

THE EFFECTS OF THE CHANGE OF POLITICAL PREFERENCES IN GOVERNMENTS ON TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY – THE CASE OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY

İbrahim ÇELİKBİLEK

 : 0000-0003-1284-9661

Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkiye

Ahmet Nazmi ÜSTE

 : 0000-0002-4638-6629

Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkiye

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ABSTRACT

According to the constructivist theory, although material capacities are important in foreign policy analysis, the perception of these material capacities, identity, ideology, norms and senses are important at least these material capacities. The characteristic features of states can change over time with the change of power and the political elites similarly. This study argues that the change in Turkish foreign policy in recent years stems from the fact that the political preferences of the political elites of the Justice and Development Party, which came to power in 2002, have different characteristics compared to the political elites of the previous periods. This study aims to discuss the reasons of mentioned change in Turkish foreign policy. The study explains the change in Turkiye's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the Justice and Development Party government with the differences in the targets, interests and threat perceptions of the political elites and placing Turkiye in a distinctive position compared to the previous political elites

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Introduction

In recent years, it is observed that there has been a certain change in Turkish foreign policy compared to previous periods. Based on the constructivist theory, this study was conducted to reveal the reasons for this change.

It is argued that the change in Turkish foreign policy in recent years is a result of the fact that the political elites of this period have different priorities and partially different perceptions about Turkiye's interests and threats compared to the political elites of the previous years. As the constructivist theorists argue, the difference in the political identity of the political elites of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), who came to power in 2002, has formed a different perception of Turkiye's interests, goals and threats compared to the previous political elites, which also led to a change in Turkish foreign policy.

Theoretical Framework

In the study, analyzing the discourses of the JDP political elites based on the constructivist theory, the effects of the change in the political identity of the political elites on the change in foreign policy was examined.

Constructivist theory is widely using in international relations in recent years. Therefore, expressions such as “international politics are socially constructed” are more frequently discussed in academic research (Wendt, 2012, p.15).

Until the end of the Cold War, the realism was a dominant theory of international relations discipline, focusing on systemic factors and material capacities. The dissolution of the Soviet Union as a result of internal dynamics has refuted the claim of realism on ineffectiveness of states' internal dynamics on their foreign policy (Kiraz, 2014, p.225). Growing criticism and a search for new approaches has declined the popularity of the realist theory. For some scholars, the realist theory was not sufficient to explain the changes in the post-Cold War period and the constructivist theory has become more widely used in the field of international relations (Reus-Smith, 2013, p.293), considering

the importance of the social factors in international relations in addition to the material capacities of the states (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2012, p.127). The concept of constructivism in the field of was firstly used by Nicholas Onuf in his book "World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations" (Onuf, 1989, p.35; Karacasulu, 2012, p.113). The concept has also gained popularity with the studies of Alexander Wendt (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2012, p.129).

According to the realists, states adopt force-based foreign policy behaviours due to security concerns arising from the anarchic nature of international relations. Examining the foreign policy of the states on the basis of material capacities, abstract elements such as norms, identities, ideologies and thoughts are not included in their analysis. Therefore, the possible effects of these intangible elements on foreign policy are also ignored. Since the state, which is accepted as the main actor in realism, is also considered to act rationally, irrational foreign policy behaviours are also out of the scope of their analysis. In constructivist theory, although material capacities are taken into account in foreign policy analysis, identities, ideologies, norms and thoughts are also included. Constructivist theorists include the abstract elements that realists ignore in their foreign policy analysis (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.58).

The inclusion of abstract elements in foreign policy analysis has led to the consideration of not only the state but also the elements within the state, such as individuals, political parties, media, different identities, religion, culture, and non-governmental organizations so that all these factors have an impact on the determination of foreign policy of the state (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.58).

Identity discussions have entered the field of international relations as well as many social science fields. According to constructivism, international politics is based on mutually constructed social relations with the identities and interests of states. States in the international structure develop different foreign policy behaviours to different states in accordance with their own identities and the identities of other states. The security interests of states are determined by their identities (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.60).

For constructivists, the concept of “identity” matters a great deal as it plays a crucial part in interpersonal and international interactions. Wendt has categorized the identities of states and their relations with other states can be three different types: Hobbesian (enmity), Lockean (rivalry), Kantian (friendship) (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.63).

The identities of states can change over time through mutual interaction. This means that the perception of states also changes. Developments in the internal political processes of the states, such as the change of power, can lead to a change in the identity of the states. People involved in decision-making processes can change the foreign policy behaviours of the state according to their own identities and perceptions (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.61).

According to Wendt, who popularized constructivism, the unit of analysis of international politics is a state, as realists argue. However, he has emphasized the social relations between states. The anarchic structure of international relations without the central authority as underlined by the realists is accepted as a socially constructed and meaningful structure in constructivism (Ari, 2013, p.499).

According to realists, states have to ensure their own security because an international system has an anarchic and conflicting structure. Constructivists argue that the international system is changeable and it is constantly reconstructed through interactions. For this reason, the attitudes of states towards each other are also variable with their identities in the international social structure (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.63).

Constructivists also accept the anarchic nature of the international system. According to constructivists, if the international system is perceived as anarchic, it is anarchic. However, it should not mean that the perception of the anarchic nature of the international system will not change in the future (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.64).

In constructivism, it is argued that elements such as identity and culture are directly related to foreign policy. Accordingly, the identity of states and the international system are constructed through mutual interactions. The interests and foreign policies of states are determined by this identity that emerges through mutual interaction in the international system (Ari, 2013, p.499).

Foreign Policy-Political Identity Relationship

The minds, attitudes, values, beliefs, thoughts, opinions and perceptions of each individual get to be shaped by the experiences that he/she experiences within the socialization process. From an early age, an individual adopts the values, norms and behavioural patterns of the group and society where he/she lives. The socialization process that starts in the family is shaped by school, peer groups, mass media, other institutions in the society, and different groups at older ages and is adopted by the reference systems in the society (Çiftçi, 2010, p.31).

By adopting the norms of the environment in which an individual lives, he/she gradually accepts the society's collective identity. Collective identity is a set of customs, values, symbols, works of art, beliefs, information, etc. It is built with the collective memory of a tradition inherited from the past (Çiftçi, 2010, p.32-33).

In spite of a little chance of meeting each other during their life, a great number of individuals who forms the society or social groups can have a common ethnic, national, religious, ideological identity and have a sense of belonging. Although individuals are often unaware of mentioned belonging, they become more aware of this collective identity, if their collective identity is under threat (Çiftçi, 2010, pp.33-34).

Individuals are members of a society from birth due to their parents and are the bearers of the rules of the society that they are a member of. The state can also impose various sanctions if these rules are violating. Schools are one of the most important tools in creating a sense of belonging after the family. History course in its form as taught in schools makes an important contribution to shaping attitudes and beliefs in society. The aim of this formation is not to have an objective judgment about their society, but to be proud of their country and be good citizens (Çiftçi, 2010, p.34).

Nation identity is closely related to citizenship. In citizenship, individuals have some legal and social rights but also obligations as members of separate sovereign states (Çiftçi, 2010, p.34-35).

The concepts of "other" and "otherizing" are frequently used to explain the formation processes of identities. Diversity is vital in identity formation. Therefore, an identity perceives different people as threats and "otherizes" in order to secure and strengthen its

own existence. States prefer use of the concept of "other" to determine the limits of their collective identity. National loyalty to the state is expected when there is a threat to the collective identity (Çiftçi, 2010, p.36).

From the European perspective, the Turks and Islam were “the others” of Europe in the Middle Ages. Even though the Europeans were in war with each other, they developed a sense of unity and integrity due to the Ottoman existence in the east. Therefore, the external forces motivates the process of creating unity and integrity at the same time. During the Cold War, the main "other" of Europe was communism and the Eastern Bloc. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, NATO adapted important changes to its defence and deterrence posture and radical Islam emerged as the new "other" and threat. Consequently, it may be argued that while the Western countries otherize and marginalize different geographies, they also try to transform, modernize and control them (Çiftçi, 2010, p.37).

The concept of identity is an important and valid concept for Türkiye as well. Determining the "other" perception in the identities of the political elites in Türkiye is important in terms of understanding Türkiye's foreign policy (Çiftçi, 2010, p.38).

The concepts of national security and national interest are important in international relations. However, it is observed that most times these concepts are used without considering their content. On the other hand, if to examine carefully, it can be argued that these concepts are perceived and interpreted differently according to the identity of the person who use them (Çiftçi, 2010, p.38).

The concept of national security is also one of the concepts that is used without thinking over its meaning. The security of states can be threatened by other states, which arises a threat perception. Changes in the international system may lead to a change in a threat perception. The state itself is not the only objective of external threats. Values and norms of societies can also be affected by threats from outside. However, an important matter here is the perception of threat rather than a threat itself. The form/mode of perceiving the threat can affect both the political life and foreign policy decisions in the country (Çiftçi, 2010, p.38-39).

Independence and territorial integrity are fundamental elements of national security. States have to develop and implement a national security policy against all kinds of internal/external threats in order to survive. Weaknesses that may arise here may lead to irreparable results in the future (Çiftçi, 2010, p.39).

The concept of national interest, on the other hand, allows political elites to legitimize their foreign policy decisions. It is assumed that foreign policy should match up with national interests. In Türkiye, conformity assessments for national interests are carried out by the relevant institutions of the state on behalf of the Turkish political identity. In each state, national interest is a concept on which the society should have a significant consensus. Those who oppose the policies set out according to the determined national interests are otherized and marginalized. Foreign policy in Türkiye is formed by the political identity shaped by Kemalism. However, as the mentioned political identity changes, the evaluations of interests in Turkish foreign policy may also change (Çiftçi, 2010, p.39-42).

Turkish Foreign Policy and the Western Identity

Although the majority of the population was Muslim, the secular regime was accepted with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye. Considering that a remarkable number of Türkiye's population is not Arabian, it differs from most of Middle Eastern countries. For the same reasons, Türkiye is not considered a Middle Eastern country by most Arabians (Oran, 2013, p.20-21).

The Western influence on Türkiye is greater than other Muslim countries. It is the only westernized and democratized Muslim country in the Middle East, and it is the closest to the West among these countries. Apart from the Middle East, Türkiye is also neighbour to the Caucasus and the Balkans (Oran, 2013, p.24).

The fact that Türkiye is neighbour to the Middle East means to be closer to the energy resources there. The interests of the Western countries in energy resources in the region arise security anxiety for Türkiye. In addition, the strategic global importance of the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits increases Türkiye's perception of threat (Oran, 2013, p.24-25).

The Republic of Turkiye was founded on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, was an important part of the balance of power in Europe in the 19th century. Even some rulers of the Empire were recruited from the West and an Empire was considered as a European state. An expansion of the Empire was also towards the West. The bureaucracy of the Republic of Turkiye was also inherited from the Ottoman bureaucracy (Oran, 2013, p.23-27).

After the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy II (1908), three main political movements: Turkism, Islamism, and Ottomanism emerged in the Ottoman Empire. The Western movement also appeared in the last years of the Empire. Although Westernism was not as strong within the Empire as other movements, it has provided thought support to them on different issues (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.65).

Westernism and secular Turkish nationalism were inherited from the Ottoman period to the Republican period as the founding ideas of the Republic (Gökçe & Çaha, 2019, p.66).

Actually, the idea of Westernism was accepted as a national security guarantee by the founders of the Republic. It was considered that Turkiye's national security can only be ensured by the establishment of Western identity, otherwise, the fate of the Republic of Turkiye will be the same as the Ottoman Empire (Oğuzlu, 2012, p.37).

The pro-Western foreign policy that started in the first years of the Republic continued in the following years. There is a belief that Turkiye will strengthen its Western identity and prevent it from being perceived as a threat by the Western countries in its efforts to become a NATO Member and join the EU (Oğuzlu, 2012, p.37). In fact, in the first years of the Republic, internal security issues were at the top of the agenda in order to strengthen the new regime. Therefore, initiatives that could pose a risk for the newly established state in foreign policy were avoided. Since it was considered that the problems experienced in the Middle East during this period could endanger the security of the country, it was tried to stay away from this region and its problems (Şahin, 2010, p.10).

The Westernist foreign policies continued increasingly in the 1950s. Even though the Western countries partially withdrew from the Middle East during this period, Turkiye moved further away from the region. The Westernist foreign policies greatly damaged

the Arabs' perception of Türkiye. Türkiye represented the West in the region and followed a foreign policy called "active partiality" (Şahin, 2010, p.12).

In 1960s remarkable changes were experienced in Turkish foreign policy. The attitudes of the Western countries on the Cyprus problem and some developments such as the Johnson letter led to disappointment in Türkiye and reconsidering its active pro-Western foreign policy. Subsequently Türkiye has tried to establish better relations with the Arab world and has supported the Arab countries in regional problems. A more critical approach towards the West was developed in these years and a more autonomous foreign policy was implemented compared to previous years (Şahin, 2010, p.13).

In the 1980s the Turkish foreign policy was focused on the security concerns, where the pro-Western attitudes were dominated. Increasing terrorism and the water problems were the main determinants of the Middle East policy (Şahin, 2010, p.14).

The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc and the end of the Cold War in the 90s has been questioned Türkiye's strategic importance whether it has decreased or not. Increasing security issues, the ethnic conflicts around Türkiye, instabilities in some Arab countries, especially Syria and Iraq has started a new era, questioning the importance of the Western alliance. While Türkiye's perception of the Middle East was shaped by security concerns, a strategic partnership was established with Israel. In these years, leading to the intense criticism of the Arab world about Türkiye's moving away from the Middle East (Şahin, 2010, pp.14-15).

Turkish Foreign Policy and the JDP

The JDP defines itself as a conservative democrat party (akparti.org.tr, 2002, p.9-10). According to the 2023 vision booklet published at the 4th Ordinary Congress of the JDP in 2015, the conservative democratic political identity of the party has now been institutionalized, turned into a centre of political attraction, and has become an example for other countries in the region (akparti.org.tr, 2015, p.5). It is argued that such type of politics contributes to the development of democracy in a country, whose population consists of Muslims and can encourage the development of democracy in the Middle East

(akparti.org.tr, 2015, p.5-7) and Turkiye should lead the Islamic world (Oğuzlu, 2012, p.39).

As stated in the mentioned vision booklet, power should be limited against authoritarianism, and change should be experienced in a natural process gradually with social dynamics, namely family, foundations, voluntary organizations, not from the top down (akparti.org.tr, 2015, p.5-7).

From 2002 to 2010, the Turkish foreign policy was dominated by principle of zero problems with neighbors, soft power and mutual economic dependence envisaged by Ahmet Davutoğlu's book - Strategic Depth, published in 2001. It is stated that Turkish foreign policy should be determined in accordance with the neo-Ottoman philosophy and for this purpose, Turkiye needs a political will – “soft power” - to maximize its economic, military and technological capacity by using its historical and geographical advantages effectively and by mobilizing its dynamic population and unifying the cultural factors (Davutoğlu, 2002, p.553; Balcı, 2021, p.297-298). But unexpected developments such as the Arap Spring and Gezi Park protests turned an attention in the foreign policy to security concerns (Kaya, 2021, p.145) and cross-border operations (Duran, 2017, p.9).

On the other hand, close relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours in the first decade of 2000's did not deteriorate Turkiye's relations with the West and Europe. The EU membership process allowed the JDP to erode the army's dominance within the politics and bureaucracy (Balcı, 2021, p.300).

During the JDP period, the Turkish foreign policy was significantly influenced by Turkiye's Islamic identity. The Western countries' and especially US policies of considering Turkiye as a model country with its secular regime and liberal economic policies to transform the Middle Eastern countries played a great role in this sense. After the 1979 revolution in Iran, the US it started to support Turkiye's - a NATO member's and an EU membership candidate country's - Islam identity against radical Islamist groups (Ekşi, 2016, p.63). However, the Arab Spring has prevented the aimed transformation process, diverging the interests of Turkiye and the USA in the region and deteriorating their relations gradually (Ekşi, 2016, p.59). Attaching more importance to the human rights, democracy, rule of law, and transparency within the traditional Islamist view, Turkiye under the JDP rule was in a position to be a model for the reforms that the

Western countries intended to realize in the Middle East in this period (Bağcı & Sinkaya, 2006, p.29).

The Western countries' policies to transform the Middle East and the policies of the JDP overlapped so that the JDP introduced Turkiye as the inheritor of a great civilization and the representative of European, Asian and Middle Eastern identities together, and argued that Turkish foreign policy should be shaped by taking these factors into consideration (Bağcı & Sinkaya, 2006, p.26). The Islamic identity of the leaders of the JDP, on the other hand, increased its credibility in the region and provided a facilitating effect. The rejection of the March 1st bill in the Turkish parliament was welcomed by the countries of the Middle East (Bağcı & Sinkaya, 2006, p.31).

The reforms planned by the Western countries in the Middle East corresponded to the goals of the ruling party to make Turkiye a global power by following an active foreign policy. It was also observed that considering Turkiye as a model country strengthened its position on international platforms during these years.

The JDP executives defend a modern model, which does not reject the traditions. With its conservative democratic identity, it is observed that the JDP strives to represent both modernity and universality and locality with traditions (Bağcı & Sinkaya, 2006, p.28).

The leaders of the JDP started to express constantly the discourses towards the nations of the Middle East and to act as the spokesperson of the Islamic world. These policies gradually increased Turkiye's popularity among Middle Eastern countries and societies. The Turkish flags and banners with photographs of the JDP leaders came across the streets of Middle Eastern cities more frequent (Ekşi, 2016, pp.67-68).

As the ruling party of a country with a high Muslim population, the JDP also aimed to combat Islamophobia. Against the argument of the Clash of Civilizations the JDP launched an initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations together with Spain. The party elites also aimed to refute the statement argued by the West about the impossibility of the development of democracy in the Middle East because of the religion, history and cultural heritage of the region. Democracy in Turkiye with a Muslim majority was a successful

experience in this sense, supporting its model country model for the related reforms in the Middle East (Bağcı & Sinkaya, 2006, p.30).

The JDP elites did not limit Türkiye's role for being a model country, aiming to become a regional power in the Middle East and to lead the Islamic world. The followed policies in this direction resulted in the end of the support of the USA and the Western countries. The deterioration of Türkiye-Israel relations and the Mavi Marmara incident, the rapprochement process with Iran may be considered as the reasons for the ending up of the US support to Türkiye (Ekşi, 2016, p.69).

Conclusion

Examining the Turkish foreign policy in the JDP period, it is observed that there are significant differences compared to previous periods. The pro-Western foreign policy was followed in the first years of the Republic and the newly established Republic adopted Western values based on science and serious efforts were made to gain a Western identity. In these years, due to Türkiye's orientation towards the West and also the fact that some Western countries had important interests in the region, little attention was paid to the Middle Eastern countries. These policies, implemented to protect the achievements gained by the republican regime, continued in the following periods as well.

During the JDP period, serious shifts were observed in these policies. An increased interest in the Middle Eastern countries compared to previous periods, and perceptions of the JDP political elites about Türkiye as the leader country have led to the search for a more active role in the region. The JDP government in power was more involved in the developments in the Middle East and clearly showed its presence in the region. Another remarkable point is that Türkiye followed a more independent foreign policy from the West in this period compared to previous years.

The main reason of this shift is the fact that the JDP political elites have a more conservative identity than the political elites of the previous periods. According to the constructivist theory, the political identities of the political elites of a state determine the interests and threat perceptions of that state.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Author Contact Information

E-mail: nazmiuste@windowslive.com

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