad accepted the principles but he declared that Syria needed time for explaining the mentality of solution to

the Syrian people. As a result, Bashar al-Assad accepted Hatay as a part of Turkey in 2005 (Tür, 2010: 167).

In January 2004, Assad visited Turkey. This visit was one of the cornerstones in relations because it was the first visit of any Syrian President to Turkey since the emergence of modern Syria in 1946. Besides, as a result of the meeting, Assad recognized the territorial unity of Turkey. Within the visit, economic issues were touched upon. In order to develop economic relations, opening of a consulate in Gaziantep was accepted. Also, the mining areas along the Turkish-Syrian border were decided to be demined in order to develop organic agriculture (Tür, 2010: 168). During the visit, the close personal relationship between Bashar Assad and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was remarkable. At the end of Assad's visit to Turkey, the Assad family was hosted in a Turkish resort in Bodrum. Afterwards, Erdoğan and the Assad family met in the airport and had lunch before flying to Damascus. The campaign for protecting endangered species was also initiated by the first ladies of the two states at the same time (Aras, 2012:47). So, it is clear that before the beginning of the protests in Syria, personal relations between the Assad and Erdoğan families were advanced.

After the visit of Assad, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Syria on December 2004. During the visit, Erdoğan referred the relationship between the Turkish people and the Syrian people as brotherhood. As a result of the visit, the water issue was considered as a technical issue rather than a political problem. Besides, Syria and Turkey signed the free trade agreement. At the same time, the Turkish private companies started to invest more in Syria and vice versa. The Turkish-Syrian Business Council was also established in order to improve the mutual trade further (Zafar, 2012: 155). Furthermore the beginning of Turkey's EU accession process was also talked within the visit. According to Tür (2010: 169), Assad supported Turkish accession to the EU on the ground that if

Turkey enters the EU, Syria would reach European market through Turkey and Turkey would benefit from the Middle East market through Syria.

It is clear that during the rule of Assad, Syria cut its ties with the PKK. In this sense, the PKK activities were hindered and anti-Turkish publications and news were removed by the Syrian regime. Even, Syria accepted 1500 Iraqi Kurds immigrants on the condition that they would not participate in the PKK activities (Aras, 2012: 43). Overall, in consequence of mutual visits, Turkey and Syria tried to eradicate obstacles before two countries in order to strengthen economic and political relations.

In contrast to the détente period in the Turkish-Syrian relations, with the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on 14th of February in 2005, Syria took attention of the international community. As a result, the international pressure on Syria increased dramatically since Syria was held responsible for the assassination. At the same time, strong ties between Syria and Lebanon harmed. Consequently, the assassination brought about the withdrawal of Syrian military forces from Lebanon in 2005 (Colombo, 2011: 4)¹⁵. In spite of the negative international atmosphere coming into existence after the assassination, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer visited Syria on April 2005. So, it is obvious that as Hale argues Turkey gave vital support to Syria when Syria was isolated by the US (Hale, 2009: 152). In essence, although the US pressured Sezer to cancel the visit, he ignored it. For instance, before the actualization of the visit, the US Ambassador Edelman warned Turkey with these words: “*the US, EU countries and Egypt were in a consensus with putting sanctions on Syria*

¹⁵ Available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2000693, accessed on 30.04.2013.

and that they were expecting Turkey to support the decisions of the international community.” (Schenker, 2009)¹⁶.

However after the actualization of the visit, the US changed its strategy and tried to benefit from the merits of Turkey’s visit. Hence, by using the Turkish channel and benefiting from the Syrian influence on Lebanon, the US wanted to calm down the stressful situation between Israel and Lebanon in July 2006. As a result, Syria proposed a peace plan to support the restoration process in Lebanon. With Syrian support to Lebanon, the elections for the Presidency of Lebanon were held on (Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, 2010: 396). The role of Turkey in the solution of the Lebanese crises was appreciated by the Syrian regime as well. Bashar al-Assad remarked that:

Turkey has become one of the friendliest countries toward Syria in the region, and not only pursues good relations at a bilateral level but also cooperates with Syria on a number of regional issues (Tür, 2010: 170).

Furthermore İlhan Uzgel (2010: 364) argues that the US considered deepening of Turkish-Syrian relations as a positive development to her interests in the Middle East. The US authorities argued that through deepening of relations between Turkey and Syria, Syria could get rid of the influence of Iran. Thus, Iran could be more isolated in the Middle East. Emerging as a mediator, Turkey also attached importance to the solution of problems between Syria and Israel in 2007. In fact, the peace meetings between Syria and Israel reached a certain point in December 2008. Yet, relations between Turkey and Israel deteriorated after Israeli military operation to Gaza on January 2009. Afterwards, through the Davos crises or “One Minute” show, Turkey excluded Israel from the military exercise

¹⁶ Available at <http://jcpa.org/article/syria-and-turkey-walking-arm-in-arm-down-the-same-road/>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

called *the Anatolian Eagle* (Inbar, 2011: 134). In this context, one can argue that Turkey's troubled relations with Israel coincided with the deepening of relations with Syria.

The AKP governments' tendency towards establishing good ties with Damascus was discussed in Israel as well. For instance, David Schenker states that there were mainly two factors that set Turkey and Israel apart during the AKP's reign. The first factor was the elimination of the PKK along Turkey's borders. As a result, Turkey's need for military assistance of Israel diminished. According to Schenker (2009), the second factor behind the divergence of the Turkish and Israeli interests was about the Islamic transformation of Turkey since the beginning of the AKP government in 2002. Accordingly, the AKP government abandoned the secular foreign policy of the Turkish Republic in order to contact with the Islamic states of the Middle East. Hence, Turkey became distant to Israel.

However in 2007, Turkey permitted the use of its airspace during the bombardment targeting the Syrian nuclear reactor, Kibar nuclear facility. Interestingly enough, relations between Turkey and Syria did not deteriorate as a result. The bombardment of Kibar nuclear facility proves the existence of the cooperation between Turkey and Israel in security matters. Similar to Turkey's role in the negotiation of the Syrian-Israeli conflict, Turkey played a central role in the solution of the Syrian-Iraqi conflict due to a series of bombs which exploded in the Green Zone in Baghdad on August 2009. Despite the fact that Syria was accused by Iraqi government for the bombings, Turkey worked to prevent the rise of tension further (Abramowitz & Barkey, 2009: 122).

The year 2009 witnessed the advancement of relations between Turkey and Syria. First, the two sides lifted visa requirements in September 2009. This development contributed to the improvement of economic

relations directly. The Strategic Cooperation Council was also formed in the same year (Kibaroğlu & Scheumann 2011: 292). In the opening speech of the Senior Strategic Cooperation Council on 14th October, Davutoğlu expressed that:

From now on, Turkey will continue walking on the same road [as Syria] ... sharing a common fate, history and future. We are going to walk hand in hand and work together to revive our region as a center of civilization. (Schenker, 2009).

Another time, concerning the removal of visa requirements, Davutoğlu stated that:

We are lifting the borders which were artificially put and becoming the people of one hinterland. We are turning the economic cooperation to an economic unity. We are hoping that this will be a model for all our neighbors (Güneylioğlu, 2011: 159).

The cooperation in military issues was also discussed in 2009. In this sense, the first joint military exercise between Turkey and Syria was put into practice in April 2009. The main motivation behind the military exercise was “*to boost friendship, cooperation and confidence between the two countries land forces and to increase the ability of border troops to train and work together.*” (Tür, 2010: 174). The developing level of the Turkish-Syrian relations affected the tourism sectors of two countries positively. To make it more concrete, more than 154.000 Syrian people visited Turkey in 2003, while the number reached 500.000 in 2005 (Aras, 2012: 44). As a result of the increasing level of economic and political relations between Syria and Turkey, Erdoğan puts his appreciation with these words:

When I watch Syria from my own country, I get emotional. For example, I am affected when the Saudi King comes to Syria, but also equally I get affected when my brother Bashar Assad goes to Saudi Arabia. Now, in a similar manner I am waiting to see my brother. With all these [developments] in this region unity, togetherness and cooperation will bring us to a bright future. I have always longed for

this and now we are succeeding in these. Is it possible not to feel the excitement of these beautiful days? (Tür, 2010: 174).

Concerning economic relations, the integration of Syrian economy to international economy drew attention. It is clear that as Bishku (2012: 46) notes Turkish investments and Turkish export to the Middle East increased dramatically during the AKP's leadership. Likewise, during the AKP governments, economic relations surged between Turkey and Syria. With the emergence of the High Level Strategic Cooperation and the free-trade zone, economic interdependence increased mutually. Cross border trade developed relations further. The bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Syria developed remarkably in less than a decade. To illustrate, while the bilateral trade was \$724 million in 2000, it increased to \$1.8 billion in 2008. At the same time, the Turkish companies invested in Syria \$260 million which made Turkey the number one investor in Syria in 2010 (Tür, 2010:172).

There were also many Turkish economic organizations which are involved in the investment in Syria. These organizations included “*the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association, the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists, the Turkish Exporters Assembly, the Foreign Economic Relations Board, the International Transporters Association, and the Turkish Contractors Association, as well as smaller, local business associations such as the Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce, Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, and Istanbul Chamber of Commerce*

” (Aras, 2012: 44). The economic relations with Syria continued to develop in 2010 as well. For instance, in December 2010, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan gathered to sign the *Levant Quartet*. The Levant Quartet is mainly about developing close relations among the participants (Bishku, 2012: 36).

Overall, as trade increased between Turkey and Syria the problems deriving from the old relations were removed from the agenda and Turkish-Syrian relations were transformed from military confrontation to economic cooperation in less than a decade.

3.2 The Beginning of the Protests in Syria and Economic and Political Reasons behind the Syrian Revolt

No one expected the downfall of the brutal regimes of the Arab states one by one with the public protests symbolized with a Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on December 2010, as a consequence of harassment he faced by local police. Afterwards, the uprising in Tunisia has showed domino effect in the Middle East and resulted in the resignation of 30 years-old government of Mubarak in Egypt and killing of Gaddafi during the Libyan civil war. Later, the protests spread to Syria and it became the biggest conflict waiting for the solution in the Middle East.

According to Hassan Abbas (2011)¹⁷, before the emergence of the protests in Syria, a Special Committee was founded by the Assad regime in order to evaluate the effects of the extension of the Arab revolts to the Syrian streets. Abbas asserted that the Special Committee reached the conclusion that the main reason behind the decline of Tunisian and Egyptian regimes was about insufficiencies of the Arab regimes to stop the protests. In this sense, if Syria could suppress the events instantly when crowds are not so large in number, then, it would hinder the fall of the Syrian regime. So, it could be argued that the suppression of the Syrian regime of protestors was planned before the revolts expanded to Syria. After the formation of the

¹⁷ <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2906/>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Special Committee, the first signs of the revolt in Syria emerged when a number of young men gathered before Libyan embassy in order to protest Qaddafi in the name of defending Libyan martyrs in the beginning of 2011. Yet, Syrian security forces dispersed the protestors immediately. The next weeks also witnessed the gatherings of crowds on Syrian streets to support the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and, later, for solidarity with the Tunisian revolt. Some protestors also gathered in front of the Syrian Interior Ministry to support prisoners who were in hunger strike in Syrian prisons. In all these cases, a limited number of people gathered and the security forces intervened immediately by using force (Abbas, 2011). However, in March 2011, the Syrian uprising commenced in the city of Dar'a which was located in the far south of Syria (Haseeb, 2012: 190). In Dar'a, children wrote graffiti criticizing the Syrian regime on school walls. Afterwards, the children were detained by security forces and the conservative people in Dar'a reacted against the regime in order to secure the release the children. At the same time, the anti-Assad protests reached Homs and Hama quickly (Salama, 2012: 517).

Despite the fact the spark for the Syrian revolt was the drawing of graffiti on school walls, the actual reason behind the Syrian uprising was different. In this sense, it could be argued that there are mainly economic motives behind the Arab revolts including especially the Syrian revolt. So, understanding the economic situation in Syria before the beginning of the revolt is crucial. While the Syrian economy was dominated by the Syrian regime since the Ba'ath revolution in 1970, after the 1986 financial crisis, the absolute dominance of the state over Syrian economy eroded. In this regard, with the introduction of the Investment Law, the private sector started to flourish in 1991. Afterwards, as Colombo (2011: 1) states economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization were actualized. Since then, state subsidies decreased and the regime went hand in hand with

the big business at the expense of smaller businesses (Haddad, 2012)¹⁸. Similarly, corruption and the emergence of crony capitalism weakened the Assad regime at societal level and the growing economic inequality and injustice between the rich and the poor reduced the trust on the Assad regime.

Although Assad asserts that he follows the Chinese economic model which is social market economy in essence, poverty and wealth gap was on the rise with the introduction of neoliberal reforms. At the same time, the global recession and droughts which lasted from 2006 to 2010 affected the Syrian economy negatively. As a result of recent droughts, 1.3 million Syrian people living especially in the north-eastern provinces of Syria suffered dramatically (Colombo, 2011: 3). Consequently, the rising unemployment with regard to neoliberal reforms, the recent droughts and the rising price of food increased the income gap between the poor and the rich in Syria. (Maunder, 2012)¹⁹ rightly argues that by applying neoliberal policies in the ruling of the economy, the Assad family could be considered as a ruling class which is against the interests of workers and peasants. That fact is crucial to understand why poor agricultural regions such as Dar'a, Homs and Idlib were the first places where the uprising emerged (Landis 2012: 80). In contrast to the poor regions, the support of big business was critical for the survival of the Assad regime since the state abandoned the poor for the sake of the rich through neoliberal reforms, the neoliberal reforms led to the emergence of crony capitalism which implies the close relationship between the government and businessmen in Syria.

¹⁸ Available at <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/syrian-regimes-business-backbone>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

¹⁹ <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=824&issue=135>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

In addition to economic problems that the protestors experienced in the Assad period, the slogans of protestors were directed against the repressive state apparatus as well. For instance, the main reason for the rise of the tension in Latakia was about the activities of the paramilitary organizations of the regime known as *shabihas*. Since shabihas have played critical role in the suppression of the Syrian revolt, it drew attention. The shabihas were formed during the 1990s. According to Abbas (2011), they were not only associated with local mafia-style violence and corruption, but also with intimidation, murder, trading in arms and drugs. The shabihas depended on the Latakia-based charitable association al-Murtada. Al-Murtada was founded by Assad's paternal uncle named Jamil al-Assad in the 1980s. So, as Landis (2012: 73) reminds the Assad regime is the founder of the shabihas. However it is asserted that Bashar al-Assad was disturbed from the activities of shabihas. So, he tried to limit the activities of shabihas along the coastal cities. Yet, Assad could not reach his aim at the end. Nevertheless, during the revolt in Syria, shabihas were used as a complementary element to the security forces in Syria (Khoury, 2011)²⁰.

The opposition groups suggest that the activities of security forces and shabihas were responsible for the counter-violence against the Syrian regime. So, according to protestors, they protected themselves through counter-strikes. To legitimize the use of counter-violence, Syria is criticized by the opposition groups as follows:

it [The Syrian regime] combines the heavy-handedness of the Tunisian regime, the economic woes of Egypt, the hereditary rule

²⁰ Available at <http://www.lb.boell.org/web/52-737.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

aspects of Morocco and Jordan, and a narrower leadership base than any other country across the Arab world (Haddad, 2011)²¹.

Especially, the heavy-handedness of the Syrian army was the cornerstone in the development of the struggle against the Syrian regime. Salamey and Pearson (2012: 941) argue that whereas the military in Egypt and Tunisia did not attack protestors during the revolts, the Syrian army attacked the protestors from the beginning of the protests. In other words, the army is unified to defend the Assad regime. As a result, the opposition groups inclined to use arms against the defenders of the regime. In this sense, one of the elements of the conflict is the army (especially the third and fourth divisions). The opposition groups argue that the elements of repressive state apparatus including security forces and paramilitary groups are against political solution, and support military solution (Abbas 2012).

As it is mentioned, during the Syrian revolt, the role played by the Syrian army is critical. It is known that the Syrian army is one of the most powerful armies among the Arab states. The size of the Syrian army ranged from 450.000 to 500.000 personnel. Importantly enough, the Syrian coercive apparatus and the army are very loyal to the ruler of the country. At the same time, the Fourth Division commanded by the President's relative Maher al-Assad, the Third Division and the Republican Guards constitute the carefully-selected personnel of the army. The cohesion of the army is also strong compared to other Arab states. Moreover, the intelligence service of Syria or *the mukhabarat* is one of the central figures in security structure (Colombo, 2011: 9). In accordance with the above-mentioned points, Khoury points out that since Hafez al-Assad rule in the 1970s, the army, security forces and Ba'ath Party members were directly loyal to the regime and its leader. This is important because it explains the cohesion of

²¹ Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/03/09/why-syria-is-unlikely-to-be-next---for-now/6bhl>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

the army in difficult conditions. Besides, after the death of Hafez al-Assad, President Bashar al-Assad brought family members to critical positions of the state apparatus in order to consolidate his power. So, Assad is very successful to continue his father's heritage and the monopoly of political power is still in the hands of the Assad family (Haseeb, 2012: 191).

In response to the attacks of the opposition groups, the use of military forces by the Syrian regime made the solution difficult within a short period of time. Afterwards, the scope of violence widened dramatically. Especially, after the involvement of the military to the conflict, the civilian causality started to be high. At the same time, the intervention of military gave birth to the armed opposition groups in Syria. The Free Officers Movement, later known as *the Free Syrian Army*, consisted of dissident and defected soldiers. However their numbers were very limited. In other words, the cohesion of Syrian army is still intact although more than two years passed from the beginning of the clashes (Bellin & Krause, 2012: 2).

The opposition groups are also supported by foreign fighters coming from other Muslim states. These fighters are known as jihadists. There are some opposition groups linked to the al-Qaeda network in Syria. For instance, *Jubhat al-Nusrah li-Ahl al-Sham* (The Front for the Protection of the Syrian People) is an active group and it attacked the Syrian military forces many times. In July 2012, another jihadist organization called *Luwa' al-Ummah* (Brigade of the Ummah) emerged in Syria. Yet, according to some writers, al-Qaeda members are still limited in number (Sultan & Cohen, 17 July 2012: 1).

Although the opposition groups have international support behind them, the popularity of President Bashar al-Assad is still quite high. In this sense, the lack of strong networks and the lack of popular legitimacy are the

main problems of the Syrian opposition. Opposed to that Assad takes the support of different segments of the society at the same time. In addition to that one of the reasons why Assad is still strong is related to Syrian foreign policy. Assad is known for his support to Hezbollah and Hamas. In this sense, he is considered as an anti-imperialist political leader in the Middle East unlike other Arab leaders. Consequently, Syria followed a confrontational policy with the US and Israel in the Middle East. By doing so, the popularity of Assad increased in the Arab streets (Haddad, 2011).

Furthermore the Syrian revolt is different from other successful Arab revolts. To make it concrete, one could compare and contrast the Egyptian and the Syrian cases. As Haddad (2011) discusses, first, Syrian protestors are small in number compared to Egyptian protestors. So, huge numbers did not gather on the squares of Syria to topple the Syrian regime. Second, Syrian civil society is weak. Hence, organizing people under one purpose is a hard task compared to organized civil society groups in Egypt. Third, although social polarization and poverty is relatively high and there is deterioration in social safety nets, the overall socioeconomic conditions are not so bad in Syria compared to other Arab states. Moreover, the opposition groups in Syria are largely divided in terms of politics, region, community, sect and ethnicity. In the final analysis, this fact makes the unification and cohesion of the opposition groups difficult unlike other cases.

3.3 The Rising Sectarianism and the Kurdish Question in Syria

Apart from the economic depreciation of the Syrian regime after the beginning of the protests, there are some other consequences of the revolt. As a result of the clashes between military and the opposition groups in Syria; the sectarian violence in Syria became visible. To illustrate, sectarian violence was obvious in the case of Homs, a Syrian city. Homs is a

predominantly Sunni city. However considerable numbers of Christians and Alawis who support the Assad regime live in the same city as well. Since the beginning of the protests, due to the inter-communal fighting between the supporters and opponents of the regime, about 100 people lost their lives at the end of 2011.²² The heterogeneous character of the Syrian regime makes easy the survival of the Assad regime in essence (Landis, 2012: 74). Accordingly, religious minority groups shy away from participating in the protests (Ismail, 2011: 539) despite they constitute 40 percent of the Syrian population.

The Alawis are the most influential minority group in Syria. In this sense, the role of Alawis in the history of Syria is critical to understand how Alawis became the authority in Syrian politics although they make up 10 percent of Syrian population. Historically, Alawis were living in the mountains and hills of Syria under worse conditions. However the French mandate encouraged minority groups to be soldiers in the Syrian army. Batatu (1981: 334-339) stresses that the Alawis enrolled in the army because of economic difficulties that they lived for years. During the rise of the Ba'ath Party of Syria, the Alawis compromised with rural Sunnis against the privileged position of urban Sunnis. In this sense, the 1963 Ba'ath Revolution could be considered a rural-centered movement since the rural groups among Alawis, Druzes and Sunnis contributed to the revolution. With the coup designed by Hafez al-Assad in 1970, Alawis took power in Syria. However according to Hinnebusch (2002: ix), there was stability of the fragmented society during Hafez al-Assad's term. This was largely as a result of personalization of power by Hafez al-Assad. Overall, it can be concluded that minority-oriented policy practiced by the French mandate, the fragmentation of the social structure and the lack of Syrian political

²² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21291714>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

effectiveness gave birth to the political dominance of the minority Alawis vis-à-vis majority Sunnis (Batatu, 1981: 340-341).

During the Syrian revolt, Alawis are considered as the organic element of the Assad regime by the opposing groups. As a result, Alawis are forced to flee to safer areas near Damascus.²³ However the Syrian military supports and protects the Alawis since they are strong in the military ranks. Alawis have fear for collective punishment in the post-Assad period because some pro-opposition sheikhs threaten the Alawis openly. For instance, Adnan Arur stated "*We shall mince [the Alawis] in meat grinders and feed them to the dogs.*".²⁴ So, it is right to argue that the spirit of revenge could prevail against Alawis in the post-Assad period.

Not only Alawis but also other minorities support the Assad regime because of the fear of the radical Islamists. In addition to Alawis, there are 2.1 million Christians who compose ten percent of the total population in Syria. By sharing the same fears with Alawis, Christians are afraid of sectarianism in Syria. In other words, Christians are disturbed from radical Sunni domination during the Syrian protests. The Christians state that the downfall of the Assad regime would bring about three scenarios, namely sectarian civil war, disintegration of Syria into sectarian mini-states or a fundamentalist Sunni regime (Khoury, 2011). Due to these negative scenarios, they support the Assad regime vis-à-vis radical Islamists in the post-Assad period. The fear of Christians was right as some Christians were

²³ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/iw/contents/articles/opinion/2013/01/alawites-syria-siege-sunni-druze.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

²⁴ http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/02/breaking_the_arab_news, accessed on 30.04.2013.

attacked in the rebel-held areas of northern Syria and they were attacked by the radical Islamic forces to flee from their homes.²⁵

Obviously, the Christians do not want to face discrimination like Coptic Christians experienced during the downfall of the Egyptian regime (Khoury, 2011). Nonetheless, Abbas (2012) asserts that the opposition groups assert that the fear of sectarianism among Christians and Alawis are fanned by the shabihas to panic the people for sectarian division in Syria. Lastly, it is widely accepted that the Assad regime did not discriminate against Christians as a state policy. So, in this context, Christians remained silent during the protests against the Assad regime.

Unlike the tolerance shown to the religious minorities during the Assad regimes, the history of the Baath regime is full of denial of Kurdish ethnicity. Kurds in Syria are about 2 million and they make up about 10 percent of the total population. In this sense, Kurds are the largest non-Arab minority in Syria. Kurds are predominantly living in the north of Syria including the areas Jazeera, Efrin and Ain al-Arab. In the northeast of Syria, especially in Hasakah province, Kurds are concentrated (Ziadeh, 2009: 2)²⁶.

As a result of the census held in Hasakah province in 1962, it was revealed that 20 percent of Kurds, approximately 120.000 people, immigrated to Syria illegally. The government denationalized these Kurds initially (Erkmen, 2012: 15)²⁷. Besides, Syrian Kurds were divided into 3

²⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/14/world/middleeast/christians-squeezed-out-by-violent-struggle-in-north-syria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, accessed on 30.04.2013.

²⁶ <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA562112>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

²⁷ http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Dosyalar/201286_127%20yeniraporson.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

categories by the Syrian government. These categories were named as Syrian Kurds, foreign Kurds and the concealed Kurds. As a result of this categorization, about 300.000 Kurds remained unrecorded in Syria (Ziadeh, 2009: 2). In a similar manner, the rise of the Ba'ath Party and Arab nationalism since 1963 led to discrimination against Kurds since they were perceived as a threat to Arab unity. As a result, all political parties were banned under the article of eight on the Syrian constitution (Sinclair & Kajjo, 2011)²⁸. Consequently, Kurds lost their rights to participate in politics. Besides, Kurdish cultural identity was denied by the Syrian regime since Kurdish language, music and publications were banned. Shortly, the basic rights of Kurds were denied by the Syrian regime for decades (Khoury, 2011).

On 12th March in 2004, the clashes between Kurds and Arabs led to 7 deaths during the Qamisli events. Further, as a result of intervention of the security forces to the events, 32 people were killed as well. Afterwards, the tension between the regime and Kurds reflected on the signing of the Damascus Declaration in 2005. The Damascus Declaration stated that finding fair and democratic solution to the Kurdish issue is needed within the unity of the country. The Damascus Declaration also called for an end to emergency law and wanted to introduce democracy for Syrian political regime (Sinclair & Kajjo, 2011). Although Kurds signed the declaration, the declaration did not yield a result at the end.

The Kurdish support for the Assad regime is critical for the end of the conflict. According to Erkmen (2012: 16-32), to provide Kurdish support to Assad, about 35.000 Kurds are given citizenship during the Syrian revolt. At the same time, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Kurdish political party in Syria, gained some privileges from the Syrian

²⁸ Available at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero083111>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

government including the opening of schools and cultural centers. Besides, about 640 PYD members were released from the prisons by the Syrian government. Basically, Kurds want to enjoy the same rights as the Arabs. At the same time, they demand that the official name of Syria, the Syrian Arab Republic, must be renewed by Republic of Syria (Sinclair & Kajjo, 2011: 1)²⁹. Kurds also refrain from giving support to the opposition groups. As a result, the Kurdish National Council was formed after the meetings in Qamishli on 26th and 27th October 2011 (Erkmen, 2012: 27). The leader of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Salih Muslim, notes that Kurds could enjoy the historical chance of governing themselves in Syria (Natali, 2012).

3.4 The International Context of the Syrian Revolt

In the international context, the most important element of the anti-Assad camp is the US. The US closed its embassy in Syria and shut down its embassy from Damascus with the beginning of the protests³⁰. Basically, the concerns of Washington with regard to Syria consist of Syrian support to Hamas, Hezbollah and the anti-US organizations in Iraq and Syrian close relations with Iran. Hillary Clinton noted that “*the US will not interfere in Syria in the way it has in Libya*” (Khashan, 2011: 28). Likewise, on November 2011, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed that “*NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. I can completely rule that out*”.³¹ These sentences are critical to predict the

²⁹ <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero083111>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

³⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/world/middleeast/violence-in-syria-continues-after-diplomacy-fails.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, , accessed on 30.04.2013.

³¹ <http://www.npr.org/2011/11/12/142270039/arab-league-suspends-syria-other-options-unclear>, , accessed on 30.04.2013.

upcoming US policies in the Syrian issue. Obviously, the US wanted to topple the Assad regime in order to limit Iranian influence in the Middle East. The US also wants to ensure Israeli security and to prevent al-Qaeda-inspired groups from operating freely in Syria. Accordingly, the US expects that the Assad regime could be renewed by a new government which is less friendly to Iran and radical Islamic groups (Dalton, 2012: 2)³².

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leadership claims that there is no meaningful US support for the development of the activities of the opposition groups in Syria.³³ Moreover an expert on Turkish politics, Professor Henri Barkey told the Turkish newspaper Radikal that the US is against military intervention in Syria due to the sophisticated air defense system of Syria (Radikal, 15 October 2012: 8). Apart from that, the US public is against military intervention in Syria. To illustrate, according to a poll published in the US, two thirds of US citizens are against military intervention in Syria (Sharp & Blanchard, 2012: 9). This fact discourages hawkish US politicians with regard to direct military intervention in Syria. The US politicians are also aware of the fact that the Syrian issue could destabilize the Middle East at large. That is why the US tries to hinder the spread of the conflict to neighboring states including Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan (Dalton, 2012: 2). So, the US tries to compose broad international support to hinder Syria's destabilizing role in the Middle East. In this sense, the US criticizes the inabilities of the opposition groups. For instance, Defense Secretary of the US, Leon Panetta, stated on 7th March in 2012 that "*with regard to Syria, for us to act unilaterally would be a mistake... It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition.*

³²http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_AsadUnderFire_Dalton.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

³³ <http://cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=365984>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

'There has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed or contacted' (Wilson, 2012: 17).

Similar to the US, the Arab League members are significant components of the anti-Assad camp in the international arena. The Arab League, to quicken the collapse of the Assad regime, put an end to trade with Syria on 27 November 2011. This move was similar to what the US and the EU did before (Haseeb, 2012: 191). Also, at the initial stages of the protests, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar withdrew their ambassadors from Syria. After the anti-Assad protests in Syria and the intervention of military and police to the protestors, the Arab League tried to pave the way for foreign intervention in Syria by the guidance of the United Nations Security Council. The Arab League also accepted the suspension of Syrian membership in the Arab League. Moreover, the Arab League condemned supporters of the Syrian regime including Russia, China, India, Iran, Brazil and South Africa on the ground that any time lost in Syria could bring about more deaths as a result (Dorsey, 15 November 2011).

In addition to that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait supplied military aid to the Syrian opposition (Buckley, 2012: 96). At the same time, Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported the SNC in terms of funding. Shortly, the Arab League members support the opposition movement by military and economic channels. As Mohns and Bank (2012: 33) point out Qatars and Saudis wanted to topple a pro-Iranian regime and set up a Sunni state instead of bringing more democracy to Syria. In this regard, the elements of the Syrian opposition groups declared that they would ignore Iran in the post-Assad period. To illustrate, according to Riyad Sukfa, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is against the alliance of Syria with Iran, Lebanon and Iraq. Hence, by toppling the Assad regime, the aim of the containment of Iran and thus, reducing the power of Shia regimes in the Middle East will be achieved. Moreover, since Alawis are considered as heretics according to

Wahhabi belief, the defeat of the Assad regime is necessary for Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In this sense, Dorsey (13 August 2012) argues that Saudi Arabia and Qatar want to see a radical Muslim state rather than a pluralistic, multi-ethnic, multi-religious Syria in the post-Assad period. Furthermore the media of the Arab states is in favor of toppling the Assad regime. In this sense, Qatari-based Al-Jazeera television played a significant role in terms of being the voice of the Syrian opposition (Salamey & Pearson, 2012: 938). However the state-owned Arabic television channels including Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya failed to show objectivity in their coverage of the Syrian events. Consequently, the Arab monarchies used media channels to eliminate the Assad regime before the awakening of the Arab people reached their own states.

The EU is another key actor in the Syrian issue. Before the beginning of the revolt, the EU was the most important trading partner of Assad. Yet, in September 2011, the first embargo on the Syrian oil was adopted by the EU (Mohns, 2011: 2)³⁴. The EU companies also play critical roles in action against the Assad regime due to the fact that the companies of Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands were main refinerie of Syria's crude oil. Besides, in order to force Assad financially, the EU collaborates with multinational companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, Total, India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, China's National Petroleum Corporation and Sinochem (Dorsey, 10 August 2011).

It is obvious that the banning of export of Syrian oil undermines the economy of Syria since about 30 percent of the Syrian state revenues used to come from the export of oil. Benefiting from the statistics, the ban on Syrian oil exports by the US and the EU costs \$400 million to Syrian economy (Landis, 2012: 81). As a response to the decrease in demand of

³⁴ <http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles//B/A/F/%7BBAF4FC37-50CB-48CB-955F-23E3ACDA5081%7D1109EM.pdf>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Syrian oil, the oil production of Syria started to decrease dramatically. In a similar way, the EU and the Arab League worked for making oil investment illegal in Syria. In addition to that Sytrol, the state-led oil company of Syria, could not find a buyer for its oil (Dorsey, 13 August 2012). Consequently, under the shadow of heavy sanctions, the Syrian government suffered financial losses. Accordingly, the EU is in favor of Assad's stepping down by financial means rather than by armed struggle. Since the EU is aware of sectarian violence in Syria, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe expressed that "*the Syrian people are deeply divided, and if we give arms to a certain faction of the Syrian opposition, we would make a civil war among Christians, Alawites, Sunnis and Shiites*" (Buckley, 2012: 90).

The speech of Alain Juppe symbolizes the continuation of the EU's nonlethal assistance rather than providing artillery to armed opposition groups in Syria. In this context, if the threat of sectarian violence lessens in Syria, then the EU could play a more crucial role in the militarization of the Syrian conflict.

In response to war efforts of the Arab League, the EU and the US, Russia and China refrain from condemning the Assad regime and thus, they vetoed UN resolutions when they are voted in the UNSC. With this attempt, Russia and China proved that they do not desire more US hegemony in the Middle East since the occupation of Iraq already disturbed the interests of Russia and China in the Middle East. Russia is against foreign intervention in Syria partly because of her military base in the Syrian port of Tartus. Importantly enough, Tartus is the only remaining navy base for Russia in the Mediterranean (Wilson, 2012: 18). Besides, oil interests and arms sales to Syria affect the position of Russia in the Syrian conflict. In this sense, post-Assad period could harm the interests of Russia in Syria. For its part, China needs Syrian oil for its economic development. China still imports oil from Syria (Mohns, 2011: 2). Consequently, China and Russia would

continue to block any kind of military measures to Syria since their interests could suffer from the post-Assad Syria.

Similar to Russia and China, Iran was disturbed by US influence in the Middle East and supports Syria strongly. In essence, the alliance between Iran and Syria dates back to early 1980s when Iran-Iraq war took place. During the war, Syria supported Iran (Mohns & Bank, 2012: 27). So, cooperation in political and economic levels between Syria and Iran lasted afterwards. During the 2000s, the relationship between Syria and Iran reached unprecedented levels. Providing cheap oil, weapons, investments and economic assistance to Syria, Iran emerged as the most important ally of Syria. Moreover, Iran helped the construction of the gas pipeline and the construction of a car factory in Syria in 2007 (Maunder, 2012).

With the beginning of the Syrian revolt, Iran supported the Assad regime. However Iran's support to Syria was limited by the restrictions of Iranian economy. According to Maunder (2012: 5), the close relationship between Syria and Iran relies on the assumption that Syria has been perceived as a rejectionist state in the Middle East in essence. Hence, the Syrian regime emerged as one of the centers of resistance against the pro-western atmosphere in the Middle East. In other words, Iran, Syria, the Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas constitute the anti-western resistance camp which is against the activities of the US and Israel in the Middle East (Mohns & Bank, 2012: 25-26). Iran supports political solution rather than any kind of foreign intervention in Syria and thus, the opposition groups criticize the influence of Iran in the Syrian conflict. For instance, the former chairman of the Syrian National Council asserted that "*a post-Assad government in Syria would reconsider its ties with Iran and Hezbollah and work to interrupt Iranian arms supplies to Hezbollah through Syria*" (Mohns & Bank, 2012: 29).

The opposition groups in Syria disturb from Assad's close relations with Islamic organizations. For instance, Syria supported Hezbollah for long years (Colombo, 2011: 5). Accordingly, when the Syrian revolt emerged, the leader of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah expressed that the Syrian regime satisfied demands of protestors through political reforms (Mohns & Bank, 2012: 30). Unlike Hezbollah, Hamas which was hosted by the Syrian regime did not support the Assad regime in the ongoing conflict.³⁵ Afterwards, the headquarter of Hamas in Damascus was shut down. In this sense, as a Sunni organization, Hamas did not share the same view with Assad concerning the elimination of Sunni insurgents and hence, left Damascus afterwards (Wilson, 2012: 20).

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9107218/Hamas-risks-Damascus-base-to-support-Syrian-opposition.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013

CHAPTER 4

THE FAILURE OF THE ZERO-PROBLEM POLICY WITH SYRIA SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE SYRIAN REVOLT

4.1 The Failure of the Zero-Problem Policy with Syria

The détente period in Turkish-Syrian relations came to an end with the rise of the unrest in Syria. In the initial stages of the protests in March 2011, Turkey worked to use her soft power on Assad. In this sense, whereas Turkey supported the withdrawal of Mubarak in Egypt, she did not want Assad to step back immediately because of the normalization of relations between the two sides. For instance, Erdoğan warned Mubarek seriously with these words:

Mubarak, we are human beings. We are not immortal. We will die one day, and we will be questioned for the things that we left behind. The important thing is to leave behind sweet memories. We are for our people. When we die the imam will not pray for the prime minister or for the president, but he will pray for a human being. It is up to you to deserve good prayers or curses. You should listen to the demands of the people and be conscious of the people and their rightful demand. (Akkoyunlu & Nicolaidis & Öktem, 2013: 71).

So, the rhetoric used by Erdoğan to define the situation in Syria was soft in the beginning of the conflict. During the first days of the demonstrations against the Assad regime, Erdoğan named Assad as “*a good friend who was loved by his people*” (Aras, 2012: 49). However the most important step of Turkey concerning Syrian protests was visible in August 2011. In this month, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was sent to Damascus to meet with Assad. In the meeting, the messages of Ankara were delivered to Assad. During the seven-hour consultation between Davutoğlu and Assad, mainly the cessation of violence and

political reform process were discussed. However the two sides could not convince each other. Afterwards, the AKP government declared that they lost trust on Assad and his regime (Bishku, 2012: 48). During the first months of the the Syrian uprising, Turkish Foreign Ministry remarked that:

The recent developments in Syria carry the potential to bring about far-reaching ramifications for peace and stability in the Middle East. Turkey sincerely wishes that the events evolve in a better direction and thus encourages the Syrian authorities to undertake a swift reform program that addresses the needs and demands of Syrian citizens. Turkey has also made it clear that she is ready to provide whatever contribution and support needed in the reform process.³⁶

After the failure of the meeting with Assad regime, Turkey joined the western camp which supported the resignation of Assad. On 22nd November 2011, for the first time since the beginning of the protests, Erdoğan publicly declared that toppling the Assad regime was necessary. So, the normalization of relations between Turkey and Syria came to an end in a very short period of time. A week later, on 30th November 2011, the first Turkish sanctions hit Syria unilaterally. Turkey's sanctions on Syria includes the suspension of the Turkish-Syrian High Level Strategic Cooperation Council, introduction of travel bans on several Syrian officials and businessman and freezing their assets in Turkey, cancellation of the sale of arms and military equipment to the Syrian military, suspension of her ties with the Central Bank of Syria and the Commercial Bank of Syria, the abolishment of Turkish-Eximbank loan agreement for the financing of infrastructure projects in Syria (Sharp & Blanchard, 2012: 5).

Turkey expected that due to the existence of the international pressure over Assad similar to Qaddafi of Libya, Assad would be toppled down in a short period time. It is well known that Turkey was neutral in the

³⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%20%93syria.en.mfa>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

initial stages of NATO-led intervention in Libya starting on March 20011. Besides, Turkey did not take any step until May 2011. As a result, Öniş (2012: 52) remarks Turkey emerged as a reluctant partner in the intervention process. Only when the defeat of Qaddafi was certain, Turkey supported anti-Qaddafi camp militarily and economically. Walker notes (2012: 1)³⁷ that by rejecting NATO's intervention and sanctions on Libya, Turkey did not calculate the results of the Libyan crisis well. As a result, Turkey's economic and political interests declined in the post-Qaddafi period. So, by learning from the Libyan crisis, Turkey wants to protect her political and economic interests in Syria before being too late. Seemingly, the cessation of the humanitarian disaster in Syria is secondarily important to Turkey's interests in Syria. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey warned the Assad regime before the emergence of the Syrain revolt in order to make necessary reforms in Syria. Davutoğlu states that:

Months before the outbreak of the events in March last year, we warned the Syrian Administration when the Arab Spring has first emerged with the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia. We underlined that Syria could not remain immune to the approaching wave of democratization. We repeatedly urged the Syrian Administration to heed the voice of the people and to meet their legitimate demands. Neither the commitments made to us nor the promises given to the people were ever delivered. The regime believed that it could run over the will of the people with its tanks and guns, and that it could hold on to power through repression and fear. We all have witnessed where these dead-end policies with no chance of success have led Syria and its people, and to what unspeakable pains they have caused.³⁸

³⁷ Available at <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/> MEB63.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

³⁸ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-syrian-opposition-conference_-2-july-2012_-cairo.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

As it is mentioned before, Turkey supports the Syrian National Council (SNC) which later replaced by the Syrian National Coalition in late 2012. The Syrian National Council was originally founded in Istanbul on October 2011. So, Turkey welcomed the Syrian opposition and afterwards, the insurgents and army leaders of Syrian opposition have met in Turkey for many times (Dorsey, 24 November 2011)³⁹. The Syrian National Council serves mainly as the political organ of the Syrian opposition movement and it is supported by the outside powers. Even, the US and the EU recognized the SNC as the representative of the Syrian people although the Syrian regime considers the SNC as a "foreign funded armed insurrection aimed at destabilizing Syria in the interest of foreign powers." (Haddad, 2012: 85).

The SNC is composed of 7 seven blocks, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, the Damascus Declaration, the National Bloc, the Local Coordination Committee, the Kurdish Bloc, the Assyrian Block and Independents (O'Bagy, 2012: 6)⁴⁰. The Muslim Brotherhood is the most powerful components of the Syrian opposition. The leaders of the organization were outside of Syria for about 30 years (Khoury, 2011). Turkey mainly supports the exiled- opposition within the SNC. It seems that Alawis and Christians are not attracted to the SNC. Besides, on March 2012, some members of the SNC resigned from their duties due to the ineffectiveness of the organization. Also, some Kurdish parties including the Kurdish Azadi Party and Kurdish Union Party in Syria left the SNC (O'Bagy, 2012: 15). In essence, the activities of the SNC are not very well known. For instance, an independent activist Salam Shawaf expressed that: "*People are angry about the executive board. We don't know what it is*

³⁹<http://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10220/7906/RSIS1752011.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁴⁰http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_Political_Opposition.pdf, accessed on 30.04.2013.

doing, and it's not clear how they are spending the money being given to them.” (O’Bagy, 2012: 13).

Furthermore it is known that the SNC is lobbying for foreign military intervention and they demand artillery from the international community (Sol, December 9, 2012: 2). Likewise, no-fly zone over Syria similar to no-fly zone over Libya during the Libyan revolt was demanded by the Syrian opposition (Khashan, 2011: 26). At the same time, to provide public support from minorities, the SNC gives guarantee to them for not establishing a radical Sunni government in the post-Assad period. Besides, the SNC experienced difficulties with the local opposition groups on the leadership of the opposition groups (O’Bagy, 2012: 6). In the initial stages of the revolt, Turkey refrained from contacting directly with the authorities of the SNC. Instead, Turkey goes behind the international community to take position in the conflict. At appearance, humanitarian aid and providing shelter to refugees were the priority of Turkey in the Syrian revolt. Yet, this situation changed with the intensification of the struggle within Syria. Later on, as Walker manifests (2012: 3) Turkey started to support the SNC at the political and military level.

The National Coordination Committee (NCC) is another strong opposition group. It was founded on September 2011 by Hassan Abdel Azim. The NCC’s headquarter is located in Damascus.⁴¹ The NCC calls for dialogue with the Assad regime and the organization is against foreign military intervention (Mohns, 2011: 3). Mainly, the NCC members include leftists and Kurdish activists.⁴² Turkey’s relations with the NCC are limited.

⁴¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁴² <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48369>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

In addition to welcoming the Syrian National Council on the Turkish soil, Turkey hosted the Free Syrian Army (FSA) under the leadership of Colonel Riyadh al-Assad as a response to Assad rule (Landis, 2012: 74). The defections within the army are the main source of fighters for the FSA. Besides, Turkey also sparked Arab states to assist the FSA by the Gulf-funded arms. It is clear that whereas rebels are strong in the north of Syria, they are still poorly armed. However as Philips notes (2012:138) Turkey pushed to coordinate the FSA organization by establishing military command center in Adana. For crossing Turkish border during the fight, the FSA members are quite comfortable when one member of the FSA organization puts the fact that:

We pay smugglers. We walk up the mountains and through rivers, trying to avoid mines. I go every two weeks. In our group, only the wounded go back to Turkey. The border guards don't know we are FSA. It's a humanitarian issue, letting us cross the border (Krajeski, 2012: 62).

Turkey's support to the Syrian opposition groups, in the last analysis, indicates how Turkey abandoned her close relations with Syria in a couple of months. Apart from the government's support to the FSA and the SNC, the affiliation between the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria and the AKP government favors Turkey for the post-Assad period. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood prefers Turkish initiative rather than involvement of the US and the EU in the Syrian conflict. Also, the formation of no fly-zone above Syria with regard to the Turkish military intervention is on the political agenda of the SMB (Bishku, 2012: 36). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Riyad Sukfa confirmed the fact that Turkey provides the most vital support to the Muslim Brotherhood compared to other Arab states.⁴³ Similarly, the representatives of the Syrian National

⁴³ <http://cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=365984>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Council many times stated that if military intervention to Syria is necessary, then command must be in the hands of Turkey, not in the hands of other foreign powers. Thereby, Turkish government emerged as if it is one of the organic parts of the Syrian opposition groups.

Krajeski (2012: 67) remarks that the AKP government's close relations with the SMB is associated with playing a central role in the restructuring of the economy of Syria in the post-Assad period. At the same time, it could be concluded that the AKP government and the SMB favor each other in terms of sectarian closeness. So, it seems that *the* government follows sectarian politics in relation to Alawi ruling in Damascus because Turkey is a Sunni-dominated country. However, according to Davutoğlu, the AKP government is not in favor of sectarianism in the Middle East. He claims that the good relations with Syria before the beginning of the protests proved how Turkey could be an ally of a non-Sunni regime in the Middle East.⁴⁴ Furthermore Turkey's willingness to promote the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood led to tension among the opposition groups. Since the role of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) in the Syrian revolt is overemphasized by the AKP government, Turkey strived to create an opposition group in which the leadership belongs only to the SMB. In this context, the leadership of the SMB is criticized by Syrian Kurds, Christians and secular Sunnis. Over this background, it is hard to provide unity among opposition groups (Philips, 2012: 139).

4.2 Turkish Public View and the AKP Government

Why is Syria on the center of Turkey's foreign policy for about two years? Some can argue that due to the humanitarian situation in Syria,

⁴⁴ [http://haber.gazetevatan.com/ulusculukla-hesaplama-zamani
geldi/481410/9/Siyaset#.UFcDwo3N9cQ](http://haber.gazetevatan.com/ulusculukla-hesaplama-zamani-geldi/481410/9/Siyaset#.UFcDwo3N9cQ), accessed on 30.04.2013.

Turkey is involved in the conflict from the beginning of the protests. Nonetheless, in this thesis, it is argued that the actual answer to above-mentioned question is about Turkey's perception of her realpolitik. In this sense, during the reign of the AKP government, Turkey makes calculations before starting to take position in any international events. Turkey's foreign policy calculations include elements from Turkey's domestic, regional and international interests. Overall, Turkey's foreign policy carries expansionist and sectarian characteristics in the war against the Syrian regime (Philips, 2012: 138-140).

In fact, one can find a correlation between the AKP government's self-assured foreign policy and her authoritarian tendencies in Turkish domestic politics. Obviously, the government intensified political pressure on Turkish opposition groups in parallel with the development in Syria. As Akkoyunlu, Nicolaïdis and Öktem (2013: 29-30) manifested:

Signs of resurgent authoritarianism in politics included intensifying government pressure on the media, giving rise to a culture of self-censorship in the editorial boards of prominent media conglomerates and independent newspapers, a restrictive internet legislation designed to force users to subscribe to filters blocking websites deemed socially, morally or politically inappropriate by the government, and a controversial 2006 amendment to the Anti-Terrorism law that significantly broadened the definition of terrorism, expanded the authority and legal immunity of the police force and equipped special police units with military grade weapons.

Importantly enough, Turkish public is mostly against any kind of intervention in Syria. For instance, in response to the AKP's government's Syria policy, from the beginning of the protests, the Alevis of Turkey who constitute 20 percent of the population are against any kind of intervention in Syria by outside forces. Dorsey (13 August 2012)⁴⁵ manifests that

⁴⁵<http://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10220/8841/RSIS1502012.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

Turkish Alevis are interested in the Syrian issue partly because of their sectarian loyalty. Nonetheless, with the emergence of violence in Syria and by the fear of Sunni resurgence, Alawis felt threatened by radical Islamists located along the Turco-Syrian border. In this sense, the Alevis of Hatay, who constitute 50 percent of the population in the city, were disturbed by the AKP government's discourse that contains sectarian tones against the Assad regime. Alevis remark that Assad is targeted by western powers because of his anti-imperialist stance both in the Palestinian issue and the Lebanon resistance against Israel. So, with the collapse of the Syrian regime, imperialism would capture Syria (Sidki, 2012). Most importantly, the Alevis fear that the fall of the Assad regime could bring about negative consequences for the existence of Alawis in Syria.

Similar to Alevis of Turkey, a poll published in a Turkish newspaper on June 2012 indicated that only 28 percent of the Turkish people are in favor of the Turkish intervention in Syria. According to the results of the poll, even the AKP voters did not support the intervention. In this context, one can conclude that there is a popular resistance against Turkey's foreign policy concerning the Syrian issue (Philips, 2012: 140). Moreover the AKP government's policy on Syria disturbed the Syrian public. So, the positive perception of Turkey in the eyes of the Syrian people just before the beginning of the conflict shifted in a dramatic way. The research conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) revealed that in 2009, 87 percent of the Syrian people had a positive view about Turkey. Nonetheless, Turkey's intervention to the sovereignty of Syria transformed the positive perception of Turkey. In 2011, only 44 percent of the Syrian people expressed a positive opinion on Turkey (Walker, 2012: 2). That dramatic decrease proves how the ordinary Syrian people were disturbed from the AKP government's intervention to Syrian domestic affairs.

In contrast to the Turkish public reactions against Turkey's considerable involvement in the Syrian crises, Erdoğan and Obama talked on the Syrian issue many times for the intervention in Syria. At the same time, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Washington in February 2012. During the visit, Davutoğlu met with the important figures of the US politics including the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council Director. In his speech, Davutoğlu emphasized the fears of the US dating back to the 9/11 attacks in September 2001. According to Davutoğlu, after the 9/11 attacks, balance between security and freedom gained importance (Aras, 2012: 47). This understanding of Davutoğlu is compatible with the discourse of the US which was developed after the 9/11 attacks for promoting freedom and justice in the international arena. It is obvious that instead of freedom and justice, the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq deteriorated further after the US intervention. At the same time, Turkey refrains from being the leading figure in the Syrian issue. For instance, although Turkey imposed sanctions on Syria unilaterally, it was one of the last members of NATO that applied sanctions. Despite the fact that through sanctions, Turkey started to cut its economic ties with Syria rapidly, in essence, Turkey is not in favor of losing Syrian market just for the sake of the Syrian protestors. Instead, the Turkish foreign policy makers calculate that Turkey would benefit from the post-Assad period if the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood takes power in future elections.

Although the international community compelled Syrian regime for diplomatic solution for some time, Turkey followed the anti-Assad path consistently. In this sense, on the 1st of April in 2012, talks concerning the approval of the Annan Plan came to an end with a success by the sides of the conflict. In essence, the approval of the Annan Plan by Assad was critical for the solution of the conflict. As it is expressed before the Annan

Plan was about cessation of the violence in Syria and designing the Syrian political institutions in a more representative way by encouraging participation to the political organs of Syria. In spite of that positive step taken by Assad regime, Turkey paid no attention to peace process. Instead, Turkey burned the bridge with Syria while international community seeks negotiation. To make this more concrete, while the international community pressured for the acceptance of the Annan Plan by Syrian regime, on March 27, 2012, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan tried to convince Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for taking action against Syria with these words:

To this date, ongoing efforts to convince the Assad regime [to stop his violent crackdown] have not delivered results. The Assad regime failed to take the necessary steps, despite promises to take democratic steps. The international community doesn't trust Assad anymore. We expect you to see this as well. You have to realize that Syria won't be convinced. Russia is a big country with a serious voice. Take a step forward for world peace (Walker, 2012:4).

Despite of Erdogan's efforts to persuade Russia, Medvedev criticized Turkey and the Friends of Syria coalition for undermining the significance of the Annan Plan. Davutoğlu also noted that:

*I have visited Syria sixty-two times in total since I have taken the post of special advisor to the prime minister. Just to remind the Syrian administration about the necessity of reforms, I have visited and met with President [Bashar] Assad three times. We have even presented a road map for reform in Syria in every walk of life. However, promises given to us for reform were not upheld. Despite relentless efforts by the Turkish government, the Syrian leadership chose to confront its own citizens by engaging in a dead-end policy based on the brutal repression of street protests.*⁴⁶

⁴⁶ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

In fact, before the acceptance of the Annan Plan, on 26th March in 2012, Turkey withdrew her ambassador to Syria and cut all her diplomatic relations with Damascus. However the tension rose above further when on 22th June 2012, the Turkish Phantom F4 war plane was shot down by Syrian military in the south-west of Hatay.⁴⁷ As a result, two Turkish pilots were killed. After the event, the Syrian government declared its regret for the losses. However Turkey did not accept the regret of the Syrian side. After a few months passed, on 3rd October 2012, 5 people were killed by the artillery shell fire coming from the Syrian border.⁴⁸ Afterwards, Turkey attacked the Syrian military units in accordance with the rules of engagement.⁴⁹ As a result, Turkish-Syrian relations came to a point where there was a possibility of war between the two states.

4.3 Turkey's Response to the Annan Plan and the Emergence of the Friends of Syria Coalition

Against this background, Davutoğlu notes that Turkey had to intervene in the internal affairs of her neighbors for the following reasons:

First, it is our moral responsibility towards the millions of our Syrian brothers and sisters who are deprived of their right to live in dignity. The real source of instability and brutality in Syria is not the demand for a change. It is the refusal to change. The war in Syria is not between the Regime and the opposition; it is between a tyranny

⁴⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/25/syria-shooting-second-turkish-plane-claim>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁴⁸ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Oct-03/190027-3-killed-by-syrian-mortar-in-turkeys-akcakale-border-region.ashx#axzz2PaFyBsri>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁴⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/03/us-syria-crisis-turkey-strikes-idUSBRE89219920121003>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

*and the people and democracy. We already made our preference for Syrian people through establishing this Group of Friends. We need to develop means and methods to translate this preference into practice. Second, to save a country which is on the brink of destruction, a country which is very dear for us, especially as a neighboring country of Turkey. Our brothers and sisters in Syria in all cities- from Damascus to Aleppo, from Deir ez-Zor to Latakia, from Quneitra to Daraa - in all cities Syrian People are confronted with a ruthless regime for almost 2 years. The efforts of the international community unfortunately could not reach to a level so far to convince the Assad regime that its actions would not go unanswered. Instead, the lack of inaction only contributed to the persistence of the suppression. Third, the acts of aggression of the regime have become a serious threat for the entire region, particularly for the neighboring countries. The more desperate the Regime becomes, the more aggression we face. 21 months ago, the regime started with bullets, continued with mortar shells, and then with fighter jets, airplanes bombing the cities, and lately even with ballistic missiles. What comes next?*⁵⁰

Against this background, to overcome the tension between the supporters and the dissidents of the regime, the international community took some steps. The most important step of the international community for the cessation of violence came to agenda when the peace plan initiated by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the UN, was accepted by the sides of the conflict in April 2012. The Annan Plan contains the following articles:

A Syrian-led political process to address the aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people; a U.N.-supervised cessation of armed violence in all its forms by all parties to protect civilians; all parties to ensure provision of humanitarian assistance to all areas affected by the fighting, and to implement a daily two-hour humanitarian pause; authorities to intensify the pace and scale of release of arbitrarily detained persons; authorities to ensure freedom of

⁵⁰ http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-at-the-fourth-ministerial-meeting-of-the-group-of-friends-of-the-syrian-people_-marrakech_-12-december-2012.en.mfa, accessed on 30.04.2013.

movement throughout the country for journalists; and authorities to respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully (Sharp & Blanchard, 2012: 7).

So, the Annan Plan was to achieve peace in Syria by withdrawal of troops from cities and to create political dialogue between the Assad regime and the opposition forces. In fact, before the collapse of the Annan Plan, the Syrian regime declared that it made reforms including introduction of new political party law, media law and local election law.⁵¹ Despite of the introduction of these reforms, the regime did not convince the protestors to stop the struggle. After the acceptance of the Annan Plan, 100 people were killed in the clashes in the west-central town of Houla which took the attention of the international community in May 2012. After the attacks, the scenario for NATO-led humanitarian intervention was talked about. As a result of the increasing level of violence, the UNSC condemned the attacks and the Syrian government. However China and Russia did not condemn the Assad government. Instead of foreign intervention, China and Russia supported a diplomatic solution based on the Annan Plan (Sultan, 7 June 2012). Nonetheless, after the acceptance of the Annan Plan, more than 1000 people were killed in the clashes.⁵² This huge causality is the ultimate indicator of the failure of the Annan Plan.

As a result of the collapse of the Annan Plan and the unsuccessful attacks of the opposition groups, the opposition groups tried to compromise on foreign military intervention. However they were divided regarding the foreign intervention. While some groups chanted the slogan “no to foreign intervention”, others wanted foreign intervention in the name of humanitarian purposes. However Sultan asserts (7 June 2012) that the

⁵¹<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/2012215192959168109.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁵² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/10/syrian-ceasefire-plan-alive-annan>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

failure of the opposition forces vis-à-vis strong Syrian army increased the demand for military solution from outside. Consequently, the opposition movement in Syria is searching for a game-changer which is obviously the foreign intervention. Apart from the division between opposed groups, there are different views among international community concerning the Syrian issue as well. While the US, the EU, Turkey and the reactionary Arab monarchies are in favor of toppling the Syrian regime; China, Russia and Iran are in favor of the Assad regime (Haseeb, 2012: 191). However, especially the role of the US concerning the end of the conflict is critical since it is the most developed military and economic power of the world. The US does not want to involve directly in the situation because of its huge sufferance in the Afghan and Iraqi war. In this context, without the approval of Russia and China, it is hard to intervene in Syria militarily.

Since there is no international consensus on the move against Syria, the emergence of *the Friends of Syria Coalition* with the endeavors of Turkey and the US after the rejection of the resolution on the resignation of Assad in the United National Security Council by Russian and Chinese votes is critical. This negative result in the UNSC triggered Turkey and the US to constitute a new political organization for reinforcing the Syrian opposition in the international level. Davutoğlu explains the role of the Friends of Syrian coalition “*as a platform for the protection of civilians in Syria*” (O’Bagy, 2012: 9). The Friends of Syria coalition conducted its first meeting in Tunisia. In the meeting, the recognition of the SNC as the legitimate representative of Syrian people and providing humanitarian aid to civilians were accepted by the coalition. Afterwards, the Friends of Syria coalition gathered in Turkey. Although many states participated in the meetings, the organization did not play very important role in the development of opposition movement. This is because the opposition

groups are deeply divided and there is no leadership and clear vision among them.

As it is argued before, the main obstacle before the success of the Syrian revolt is based on the lack of the unification of the Syrian opposition movements. Not only the EU and the US, but also the Arab League aimed at the unification of the opposition groups by meeting them in Cairo. As a result of the meeting, the opposition stayed dispersed yet (Dorsey, 15 November 2011)⁵³. Predictably, the heterogeneity of the Syrian people hinders the cohesion of the opposition. And the lack of leadership and the uncertainty for the post-Assad regime strengthened Assad's hands in the conflict. Furthermore despite armed struggle and sanctions against the Assad regime, the regime is still strong since the public support behind the opposition group is insufficient. Besides, only a very limited number of soldiers shifted their sides after the beginning of the military conflict in comparison to Libyan case. Overall, Philips (2012: 139) suggested that the lack of popular support behind the Syrian opposition as opposed to Egyptian and Tunisian protestors prolonged the ruling of Assad in Syria.

4.4 The Impact of the Syrian Revolt on Turkey's Kurdish Issue and the Refugee Problem

At this point, the evolution of the Kurdish issue with regard to development in Turkish politics will be assessed. In this thesis, it is claimed that through the analysis of the development of the Kurdish issue, Turkish stance in the Syrian revolt could be understood more clearly. In the second

⁵³<http://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10220/8050/RSIS1672011.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

term of the AKP government, the Kurdish problem was shaped by the consequences of the Oslo meetings between the PKK and Turkish government. Nonetheless, the failure in finding peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem by the sides of the conflict created a more stressful atmosphere in the eyes of Turkish public. Besides, just after the collapse of the secret talks between the PKK and Turkish state, the PKK activities reached its peak. In response to increasing level of the PKK actions, Turkish military was deployed to attack the PKK bases located in Turkey and in northern Iraq (Sidki, 2012). However the most important result of the Oslo meetings was about the beginning of *the Kurdistan Communities Union* (KCK) operations. By means of the KCK operations, some Kurdish citizens of Turkey allegedly related to the civilian wing of the PKK were arrested. The Kurds arrested in the context of the KCK operations include not only lawyers and intellectuals, but also politicians, mayors and some Kurdish parliamentarians.⁵⁴

Against this background, Philips (2012: 137) marks that it could be argued that Turkey's Syria problem has consequences not only for her regional influence and popularity, but for the Turkish domestic problems as well. In this sense, the involvement of Turkey in the internal affairs of Syria is partly based on the Kurdish issue. Especially, the results of the Syrian revolt on Turkey's own Kurdish population worries the AKP government. One of the recent reports written by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) put the fact that the cooperation between Turkey and Syria on anti-terrorism was over after the emergence of Syrian protests. Similarly, Iran, as a main partner of Syria since the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Bishku, 2012: 43), stopped sharing information on her operations

⁵⁴ <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3047/turkish-politics-kurdish-rights-and-the-kck-operat>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

against PEJAK with Turkish authorities. These factors could result in the failure of Turkey's foreign policy against Assad.

The increasing level of Turkey's involvement in the domestic affairs of Syria brought about Syrian support to the PYD at large (Dorsey, 10 August 2011). Consequently, the AKP government relies on the assumption that domestic stability of Turkey could be affected by the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the post-Assad period. Hence, as Walker (2012: 3) claims the shared border with Syria is perceived as a potential threat to Turkey's domestic politics in the AKP period. Out of this background, Saleh Muslim, the head of the PKK in Syria, returned to Syria and got in touch with Syrian secret agencies. According to reports, Saleh Muslim and the Syrian government settled on the virtual autonomy of Kurdish regions in Syria. In addition to that Assad permitted the free activities of the Democratic Union Party (the PKK's Syrian wing) in Kurdish regions. The Assad regime also allowed the opening of Kurdish cultural centers in Syria. In return for the collaboration with the Syrian regime, the Kurds refrain from participating in the protests against the Assad regime (Sidki, 2012).

As a result of the struggle between the opposition groups and the Syrian military, Kurds control some parts of the northern Syria. To illustrate, Kurds captured the administration of Kobani on 19th of July 2012 (Erkmen, 2012: 28). Afterwards, there were some clashes between the PYD and the SNC along the border in Ceylanpinar. In this context, Turkey wants to protect the unity of Syria because of a fear of Kurdish independency along Turkey's border. However the Assad regime redeemed itself to Kurds in order to acquire their support in the struggle. As a response to that Turkey managed to use the Kurdish card. In this sense, during the Syrian revolt, the PKK attacks intensified. To illustrate, according to former Turkish Interior Minister Idris Naim Şahin: "*Syria is turning a blind eye to terrorist*

groupings in areas close to the border to put Turkey in difficulty and perhaps as a way to take revenge on Turkey.”⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Davutoğlu warned Syria with these sharp words: “*Recalling the past, [Syria] should not even think of playing the PKK card. Everybody will see where such an act would lead.*”⁵⁶

Furthermore one important consequence of the Syrian revolt for Turkey was related to the refugee issue. After the emergence of the Syrian conflict, according to the UN reports, about 1.5 million Syrian people were affected.⁵⁷ As a result, hundreds of thousands of people escaped and were hosted by neighboring states including Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. The Syrian refugees in Turkey are mainly located in Hatay, Kilis and Gaziantep (Sahlool & Sankri-Tarbichi & Kherallah, 2012: 25). Turkey have hosted hundreds of Syrian refugees although she experienced “*complicated political maneuvers, humanitarian struggles, bureaucratic hassles, and the impromptu redefining of both its policy toward refugees and its foreign policy*” during the refugees’ acceptance process. Also, the AKP government preferred to determine her acts on the rising refugee problem alone and that fact alienated Turkey to human rights organizations and limited the financial aid for meeting the necessities of the refugees (Krajeski, 2012: 60).

Turkish treatment to Syrian refugees is limited by some factors. For instance, Turkey’s health system is alerting for the rising number of

⁵⁵ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/May-24/174455-assads-forces-push-to-capture-rebel-hotbed.ashx#axzz2PaFyBsri>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁵⁶ <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/turkey-syria-and-the-kurds.html>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁵⁷ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/06/191986.htm>, accessed on 30.04.2013.

refugees at large. Also, refugee camps are very close to borders, thus the refugees are in danger when the clashes continue along the Turkish-Syrian border. Besides, acquiring medicine and rising food prices are the main difficulties of the Syrian refugees (Devi, 2012)⁵⁸.

Before the influx of Syrian refugees, about 17.000 non-European asylum-seekers were hosted by Turkish government (Krajeski, 2012: 65). However with the beginning of Syrian revolt, hundreds of thousands of Syrian people have been hosted and they have been given “*temporary protection status*” rather than refugee status which means the denial of full legal rights of refugees. Under the shadow of “*temporary protection status*”, Syrian people rightly argue that:

The Syrian regime looks at us as terrorists. The Turkish regime looks at us as numbers... We are human beings. We must be considered refugees...They are keeping us like a card to play, Turkey's refugee camps are platforms where the regional power can showcase its humanitari-anism while hosting Assad's opposition a chance to start on good terms with a post-Assad government. But by denying status to the refugees... the Turkish state shows it cares little for the individual (Krajeski, 2012: 65).

The differences in terms of language and culture with Turkish authorities make life in refugee camps difficult. At the same time, the refugees face harsh conditions in terms of acquiring jobs, education and homes. Lastly, there is tight security in the refugee camps including constant surveillance (Krajeski, 2012: 60-63). Until May 2012, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey rose above 300.000 people⁵⁹. Hence, the AKP government demanded NATO's Patriots in order to defend the refugees and

⁵⁸ [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)61785-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)61785-1/fulltext), accessed on 30.04.2013.

⁵⁹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/multimedya/2013/05/130514_dg_suriye_multeciler.shtml, accessed on 30.04.2013.

territory of Turkey against possible Syrian military attacks. As a result, NATO approved the Turkish demand on 4th of December in 2012. Patriots coming from the Netherlands, Germany and the US were deployed in Kahramanmaraş, Adana and Gaziantep on January 2013.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_98936.htm, accessed on 30.04.2013.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As intended, this thesis shows that relations between Turkey and Syria evolved in the context of the Hatay issue, the water problem, and the PKK issue from 1980s to 1998. Against this background, the deportation of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK, in 1998 opened a new page in the relations history and the detente period emerged between Turkey and Syria. Relations between two states improved even more rapidly and further after the Justice and Development Party government came to power in 2002 in Turkey. To illustrate, trade boomed between the two countries and Syria became an important export market for Turkey. The change in the governments of both sides in time, the increasing level of economic cooperation, and the AKP governments' new foreign policy activism in the Middle East on the basis of zero-problem policy with neighboring states brought about considerable changes in the history of problematic relations of the two states. In this sense, interestingly enough, from the beginning of the first AKP government in November 2002 to the outbreak of the Syrian revolt in March 2011, in almost less than a decade, Turkey's problematic relations with Syria was even reshaped successfully.

According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the main figure in the making of Turkish foreign policy during the AKP governments, Turkey's old problematic relations with neighbors was due to Kemalism, which was motivated by westernization movements and remains indifferent to the Middle East. Thus, Davutoğlu claims that Turkey neglected relations with Middle Eastern states and hence, she faced various problems and conflicts with her neighbors in the end. As opposed to the rest of Turkish governments' foreign policy approaches, the shared historical and cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire with an obvious emphasis on Sunni Islam is

one of the most important characteristics of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East during the reign of the AKP governments. According to Davutoğlu, in order to actualize Turkey's alleged potential which is a result of her unique geographical and historical advantage, Turkey's relations with the West have to be balanced through developing alternative alliances while considering Turkey as one of the centers in regional affairs. Moreover; Turkish foreign policy during the AKP governments was structured on and designed towards acting as an order setting agent in the Middle East.

With the emergence of the Arab Spring, Turkey's general foreign policy vision and specifically zero-problem policy with neighboring states started to be inadequate with regard to the newly-emerged political and social conjuncture in the Middle East. Turkish foreign policy makers had not expected any kind of a regime change or the collapse of secular and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, therefore the vision of zero-problem policy with neighbors was not ready to be adapted in case of any change in the region. At the same time, Turkish government thought that the Assad regime would not bear to stand in reign for weeks since the ruling elite in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya were toppled in a short time. In essence, Turkey, in the early days of the Syrian revolt, struggled hard to employ diplomatic channels to convince the Syrian regime for political transformation in Syria. However Turkey's persuasion efforts for the cessation of violence in Syria ended with total failure after the 7-hour consultation between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in the early August, 2011. In addition, clashes between the opponents of the regime and Syrian military reached to a certain point afterwards.

Against this background, normalization and deepening of Turkish-Syrian relations came to an end and the AKP government played a leading role in providing assistance to the Syrian opposition. Hence, Turkey

provided unilateral support for the Syrian National Council, which was later replaced by the Syrian National Coalition, and the Free Syrian Army due to the failure of peace talks between the two states. Turkey had expected the fall of the Assad regime similar to Qaddafi of Libya in a short period of time and thus Turkish foreign policy towards Syria intensified. Moreover, Turkey played a significant role in facilitating a suitable atmosphere for an international military intervention in Syria. However the influence of Russia, China, Iran and Hezbollah in the conflict hindered military confrontation. Otherwise, the direct military intervention in Syria could have harmed the regional balance of power and have promoted sectarian division in the Middle East.

This thesis further concludes that Turkey was keen on establishing good ties with Sunni organization of the Syrian opposition, namely the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and thus, the AKP government started to use sectarian tones concerning Turkish foreign policy towards the Syrian government. Yet, expectations for the fall of the Syrian regime collapsed since the civil war between Syrian regime and the armed opposition groups are still lasting for more than two years. The further argument was that Turkey's involvement in the Syrian domestic politics is due to the fact that Turkey wants to play a major role in the reconstruction of Syria in the post-Assad period. Hence, Turkey's foreign policy, it could be argued, reflects her realist characteristics with regard to the Syrian conflict at large. Consequently, Turkey's zero-problem policy with Syria failed on the grounds that the relations between Turkey and Syria have been proven to be belligerently problematic similar to the late 1990s.

The ongoing clashes in Syria paved the way for the confrontation between Sunni and Shia regimes in the Middle East. Traditionally, while Syria, Lebanon and Iran composed the Shia axis; Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab League members composed the Sunni axis in the

region. In addition, it is obvious that during the Arab revolts, the US, the EU and Israel supported Sunni axis vis-à-vis Shia regimes in order to eliminate the rising influence of Iran in the Middle East. In this sense, the close ties between the Turkish government and the Syrian Sunni majority could be interpreted that Turkey plays an active role in the confrontation of Shia and Sunni regimes in the Middle East. In fact, this division among Muslim states put Turkey's internal stability in jeopardy since Turkey is not a homogenous country in terms of sects and ethnicity.

Moreover, the crystallized sectarian character of Syrian conflict increased the tension between Turkey and the supporters of the Assad regime in the international arena. As a result, Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq and Shia organizations deteriorated. In this context, the rivalry between Iran and Turkey concerning the leadership of the Middle East became more evident in the Muslim world. Furthermore, there is obvious confrontation between the western bloc and the rising stars of the 21st century, especially with Russia and China. This polarized situation could be compared with the proxy wars between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the US in the Middle East in the past. Consequently, it is argued that all efforts of international powers to take action in the Syrian crisis are due to their desire to design the post-al-Assad period in parallel to their political and economic interests.

As it is one of the arguments of the thesis, it is also manifested in the light of the conclusions up to this point that the Syrian revolt which led to deaths of more than 100.000 people until June 2013 is different from the other Arab revolts in the Middle East. This claim is affirmed by the following outcomes of the thesis. First, the opponents of the al-Assad regime have not been able to topple the Syrian regime when compared to the successful attempts in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt although it has been more than two years since the beginning of the Syrian clashes. Second, there

is no consensus on an international military intervention in Syria as opposed to a successful foreign military intervention in Libya. In this sense, especially China and Russia have been playing significant roles in the United Nations Security Council in terms of vetoing resolutions concerning military precautions against the Assad regime. It is obvious that if China and Russia abandoned their support for the Syrian regime, Syria would have been more isolated in the international arena. Third, the public support is crucial for the continuation of the al-Assad regime in Syria. To illustrate, the minority groups including Alawis, Christians, Kurds and even secular Sunnis have been supporting the Assad regime vis-à-vis the opposition groups; and thus the Syrian government proved her legitimacy in the fight against the rebels. Fourth, it is to the point to argue that the commanding staff of the Syrian army is composed of a minority of Alawis while low-ranked soldiers come from Sunni background. Nonetheless the cohesion of Syrian army in contrast to other Arab states' armies during the emergence and development of the Arab uprisings forms the dynamics for the survival of the Syrian regime.

In addition, disorganization of the opposition groups and the existence of radical Islamic groups within the Syrian opposition paved the way for strengthening Assad's hand in terms of taking the support of Syrian public and giving rise to confusion within international community to provide support for rebels. Sixth, the fall of the Syrian regime could change the regional balance between Shias and Sunnis in the Middle East. In this regard, the elimination of Bashar al-Assad could provoke sectarian tensions in the regional level; hence the Middle East could politically destabilize further. Seventh, the US has not assumed a leading role in supporting the opposition groups. This situation was because the majority of the US citizens are against any kind of overseas intervention, Syria in this case. Besides, the Obama administration does not favor a new war in the Middle

East while the US has already been facing difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan for long time. Eighth, the allegations on the usage of the chemical weapons by the Syrian regime could have encouraged the US administration to provide artillery rather than non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition groups. In other words, the US government could have been more motivated for accelerating the demise of the al-Assad regime if there were enough evidence for the usage of chemical weapons in Syria. Last but not least, unlike other Arab revolts, Israeli government started to be a part of the Syrian conflict and hence, to illustrate, she attacked Syria for a couple of times in order to eliminate the alleged military connection between Iran, Hezbollah and Syria. It is hard to presume whether Israeli military would intervene in Syria or not. However if this were the case, then it would have been easier to estimate that the Assad regime would fall in a few months due to the absolute technological superiority of Israel.

Having thoroughly discussed the above-mentioned facts, I conclude that the Syrian regime would survive in the short and middle terms unless there comes a consensus on international military intervention onto the agenda of the international community. However, the Turkish government struggled hard to resist provocations when she was put under increasing level of international pressure to take an active role in leading a possible military intervention in Syria. Had she not resisted, the Turkish government would have faced huge risks for the internal stability of the country. Moreover, Turkey was to deal with all the negative consequences of the war directly by herself. It is obvious that Turkey stepped back concerning her assertive foreign policy towards the Syrian government in the recent months and as a result, the Istanbul-based Syrian National Council is replaced by the Doha-based Syrian National Coalition. At this point, it is clear that *the* future of Turkish-Syrian relations will be shaped on the axis of Turkey's sensitivity towards four main dynamics of the Syrian conflict on Turkish-

Syrian relations, namely Turkish government's peace process with the PKK organization, the possibility of the emergence of autonomous Kurdish region in Syria, the refugee problem and the possible sectarian tension between Sunnis and Alevis in Turkey dependent on the AKP government's involvement in Syrian crisis.

Moreover it should also be noted that although Davutoğlu introduced some new concepts and mechanisms to alter Turkey's traditional foreign policy in the Middle East, Turkey is still dealing with serious political problems with her neighbors, in practice. Accordingly, with the emergence of the Arab uprisings in the last days of 2010, Turkey's zero-problem policy with neighbors transformed into a full-problem policy with neighbors in the Middle East. For instance, Turkey's relations with Iran deteriorated due to the installation of a missile shield in Kürecik, Malatya. Turkey also faces problems with Iraq concerning the PKK issue, the rising influence of Shias in the ruling of Iraq and the formation of a possible Kurdish state in northern Iraq. And finally, with the 'one minute' crisis in 2009, relations with Israel changed its path dramatically during the AKP governments until the Israeli government apologized in March 2013 for attacking the MV Mavi Marmara, a ship carrying humanitarian aid, while in international waters and en route to Gaza, on May 31, 2010. Hence, it may be concluded that the AKP government's new peaceful rhetoric concerning the making of foreign policy decisions was not sufficient to alter Turkey's alleged conflict-creating Kemalist foreign policy during the AKP governments.

Against this background, the securitization of Turkish foreign policy similar to the 1990s is on the agenda. Although as a result of Arab uprisings, Turkey was called "*a model for the Middle Eastern countries*" on the basis of her being a democratic country, achieving economic growth and maintaining political stability simultaneously, Turkey's prestige and the credibility in the Middle East declined dramatically since the failure of the

zero-problem policy with Syria revealed that achieving a zero-problem policy depends more on how the neighbors and their leaders perceive this policy rather than the expectations of the AKP government and perceptions of theorists of this vision.

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APPENDICES A

TURKISH SUMMARY

Bu tezin temel amacı, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) hükümetleri süresince, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinin değişen doğasını incelemektir. Bu sayede, Suriye'de Mart 2011'de başlayan isyan sonrasında gerilen ikili ilişkilerin bozulmasında yatan sebeplere ışık tutulmaya çalışılacaktır. Bu tezin temel sorunsalı, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerini 2013 yılı başına kadar analiz etmek suretiyle, Suriye ile sıfır sorun politikasının neden iflas ettiğinin anlaşılmasıdır.

Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinin tarihsel gelişimine bakıldığından, AKP hükümetinin 2002 genel seçimleri sonucunda iktidara gelmesine dek, Türkiye'nin Suriye ile olan tarihsel ilişkileri esas olarak, Hatay sorunu, su sorunu ve PKK meselesi çerçevesinde bir gelişim göstermiştir. Türkiye'nin 1939 yılında Hatay'ı sınırlarına dâhil etmesiyle soğuyan ilişkiler, Soğuk Savaş süresince de sürmüş, iki ülkenin birbiri nezdindeki olumsuz tutumları pekişmiştir. Ayrıca, aralarında Soğuk Savaş'ın iki farklı kutbunu destekleyen ülkeler olarak, bir rekabet ortamı doğmuştur.

Özellikle Türkiye'nin 1952 yılında NATO'ya üyeliğinin gerçekleşmesi ile bu durum daha da somut bir hal almıştır. Bu yönelik ile birlikte, Türkiye, 'Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği (SSCB) tehdidi' (komünist tehlike söylemi olarak da ifade edilebilir) söylemini kullanarak Batılı ülkeler ile politik ve iktisadi anlamda işbirliği yoluna gitmiş ve Sovyetler Birliği etkisindeki Arap coğrafyasına karşı yabancılasmıştır. 1960'lar süresince ise suyun sosyo-ekonomik kalkınma için öneminin anlaşılmasıının ardından, Fırat ve Dicle nehirlerindeki suyun paylaşılması meselesi sorun yaratmış ve Türkiye, Suriye ve Irak, kendi sosyoekonomik

kalkınmalarını gerçekleştirmek için baraj inşa ederek sulama yöntemlerini geliştirme metoduna başvurmuşlardır. Bu anlamda, Türkiye'nin 1970'lerde uygulamaya koyduğu Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi (GAP), alanında en kapsamlı kalkınma projesi olması yönünden önemlidir. Projeden temel beklenti, Türkiye'nin güneydoğu bölgesinde, tarımın ve sanayinin geliştirilmesi suretiyle bölgesel kalkınmanın hız kazanmasıdır. Türkiye'nin su-temelli kalkınma stratejisi ile aynı dönemde, Suriye ve Irak'ın nehirlerdeki suyun kullanımına ilişkin geliştirdikleri projelerin yürürlüğe konulması ile su sorunu büyümüştür. Bu meseleye, ülke teknokratların çözüm üretme çabaları ise defaattle başarısızlığa uğramıştır. Böylelikle, su meselesi basit bir teknik mesele olmaktan çıkarak, ikili ilişkilerin gerilmesi noktasında kilit rol oynayan ciddi bir sorun olarak tarihteki yerini almıştır. Suriye'nin, Türkiye'nin nehirlerdeki avantajlı konumuna ve yapılmasına hız verilen baraj yapımlarına karşılık vermek adına, yeni kurulmakta olan Kürdistan İşçi Partisi (PKK) örgütünü desteklemesi ise 1980'lerin başına rastlamaktadır. Suriye'nin PKK'yi lojistik olarak desteklemesi ve PKK lideri Abdullah Öcalan'ın örgütü uzun bir süre Suriye'den yönetmesi, Türkiye hükümetlerinin Suriye'ye yönelik dış politikalarında sert bir tutum içerisine girmelerine sebebiyet vermiş ve ancak PKK lideri Abdullah Öcalan'ın Kasım 1998'de yakalanmasının ardından Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinde yeni bir sayfa açılmıştır. Bu dönemden sonra, ikili ilişkiler olumlu yönde bir seyir izlemeye başlamıştır. Bu anlamda, Öcalan'ın Suriye'yi terki ve sonrasında imzalanan 'Adana Mutabakatı' ile ikili ilişkilerde yumuşama döneme girilmiştir.

Türkiye askerlerinin sınır bölgelerinde konuşlandırılması ve devletin üst düzey yöneticilerinin ağzından PKK'ya desteğin sürmesi durumunda, Türkiye'nin Suriye'ye yönelik olarak bir askeri müdahale tehdidine bulunmasından sonra imzalanan Adana Mutabakatı'yla Suriye, PKK'yi terör örgütü olarak tanımlamış, PKK'ya sağladığı lojistik desteği kesme

sözü vermiş ve sınırlarını PKK militanlarına kapatma kararı almıştır.. Adana Mutabakatı'nın ardından, ikili ilişkilerde, güvenlik ve ekonomik konular başta olmak üzere bir iyileşme söz konusu olmuştur.

Ne var ki, özellikle AKP hükümetinin iktidara geldiği 2002 genel seçimlerinden sonra, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri gerek siyasi gerek ekonomik manada oldukça hızlı bir ilerleme çizgisi tutturmuştur. Daha somut bir düzeyde ifade edecek olursak, iki ülke arasındaki ticari ilişkiler kısa süre içerisinde zirve yapmış, Suriye, Türkiye için önemli bir pazar haline gelmiş ve geçmişte yaşanan politik sıkıntılar geride kalmıştır. Türkiye ve Suriye hükümetlerinin yönetimlerinde Suriye Eski Devlet Başkanı Hafiz Esad'ın 2000 yılında hayatını kaybetmesiyle oğlu Başar Esad'ın yönetimi devralması ve Türkiye'de 2002 seçimleriyle Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın Başbakan olması ile yaşanan değişiklik, bu yönetsel değişimin ardından iki ülkenin de iktisadi gelişme merkezli bir dış siyaset izlemeleri ve AKP hükümetinin komşularla sıfır sorun politikası bağlamında Ortadoğu'ya yönelik olarak aktif bir dış politika izlemesi, bu olumlu gelişmeyi tetikleyen temel dinamikler olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu açıdan, yeterince anlaşılır bir şekilde, AKP hükümetinin iktidarı ele geçirdiği 2002 tarihinden Suriye'de protesto gösterilerin başladığı 2011 Mart'ına kadar geçen sürede, yani neredeyse on yıldan daha az bir sürede, ikili ilişkiler farklı bir şekle bürünerek başarılı bir yönde seyir izlemiştir.

Her ne kadar Türkiye'nin komşularıyla olan ilişkilerinin düzelmesinde ve güvenlik odaklı dış siyasetinin terk edilmesinde Eski Dışişleri Bakanı İsmail Cem rol oynamışsa da, Suriye ile ilişkiler AKP döneminde de, siyasi meselelerin dışında bırakılmasıyla yeni bir ivme kazanmıştır. Bu açıdan 2004 yılında, önce Esad'ın Türkiye'yi ziyareti, ardından ise Erdoğan'ın karşı ziyaretiyle olumlu bir hava oluşmuş ve ülkeler arasında güven duygusu tazelenmiştir. Türkiye'nin Hatay meselesinin politik bir sorun olarak değerlendirilmemesi yönündeki girişimi, Suriye

tarafında olumlu karşılık bulmuş ve 2005'te Suriye yönetimince Hatay, Türkiye'nin yasal bir parçası olarak kabul edilmiştir. Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri, Lübnan Eski Başbakanı Refik Hariri'nin Şubat 2006'da suikast sonucu öldürülmesinin ertesinde daha da güçlenmiştir. Batılı güçlerce suikastın tetikçisi olarak Suriye yönetimi gösterilmişse de, Türkiye, Suriye ile ilişkilerini sıcak tutmuş ve komşusunun yanında yer almıştır. Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinde esas derinleşme ise 2009 yılında karşılıklı olarak vizelerin kaldırılması ve askeri alanlarda işbirliğinin sağlanmasıyla görülmüştür. İki ülke ticari ilişkileri de aynı dönemde zirve yapmıştır. Aynı zamanda, Türkiye'yi ziyaret eden Suriyeli ziyaretçilerin sayısı da geçmiş dönemlere nazaran hızlı bir artış göstermiştir.

Yukarıda bahsedilen tarihsel arkaplan çerçevesinde, bu tez, esas olarak 4 amaç etrafında kurgulanmıştır. Bu amaqlardan ilki, AKP hükümetlerinin dış politikasının, Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politikasından ayrılan ve ona benzeyen yönlerinin irdelenmesidir. Bu bağlamda değerlendirildiğinde, bu tezde, AKP hükümeti döneminde dış politikada, kültürel ve ekonomik etmenler dikkate alınarak bir dış politika izlendiğinden söz edilmektedir. Ayrıca, tez dâhilinde, AKP dış politikasının mimarı olarak kabul edilen Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politika karakteristikleriyle olan hesaplaşmasına yer verilmesine ihtiyaç doğmaktadır. Davutoğlu'na göre, AKP hükümetleri öncesinde Türkiye dış politikası, komşularla sürekli sorunlar yaratacak şekilde bir şekilde örülmüştü. Bu anlamda, Türkiye'nin kurucu ideolojisi olan Kemalizm ile özdeleşen bir dış politika anlayışından vazgeçilmesi gerekiyordu; zira Kemalizm, Batı merkezli bir düşünce anlayışı çerçevesinden dünyayı yorumladığı için ve Batılılaşmayı dış ilişkilerde esas unsur olarak tercih etmesinden dolayı, Türkiye'nin Batı dışındaki ülkelerle arasına set çekilmiş durumdaydı. Davutoğlu'na göre böylelikle, Türkiye hükümetleri yıllarca

Ortadoğu coğrafyasındaki komşularına karşı soğuk bir şekilde yaklaşmış ve onlarla iyi ilişkiler geliştirmekten uzak bir tavır içerisinde girmiştir.

Ahmet Davutoğlu'na göre, 6 Kasım 2002 seçimlerinden sonra iktidara gelen AKP hükümeti, Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'daki komşularına yönelik olarak geliştirdiği ilgisiz tavrin son bulması için ciddi bir hareket içerisinde girmiştir ve Ortadoğu'daki ülkelerle olan ilişkilerin düzeltilmesi için çaba sarf etmiştir. Özellikle AKP hükümetleri süresince, bölge ülkeleriyle olan tarihsel ve kültürel ortaklıkların vurgulanması suretiyle ilişkiler yeni bir ivme kazanmış ve yine Davutoğlu'na göre, Türkiye'nin komşularına olan yabancılışması son bulmuştur. Bu söylem ışığında, Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu ülkeleriyle olan iktisadi ilişkileri de farklı bir boyut kazanmış ve ekonomik ilişkiler hiç olmadığı kadar gelişmiştir. Bu gelişme, Davutoğlu'na göre, Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu ülkeleriyle olan ilişkilerinde vurguladığı kültürel ve tarihsel bağlar sebebiyle gerçekleşmiştir.

Türkiye'nin bölge ülkeleriyle olan kültürel ve tarihsel yakınlığı ise köklerini Osmanlı Devleti'nin eski etki sahasından almaktadır. Bu yönyle değerlendirildiğinde, Davutoğlu'nun komşularla sıfır sorun politikasının Neo-Ottomanizm tartışmaları ile yakından bağlantısı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Türkiye'nin olumladığı ortak kültür ve tarihsel birlikteliğin ise Arap ülkelerince nasıl anlaşıldığı meselesi hususunda ise net bir değerlendirme yapmak zordur. Yani Davutoğlu'nun Türkiye'nin tarihsel ve stratejik olarak önemli bir derinlik taşıdığını ilişkin görüşleri, bu görüşün Ortadoğu ülke liderlerince nasıl yorumlandığına sıkı sıkıya bağlıdır. Aynı zamanda, Davutoğlu'nun komşularla sıfır sorun politikası ile Batı odaklı bir siyaset tercih gösteren Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politikasına bir alternatif yaratma eğiliminde olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Davutoğlu'na göre, bu tercih yoluyla Doğu ve Batı ülkeleri arasında bir köprü inşa edilerek iki coğrafayla da aynı anda ilişkiler gelişecek ve Türkiye, bölge meselelerinde merkezi bir güç olarak yerini alacaktır. Türkiye, ayrıca sıfır sorun politikası bağlamında,

bölge ülkeleriyle ekonomik ilişkilerin gelişmesi sayesinde siyasal sorunların da ortadan kalkacağına ilişkin bir anlayış geliştirerek uygulamaya koymuştur. Buna ek olarak, Türkiye, Davutoğlu'nun dış politika yorumunda, Ortadoğu'daki temel meselelerde, İsrail-Filistin, İsrail-Lübnan ve İran-AB sorunları gibi, arabuluculuk rolüne soyunarak, bölgede barış ve istikrarın kurulmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Yukarıda bahsedilenler ışığında Türkiye, AKP hükümetleri süresince, oyun kurucu bir aktör olarak dış politika üretmeye ve onu uygulamaya çalışmıştır.

Ne var ki, Davutoğlu'nun sıfır sorun politikası söylemi, Ortadoğu'daki dengelerin kısa ve orta vadede değişmeyeceği öngörüsünden hareketle kurgulanmış ve bir statükocu söylem olarak tarihteki yerini almıştır. Bu yönyle değerlendirildiğinde, Arap isyanlarının neticesinde bölgesel dengelerde tarihsel bir değişim yaşanmış ve yeni bir politik, iktisadi ve sosyal bağlam ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu durumun uluslararası ilişkiler noktasında da birçok değişimi beraberinde getirdiği zamanla ortaya çıkmıştır. Böylelikle, Aralık 2010'da ortaya çıkan Arap isyanlarının genel olarak Türkiye dış politikasını, özel olarak ise komşularla sıfır sorun politikasını olumsuz yönde etkilediğinden söz edilebilir. Aslında Türkiye, Ortadoğu'daki halk hareketleri ertesinde, uluslararası camiada bir demokrasi havarisi olarak görülmüş ve kendisine, yönetimleri devrilen ülkelere yeni arayışlarında rol-model olacağı yönlü atıflarda bulunulmuştur. Rol-model tartışmalarının merkezinde ise Türkiye'nin hem istikrarlı bir ekonomiye sahip olması hem de siyasal sistem açısından demokratik bir ülke olması gösteriliyordu. Fakat Türkiye dış politika yapıcılarının Ortadoğu'daki istikrarsızlığa yönelik olarak yeni bir vizyon geliştirememeleri, buna ilaveten halihazırda mevcut vizyonu revize edememeleri sebebiyle, Türkiye'nin imajı bölge nezdinde bir hayli zedelenmiştir.

Mısır Eski Devlet Başkanı Hüsnü Mübarek'in Ocak 2011'de devrilmesi ve Libya'ya karşı gerçekleşen uluslararası müdahale sonrasında

rejim değişikliğinin gerçekleşmesi, Mart 2011'de Suriye'de başlayan isyanın da rejim değişikliğine sebebiyet vereceği yönlü düşünceyi kuvvetlendirmiştir. Buna rağmen, Türkiye, Suriye'de isyanın başladığı ilk günlerde diplomatik ve siyasi bir çözümden yana tavır geliştirmiştir. AKP hükümetinden birçok isim gerek telefon görüşmeleri gerekse de bireysel temaslar yoluyla Suriye'ye ziyarette bulunmuş ve bizzat Başbakan Erdoğan tarafından Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu Şam'a yollanarak çözüm için bir orta yol bulunmaya çalışılmıştır. Ağustos 2011'de Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Suriye Devlet Başkanı Beşar Esad ile 7 saat süren görüşmesinden çatışmaların müzakere yönüyle çözümüne ilişkin bir sonuç çıkmaması ile Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri durma noktasına gelmiştir.

Aynı dönemde, Suriye'de hükümet güçleri ile silahlı muhalif unsurlar arasındaki çatışmalar da ciddi bir raddeye ulaşmıştır. Türkiye hükümeti, bu noktada, önce Suriye Ulusal Konseyi'ni, daha sonra bu örgüt Suriye Ulusal Koalisyonu adını aldı, ve Özgür Suriye Ordusu'nu destekleyerek Suriye'deki pozisyonunu netleştirme gayreti içerisinde girmiştir. Ne var ki, Türkiye'nin rejimin kısa sürede devrileceği yönlü beklentisi, uluslararası konjonktürün olumsuz etkisi ve Suriye'deki muhalif askeri unsurların aralarındaki problemler vesilesiyle, olayların üzerinden iki yıl geçmesine rağmen gerçekleşmemiştir. Aynı zamanda, Türkiye ile Suriye arasındaki gerilen ilişkiler, Haziran 2012'de Türkiye Hava Kuvvetlerine bağlı bir jetin Suriye tarafınca düşürülmesi, Ekim 2012'de Akçakale'de sınırda gelen top mermilerinin 5 kişiyi öldürmesi ve Mayıs 2013'te Reyhanlı'da yaşanan saldırılar ile iki ülkeyi savaşın eşiğine kadar getirmiştir. Bu durum karşısında, Türkiye tüm önemleri alarak, askeri caydırıcılık kartını kullanmıştır. Ayrıca, geçtiğimiz birkaç ayda, İstanbul merkezli Suriye Ulusal Konseyi'nin Doha merkezli Suriye Ulusal Koalisyonu altında örgütlülük faaliyetini sürdürmesi, AKP hükümetinin son yaşanan olaylardan duyduğu rahatsızlığın somut bir tezahürü olarak

belirmektedir ve Türkiye'nin olaylara daha fazla sağduyu ile yaklaşma çabası içerisinde olduğunu göstermektedir.

İkinci olarak bu tez, Suriye'ye olası bir uluslararası askeri müdahalenin, Türkiye'nin kendi iç meselelerine ilişkin de sonuçları olacağını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. İlkın, kısmen Suriye'de yaşanan çatışmalar neticesinde, Türkiye'nin büyüyen Kürt meselesi tartışmalarının bir kez daha gündemin en üst sıralarını işgal ettiği bir dönem yaşanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Ocak 2013'te AKP hükümeti ile PKK lideri Abdullah Öcalan arasında gerçekleşen görüşmeler, hala kırılgan bir yapıda gelişmektedir. Suriye'de yaşanan silahlı çatışmaların Kürt meselesinin çözümü yönündeki çabalara engel teskil etmesini önlemek adına, Suriye'nin içişlerine müdahalenin bir nebze de olsa kesildiğinin belirtilmesi gerekmektedir. İkinci olarak, Suriye'deki kanlı olaylardan kaçan ve sayıları 500.000'i aşan sığınmacıların Türkiye'ye yarattığı mali yük ile sığınmacılar ve yerli halk arasında kimi yerlerde kavgaya varan tartışmalar ülkede gergin bir psikolojik atmosferin oluşmasına sebebiyet vermiştir. Bu bağlamda, Suriye'de yaşanan çatışmalarının sürmesinin, Türkiye'ye daha fazla sığınmacı getireceğini tahmin etmek güç değildir. Bu koşullar altında Türkiye, Suriye rejimi ile muhalifler arasındaki çatışmada taraf olmaktan kaçınsa dahi, çatışmaların organik bir parçası olmak durumunda kalabilir.

Üçüncü olarak tezde, Suriye'de yaşanan silahlı çatışmaların kültürel kökenleriyle incelenmesi durumunda, AKP hükümetinin Suriye'ye yönelik keskin tutumunun Türkiye'deki Aleviler ve Sunniler arasında bir mezhep çatışması riskinin doğmasına sebebiyet verebileceği belirtilmektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın Suriye'deki meseleye yönelik olarak sarf ettiği kimi sözlerin sekteryen izler taşıması, Aleviler içerisinde AKP hükümetinin dış politikasına yönelik bir rahatsızlığın ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Bu durumda, Suriye olaylarının başlamasının öncesinde, Türkiye hükümeti ile Beşar Esad

arasındaki yakın ilişkilerin Arap isyanları sonucunda bozulmasının bir nedeni olarak, Arap isyanlarının Ortadoğu'daki Şii-Sunni çekişmesini yeniden gözle görülür hale getirmesi ifade gösterilebilir. AKP hükümetinin Suriye meselesinde, Esad hükümeti yerine Sunni grupları muhatap alması ise Türkiye'nin Şii-Sunni çekişmesinde taraf tutan pozisyonda olduğunu göstermesi bakımından önemlidir. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'nin sekteryen dış politika izlemesi, kendi iç istikrarını tehlikeye sokmaktadır. Türkiye'nin Suriye'deki olaylarda kendi tarafını net bir şekilde belli etmesi, AKP hükümeti ile Esad rejimine destek veren ülkelerin arasındaki ilişkileri olumsuz bir şekilde etkilemiştir.

Uluslararası bağlam açısından değerlendirildiğinde ise Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Avrupa Birliği ülkeleri ve Arap Birliği gibi örgütler Suriye'deki mevcut rejimin değişmesi yönünde dış politika izlerken; Rusya, İran ve Çin, Esad yönetiminin görevde kalmasından yana tavır geliştirmiştir. Özellikle ABD ve Rusya arasında Suriye'deki olaylar ilişkin olarak yaşanan farklılaşma, Soğuk Savaş süresince ABD ve Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği arasında yaşanan gerginlikleri hatırlatacak denli ciddi bir havaya bürünmüştür. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'nin İran, Irak ve Rusya ile ilişkilerinin gerilmesinde, AKP iktidarının tarafsız politikasının etkili olduğu savunulabilir. Türkiye'nin muhalif unsurlar arasında dahi Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler örgütüne en güçlü desteği sunması ve onları Suriye'nin gelecekteki yöneticileri olarak görme beklentisi, AKP hükümeti ile Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler örgütü arasında daha da yakın ilişkilerin tesis edilmesine sebebiyet vermiştir. Suriye Müslüman Kardeşler örgütü de AKP hükümetinin kendilerine yönelik olumlu tutumlarını boşça çıkarmayacak nitelikte, Suriye'ye olası bir askeri müdahalede, iplerin Türkiye'nin elinde olması gereğine ilişkin beklentilerini açığa vurmuşlardır. Bu durumun yanında, Türkiye'nin Suriye meselesine olan ilgisinin altında yatan temel sebeplerden biri de, Suriye'nin savaş sonrası

yeniden inşasında söz sahibi olmak istemesidir. Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde, Türkiye'nin Suriye yönelik dış politikasının realist bir çizgi taşıdığı ve ülkenin politik ve ekonomik çıkarlarının ön planda olduğu bir yapım sürecinden geçtiğinden bahsedilebilir.

Bu tezde ayrıca, Suriye'deki isyanın derin bir okumasının sonucunda, ortaya çıkış ve gelişim süreçleri açısından diğer Arap ülkelerindeki isyanlardan farklı olduğu görüşü üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu sayede, Suriye rejiminin, olayların başlamasının ardından geçen iki buçuk yılı aşkın sürenin ardından, hala nasıl ayakta kaldığına ışık tutulmaya çalışılacaktır. Özellikle Suriye'de yaşanan toplulukların etnisite, din ve mezhep noktasında heterojen bir karakter taşımı ile muhalif unsurlar arasındaki ayrışmanın bir paralellik içerdiği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu durumun, Esad yönetiminin silahlı unsurlara karşı en önemli avantaj noktalarından birini teşkil ettiği anlaşılmaktadır. Ayrıca Rusya, İran ve Çin'in dış müdahale karşıtı tutumlarının Suriye'deki çatışmaların askeri yollardan sonra erdirilmesini kısa ve orta vadede ertelediğinden söz edilebilir.

Bu tez aynı zamanda, Suriye'de yaşanan mevcut çatışmaların, diğer Arap isyanlarından ayrılan önemli yönleri olduğundan bahsetmektedir. Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde, ilkin, Haziran 2013 itibarıyla 100.000 kişinin üzerinde ölüme sebebiyet veren isyan, başarılı bir sonuca ulaşamamış ve Mısır, Tunus ve Libya'da yaşananların aksine, rejim ayakta kalarak, muhaliflere yönelik ciddi bir karşı saldırıya girişmiştir. Bu nedenle, Türkiye'nin Esad'ın kısa sürede devrileceğine ilişkin geliştirdiği tahminin açık bir şekilde iflas ettiğinden bahsedilebilir. İkinci olarak, diğer Arap isyanlarına uluslararası toplumun bakışına kıyasla, Suriye meselesinde aklı daha fazla karışan bir uluslararası toplumun varlığından söz edilebilir. Bu sebeple, 2013'ün son aylarına dek, Suriye'ye uluslararası askeri müdahaleye ilişkin bir uzlaşma durumundan söz etmek imkansızdır. Özellikle Rusya ve

Çin'in Birleşmiş Milletler Güvenlik Konseyi'nde Suriye'ye yönelik askeri müdahale kararlarını veto etmesi ile bu durum daha da belirginleşmiştir. Ne var ki, Rusya ve Çin'in Suriye yönelik müdahaleye onay vermeleri ya da bu müdahaleye ses çıkarmamaları durumunda, Esad rejiminin müdahaleye karşı koyma gücünün mevcut askeri olanaklar çerçevesinde oldukça sınırlı olacağı anlaşılmaktadır. Üçüncü olarak, Suriye rejimine yönelik halk desteği, diğer devrilen Arap ülkeleri liderlerine nazaran oldukça yüksektir. Bu anlamda, Esad yönetiminin, ülke içerisinde her ne kadar bir savaş durumundan söz edilse de, belirli toplumsal kesimler tarafından hala meşru bir lider olarak görüldüğünün altının çizilmesi gerekmektedir. Büyük çoğunlukla Nusayriler, Hristiyanlar, Kürtler ve hatta seküler olarak tanımlanan Sunniler, Esad rejiminin devam etmesi gerektiği yönünde bir inanca sahiptirler ve bu yönleriyle, rejimin savaşa devam edebilmesinin arkasındaki dinamo görevini görmektedirler. Dördüncü olarak, Esad ailesinin de arasında bulunduğu Suriyeli Nusayriler, askeriye ve bürokraside önemli oranda iyi örgütlenmişler ve kritik makamları ellerde tutarak Suriye yönetiminin sürekliliğine katkı sunmuşlardır. Örneğin, Nusayriler nüfus büyülüğu açısından tüm toplumun yaklaşık yüzde onluk bir kesimini oluştururken, askeri pozisyonlarda yüksek makamları işgal etmişler; buna karşılık Sunni çoğunluk ise düşük rütbeli pozisyonlarda istihdam edilmişlerdir. Böylelikle, Suriye'de askerler Esad yönetiminin arkasında bir bütün oluşturmuşlar ve rejimin muhaliflere yönelik askeri operasyonlarına destek olmuşlardır.

Beşinci olarak, Suriye'deki muhalif unsurların kendi aralarında yaşadıkları yönetsel sorunlar ve radikal İslamçı savaşçıların mücadelede öne çıkmaya başlamaları, Esad'ın elini güçlendirerek Suriye halkın ve uluslararası toplumun derin bir çatlak halinde bölünmesine neden olmuştı. Bu koşullar altında, yabancı devletler tarafından muhaliflere yönelik olarak yapılan yardımların doğru adreslere ulaşması için daha ciddi

bir organizasyonel birlikteliğe ihtiyaç duyulduğu anlaşılmıştır. Altıncı olarak, Suriye rejiminin devrilmesi, Ortadoğu'da Sunni ve Şii devletler arasındaki dengenin bozulması anlamına geleceğinden, bölgesel dengelerin hassasiyetinin dikkate alınarak bir çözüm arayışına girilmesi zorunluluk halini almaktadır. İslam ülkeleri arasındaki sekteryan ayrılığın daha fazla gün yüzüne çıkması ise Ortadoğu'nun daha fazla istikrarsız hale geleceğinin sinyallerini taşımaktadır.

Yedinci olarak, ABD, Suriyeli muhalifleri silahlandırma ve finansal açıdan destekleme bakımından öncü rolü oynasa da, Amerikan halkın büyük bir bölümünün dış müdahale karşılığı yönünde birleşmesi, Obama yönetiminin olası bir askeri müdahale için elini zayıflatmaktadır. Zaten hâlihazırda Irak ve Afganistan işgalleri sebebiyle zor durumda bulunan ABD'nin, Ortadoğu'da yeni bir maceraya başlamasının, ülkeyi daha fazla zora sokacağına ilişkin bir kaygı bulunmaktadır. Sekizinci olarak, ABD tipki Irak'a müdahale öncesinde yaptığı gibi, Suriye rejiminin muhaliflerine yönelik olarak kimyasal silah kullandığını belirtmektedir. Bu sebeple, hafif silahlar yerine ağır silahları muhaliflere sağlayarak, Esad yönetiminin elini zayıflatabilecek durumdadır. Bir başka deyişle, ABD'nin kimyasal silah kullanımına yönelik iddiası sebebi ile Suriye yönetiminin zor günler yaşaması olasıdır. Son olarak, diğer Arap isyanlarından farklı olarak, İsrail Suriye'de çatışmalar başladıkтан sonra birkaç kez Suriye tesislerine hava saldırısında bulunmuştur. Bu saldırıarda, İsraili kaynaklara göre, Suriye, İran ve Hizbullah arasındaki askeri işbirliği hedef alınmış ve bölgede İsrail'in aleyhine gelişecek durumların önü alınmaya çalışılmıştır. Özü itibarıyla İsrail'in Suriye'ye yönelik kapsamlı bir operasyona yeşil ışık yakması zor olsa da, bu olasılığın gerçekleşmesi durumunda, Suriye yönetiminin kısa sürede devrileceği ve İran ve Hizbullah'ın bu gelişmeye tepki vermesi durumunda, bölgesel bir savaş tehdidinin ortaya çıkacağı tahmini yapılabilir.

Yukarıda bahsedilen bütün hususlar dikkate alındığında, Suriye rejiminin kısa ve orta vadede hayatı kalacağına ilişkin bir tahmin yürütmek, uluslararası toplumun askeri müdahale yönünde tam bir konsensüs içerisinde olmaması durumunda, hiç de zor değildir. Bu noktada, AKP hükümetinin, Suriye'ye müdahalede aktif rol alması için yapılan baskılara ve kimi provokasyonlara karşı temkinli yaklaşmaya çalıştığı görülmektedir. Bu görece temkinli duruşun aşınması durumunda ise, Suriye uzantılı sorunların hem Türkiye'nin iç problemleri için hem de Türkiye'nin bölge ülkeleriyle geliştirdiği ilişkiler bağlamında ciddi sorunlar yarataceği anlaşılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda değerlendirildiğinde, Türkiye-Suriye ilişkilerinin geleceğine yönelik tahminin 4 temel dinamik etrafında örgütleneceğinden bahsedilebilir. Daha net bir şekilde ifade edilecek olursa, Türkiye hükümetinin PKK ile yürüttüğü müzakere süreci, Suriye'de savaş sonrasında Kürt bir otonom bölgenin oluşması ihtimali, etkisi hızla artan mülteci sorunu ve günümüzde soğumuş olsa da Suriye'deki mezhepsel çatışmanın Türkiye'deki Alevi ve Sunniler arasındaki soğumuş gerginlige yansımıası olasılığı, Türkiye ile Suriye arasındaki ilişkilere yön verebilecek esas noktaları teşkil etmektedir.

Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Türkiye'nin izlediği geleneksel dış politikayı değiştirmeye yönelik olarak geliştirdiği bazı kavramlar ve mekanizmalar var olmasına rağmen, en azından pratik düzeyde, Türkiye'nin AKP hükümeti döneminde komşularıyla sorunsuz bir ilişki sürdürdüğünden bahsedilemez. Tam aksine, 2010'un son haftalarında Arap ülkelerinde başlayan isyan dalgası ile birlikte, Türkiye'nin komşularla sıfır sorun politikası iflas noktasına ulaşmıştır. Daha somut bir düzeyde ifade edilecek olursa, Türkiye'nin İran ile ilişkileri, Malatya'da bulunan Kürecik'e inşa edilen füze kalkanı projesiyle gerilemiştir. Türkiye ayrıca, Irak ile Bölgesel Kürt Yönetimi'nin bağımsız bir devlet kurmaya yönelmesi olasılığı, PKK meselesi ve Irak'ın siyasi yönetimde artan Şii etkisi sebebiyle sıkıntılı bir

dönem yaşamaktadır. İsrail ile olan ilişkiler ise, 2009'da Davos'ta yaşanan 'one minute krizi'nde ifade bulan bir gerginlik dönemine girmiştir. 'Mavi Marmara' adlı, Gazze ablukasını delerek Gazze'ye insanı yardım götürmeyi amaçlayan gemiye, uluslararası sularda yolculuğuna devam ettiği sırada, 31 Mayıs 2011 tarihinde İsrail güvenlik güçleri tarafından gerçekleştirilen saldırısı ise gerilen ilişkileri kopma noktasına getirmiştir. İyice kopma noktasına gelen ilişkiler İsrail Başbakanı Benjamin Netanyahu'nun Mart 2013 tarihinde Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ı arayarak özür dilemesi ile düzelmeye başlamıştır. Yukarıda bahsi geçen sebepler dolayısıyla, AKP'nin söylem düzeyinde barışçı ve uzlaşmaya açık dış politika anlayışının, pratik düzeyde Kemalist dış politikaya atfedilen olumsuz özellikleri ortadan kaldırılmaya yetmediğini ifade etmek gerekmektedir. Böylesi bir ortamda, Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Ortadoğu ülkeleriyle izlemek istediği sıfır sorun politikasının iflas etmek suretiyle tam sorun politikasına döndüğünü ifade etmek abartı olmaz.

Bu değerlendirmeler bağlamında, Türkiye'nin dış politika anlayışında, 1990'larda yaşananlara benzer bir şekilde, güvenlikleştirmeye yoluna gittiği anlaşılmaktadır. Türkiye, her ne kadar Arap isyanları ertesinde 'işleyen bir demokrasiye sahip, siyasi istikrarı olan ve ekonomisi büyüyen bir ülke' olarak adından söz ettirse de, Suriye ile sıfır sorun politikasının başarısızlığa uğramasının ve diğer bölge ülkeleriyle yaşanan sorunların da günüzunge çıkarması vesilesiyle, Ortadoğu'daki prestiji ve güvenilirliği ciddi oranda zarar görmüştür. Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde, AKP dönemi dış politikasının söylem düzeyinde Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politika anlayışından ayrılan yönleri bulunsa da, Türkiye'nin komşularıyla olan problemleri, Arap isyanları sonrasında, farklılaşarak yeniden üretilmiştir.

APPENDICES B

Tez Fotokopisi İzin Formu

ENSTİTÜ

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Enformatik Enstitüsü | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü | <input type="checkbox"/> |

YAZARIN

Soyadı :

Adı :

Bölümü :

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) :

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
2. Tezimin içindeler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: