The AKP’s foreign policy challenges after the Arab Spring

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Executive Summary

“Peace at home, peace in the world” is the maxim of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, formulated by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, after the establishment of the state in 1924. It was intended to mark the modern republic’s non-interventionist stance towards the territories of the old Ottoman Empire, and its acceptance of the borders inscribed in the Treaty of Lausanne from 1923. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has infused this phrase with new meaning. From a policy of non-intervention in the Middle East pursued by successive secular governments, the AKP has reframed Turkey as a key regional power, seeking to actively play a mediation role. Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkey’s “zero problems with neighbours’ policy”, is a proponent of using Turkey’s soft power as an important component in its foreign policy toolbox. Through his key positions, first as foreign policy advisor and later as Foreign Minister, Davutoğlu has redefined Turkey on the geopolitical map. However, as a consequence of the upheavals following the Arab Spring, Turkey’s neighborhood is beset with problematic neighbors.

This report analyzes Turkey’s position in the unfolding Middle East, illustrating the tension between Turkey’s ambitions and some of the challenges it faces from an international, regional and national perspective. The report seeks to understand how the AKP’s policy of soft power has fared after the Arab Spring. The focus is particularly on the case of Syria, as it was both the biggest success of Turkey’s soft power policy and Turkey’s greatest challenge in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In particular, the report examines how the Kurdish issue impacts on and is impacted by the events in the region, seeking to illustrate its repercussions from the three perspectives noted above.
The AKP and a new foreign policy vision

A popular Turkish saying states, “The only friends of Turks are Turks” (“Türk’ün Türk’ten başka dostu yok”). Indeed, Turkey’s tough neighborhood – bordering Iraq, Iran and Syria – and its critical position during the Cold War inclined the country towards cautiousness in its foreign policy. To a great extent, this was also due to the composition of the foreign policy elite – staunch secularists and military officers – wary of Turkey’s geopolitical placement. Their sentiments on Turkey’s geography can be summarized in the words of a retired officer: “Turkey is in the center of a witches’ cauldron.”

The perception of Turkey’s place in the Middle East changed with the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002. However, important shifts in Turkey’s foreign policy had already begun in the 1990s when Turkey sought its geopolitical position in the post-Cold War order. In the bipolar era, Turkey’s key role in NATO as the Southern flank of the alliance situated the country clearly in the Western camp. Seeking to reinforce Turkey’s value to the West even after the Cold War, Former President Turgut Özal drew Turkey into the Gulf War coalition in 1991, against the advice of its powerful military. This had the effect of “repositioning” Turkey further East, albeit as a staunch ally of the West.

However, it was only after the AKP came to power that a new vision of a Turkey engaged with the Middle East began to take form. The AKP set out to repair Turkey’s regional standing and in so doing, shifted the course of Turkish foreign policy dramatically. From a foreign policy that traditionally focused on gaining acceptance for Turkey as a part of the West (turning its back on the Middle East), foreign policy under the Muslim conservative AKP anchored the country in the Middle East, albeit maintaining and strengthening the idea of Turkey as a bridge between East and West. The emphasis on Turkey’s Muslim identity in its foreign policy made it impossible to continue with the West/East, us/them juxtaposition that had informed traditional thinking on foreign policy. For the first time, Turkey was both “in the region” and “of the region”. The relationship to the EU was particularly important to the AKP in its first period in power. Well aware that five previous parties with Islamic roots had been either banned or closed down, the AKP had to tread carefully and convince the traditional secular elite and in particular, the Turkish military, of its commitment to the Kemalist project. The latter was reassured by the AKP’s new initiative towards the EU, making it its foreign policy priority. The AKP’s emphasis on Turkey’s Muslim identity coupled with its secular state was a core argument for EU membership candidacy. Including Turkey would dispel the myth of a Christian fortress Europe. That being said, the Turkish Parliament’s surprise rejection in March 2003 of American troops on Turkish soil during the Iraq War raised concerns that the West was, in fact, “losing Turkey”. This decision, passed in the Parliament by a scant majority, was a defining moment for regional perceptions of Turkey’s changing foreign policy identity.

The developments above, both domestically and internationally, served to redefine Turkey’s position in the region. Against this background, Ahmet Davutoğlu launched a new foreign policy vision – “zero problems with neighbours” - that prioritized “Turkey’s civil-economic power”, and strengthened Turkey’s position as a soft power player in the region. This was a departure from the country’s traditional preference for hard power as a negotiation tool. Davutoğlu’s doctrine of “strategic depth” is centered on the belief that a nation’s geostrategic location determines its value in international relations. His understanding of Turkey’s power is based on the state’s ability to take advantage of its historical heritage, cultural ties and democratic reforms. Davutoğlu articulated a vision for Turkey’s relations with the Middle East that was engaged, pro-active and focused on building economic and social networks through the soft power approach. Nowhere was this new foreign policy more evident than in the turnaround of Turkey-Syria relations. Turkey was heralded as a “model”, an “inspiration” or even a reference point. Professor Kemal Kirişci notes the “demonstrative effect” of the Turkish model. In his view, the “effect” is a result of three particular developments: the rise of the “trading state”, Turkey’s ongoing democratization experience and the positive image of its redefined policy.

The new era in Turkish foreign policy prospered until the coming of the Arab Spring. This was the moment when the rhetoric of regional leadership met the reality of a region in turmoil. While Turkey’s pro-active position on Egypt was consistent with expectations in the Arab World, branding Prime Minister Erdoğan as a political star, its policies came under pressure in the cases of Libya and Syria. Rather than taking on the mantle of leadership, the AKP’s foreign policy faltered, due in large part to the difficulties of “squaring the circle”: taking an active stance while advocating “zero problems” with neighbors. Nor did the popular debate on the uprisings...
allow the AKP room for maneuver: the discourse on the Arab Spring in Turkey, particularly after the intervention in Libya, has been framed around a Great-Power game of control in the Middle East. The return of this conspiratorial tone in the analysis of foreign policy, particularly at the popular level, is reflected in the AKP’s more pragmatic, less idealistic, approach to regional politics. From a foreign policy led by a pro-active vision of Turkey’s regional role, the Arab awakening has returned the AKP to Turkey’s more traditional foreign policy orientation.

**Turkey’s Regional dilemma – Kurdish aspirations in Iraq and Syria**

While the AKP embraced the Egyptian revolution and cautiously fell into line on the intervention in Libya, Syria has been a challenge on several levels. The AKP’s policy towards Syria impacts on Turkey’s relationship to two of its most demanding neighbors, Iraq and Iran. After a period of uncertainty – and wishful thinking – hoping that the problem would resolve itself, the AKP came out in strong support of the Syrian opposition: Turkey was the first country to officially recognize the Syrian National Council, and its headquarters are now in Istanbul. Turkey’s support for the Syrian opposition challenges Iran and its support for the Alawite-led Assad regime. This is a politically negative development in Turkey’s relationship with Iran, which was on the road to improvement prior to the Arab awakening. Factional rivalries between Iran and Turkey also play out in Iraq: Turkey is increasingly cooperating with the Kurds (and the Sunni minority), in competition with Iran, which supports the Shia majority.

Turkey’s relations with the central government of Iraq is equally problematic. Not only has Turkey gradually accepted Kurdish autonomy in the north, it has also actively built ties with Sunni political and business elites, straining relations with the Shia-led government. Northern Iraq is increasingly engaging in “para-diplomacy” as a sub-state entity seeking diplomatic relations with other sovereign states. According to a scholar of Kurdish politics, Romano, some twenty states opened consulates in Erbil in 2012, and representatives of the KRG have begun receiving recognition on par with other state leaders at international gatherings. As an example, President of the KRG Mesud Barzani was invited, for the first time, to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2012. The central government of Iraq is aware of the slippery slide from para-diplomacy to “protodiplomacy” – preparation of the ground through international recognition for a future declaration of independent statehood.

Despite the formulation of an increasingly more pragmatic relationship to the Iraqi Kurds, the core of Turkey’s concerns with Syria paradoxically lies with Kurdish regional aspirations to statehood. This is most apparent in the tumultuous relationship with Syria which until recently was regarded as the crown jewel in the AKP’s new neighborhood policy.

Turkey’s interest in Syria has historically centered on concerns over Kurdish separatism. In fact, rapprochement between Turkey and Syria that began in 1998 was a result of the latter’s decision to expel the leader of the separatist PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, from Syria following Turkish military pressure. With Öcalan in custody and the PKK militarily weakened, Turkey had the opportunity to move the Kurdish issue from the security, to the political, arena. It also began a process that was to bring Syria closer to the West through the intermediary efforts of Turkey. This policy had several beneficiaries. The United States saw the opportunity to lessen the influence of Iran in Syria, thus tempering Israeli concerns. For Turkey it meant new markets in the Middle East and an international profile as a regional mediator, while for Syria it was an opportunity to build bridges to the West, drawing the country out of isolation.

However, since the outbreak of civil war in Syria, Turkish foreign policy has returned to its guiding concern: the existential fear of Kurdish separatism. This threat is exacerbated by the current security vacuum in Syria, coupled with the influx of refugees (over 150,000 at the time of writing) and not least, the involvement of Iraqi Kurds with their Syrian brethren.

There are parallels with the situation in the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003. Kurdish aspirations in northern Iraq were fulfilled due to the active engagement of the Kurdish peshmerga during the war. The position of strength they accrued in an otherwise unstable Iraq allowed Iraqi Kurds to develop an autonomous structure in northern Iraq by 2007. Turkey was particularly opposed to Kurdish control over the disputed, oil rich and multiethnic city of Kirkuk. Given the economic foundation that it would provide for a nascent Kurdish state, and the inspiration it would provide for Turkey’s own Kurds, Kurdish control over Kirkuk (and Mosul) was one of the red lines for the Turkish military in the Iraq War. Turkey opposed Kurdish control over these key cities, concerned that this would encourage separatism among its own Kurdish population.
policy at the time was in large part influenced by the Turkish military's position on the Kurdish issue. Even so, according to an interview with a former AKP foreign minister, Yaşar Yakış, the government was, soon after the war, looking for a more pragmatic modus vivendi with the regime in northern Iraq. According to Yakış, the AKP made a “u-turn” in its policy towards the north, recognizing that an economically and politically stable northern Iraq was ultimately in Turkey’s interest. The situation today bears witness to that policy: Turkey is presently Iraq’s largest trading partner, with exports near tripling since 2007 and trade up from $2.8 billion in 2007 to $8.3 in 2011. Almost 600 Turkish construction companies now operate in Iraq according to the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board. The AKP recognizes that the de facto state structure established in northern Iraq may also be repeated in northern Syria.

In Syria, Kurdish groups have kept a lower profile, biding their time and avoiding confrontation with the regime. That being said, Kurds in the northeast of Syria living in the political vacuum brought on by the conflict have assumed state functions – providing security, food distribution and operating the bureaucracy. While it may be too early to speculate on the likelihood of a Kurdish entity in northern Syria, the incremental steps towards greater autonomy have already had an impact on the nationalist aspirations of Turkey’s Kurds.

Notwithstanding the future status of the Kurds in Syria, for Turkey, the primary concern is that local Kurdish groups will allow the Kurdish separatist organization in Turkey, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Worker’s Party – PKK), to operate from Syria and intensify attacks on Turkey. The two primary Kurdish groups in Syria – the PYD (Democratic Union of Kurdistan) and the KNC (Kurdish National Congress) – have historically been in opposition to one another. The former has had support from the Syrian regime (as well as the Iranian) and is commonly known as the PKK’s Syrian arm. The latter, meanwhile, has been closer to the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). However, efforts by Mesud Barzani, the Kurdish regional president in Iraq, have brought the groups closer together, raising concerns in Turkey. Barzani has also confirmed reports in July 2012 of Iraqi Kurds training Syrian Kurds at camps in the Kurdish region. While some sources claim that there is Turkish support for this collaboration in the interests of bringing down the regime, it is a development that could spell trouble for Turkey. For the Kurds meanwhile, recognizing that Syria’s Kurds may be in a vulnerable position at the end of the Syrian civil war, this is not, in itself, an unreasonable precaution. The Kurds in Iraq and Syria are aware that the downfall of the regime may result in a sectarian war in which, at best, they will play a critical role as a balancing power, and at worst, face retribution from other sectarian actors.

As noted above, a pragmatic relationship has grown between Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq. However, there are still fears that Barzani, in courting the PYD, may become more sympathetic to the PKK. In a move that reflects the pragmatism of Turkish policy, the AKP decided in July 2012 to import oil directly from northern Iraq, bypassing the Iraqi central government. This is an about-face of Turkey’s long standing policy which sought to prevent Iraqi Kurds from attaining sole authority over the region’s energy resources. Ironically, it is a soft power move – tying Kurdish economic interests to Turkish political ambitions – that has increased problems with its neighbor, the Iraqi central government.

The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: National repercussions of regional dynamics

Perhaps the greatest limitation to Turkey’s ambitions as a regional leader is to be found on the national level. As Turkey’s Kurds follow events unfold in the Arab world, the question arises: Why is there no Kurdish spring? Simply stated, the uprisings in the Arab world were against rulers who no longer had legitimacy across a wide political spectrum. Winning its third election victory in 2011, the AKP was in the unique position of being able to fend off the discontent of a sector of its population. However, this may not last, should violence linked to terrorism increase over the coming year. Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, PKK related violence in Turkey has gone up dramatically. According to a report from September 2012 by the International Crisis Group, PKK-related violence has killed 700 people since the summer of 2011 – the highest amount in over a decade. In short, the situation in Syria has reignited the smoldering Kurdish conflict in Turkey. One of the most protracted incidents of recent years occurred in late July 2012 when PKK forces in the Hakkari province of Semdinli fought a two week battle with the Turkish army in the mountainous region between Iraq and Iran.

The AKP’s Syria policy has already been harshly criticized by the opposition for the violent backlash it has had internally. Looking to the future, if Erdoğan’s government is not able to
stem the tide of domestic terror it will have a negative impact on the presidential election planned for 2014, for which the speculation is that Erdoğan will present his candidacy (after the adoption of a new constitution giving greater powers to the office of President). The fledgling peace process with the Kurds, unveiled at the start of 2013, indicates that Erdoğan’s government is aware of the potential political costs of the conflict with Turkey’s Kurds.

Increasing levels of violence have resulted in a public outcry and the rise of nationalist sentiment. When the AKP first came to power in 2002, there was hope among the Kurds that a new party would be able to address Kurdish grievances. Indeed, a number of reforms were made in the 2002-2004 period, spurred on by Turkey’s EU aspirations. These included the right to publish and broadcast in Turkish as well as allowing for private language courses in Kurdish. However, then, as now, the reform momentum is met by resistance from both the judicial system and populist politicians. As Human Rights Watch pointed out in its 2012 Turkey report, “Turkey’s laws, prosecutors, judges, and politicians still lag behind. Turkey’s overbroad definition of terrorism still allows for arbitrary imposition of the harshest terrorism charges against individuals about whom there is little evidence of logistical or material support for terrorism or of involvement in plotting violent activities. ... A comprehensive review of all existing laws that restrict freedom of expression is overdue.”

One of the most significant efforts at finding a political solution was made in 2009 through the AKP’s widely inclusive Democratic initiative process (Demokratik açılım süreci). The initiative was a project aimed at improving the standards of democracy, freedoms and the respect for human rights in Turkey. While grievances from various groups were addressed (including among others Armenians, Alevi, and Greek Orthodox), it was the plans specifically targeting the Kurds, called the Kurdish Opening, that received the most attention. This raised hopes that the government was serious about finding a political settlement. However, due to serious flaws in the process, it came to a standstill. None of the three parliamentary parties in opposition supported the Kurdish Opening and did their utmost to raise nationalist sentiments against the process. The Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) accused the AKP of “separatism, cowing to the goals of the terrorist PKK, violating the constitution, causing fratricide and/or ethnic polarization between Kurds and Turks, being an agent of foreign states, and even betraying the country.” An even harsher criticism of treason came from the far right Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Nor was there support for the process from the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), who refused the AKP government’s demand to condemn the PKK. There were also unforeseen consequences that arose from AKP’s peace initiative. An amnesty offered to former PKK members allowed them to return to Turkey from northern Iraq in October 2009, whereupon they were given a hero’s welcome by Kurds, thus inflaming Turkish public opinion. The banning of the DTP by the Constitutional Court in 2009 for its ties with the PKK effectively spelled the end of the Kurdish Opening. Thus, despite paying lip service to the need for a political process, little was achieved.

From a wider regional perspective, the unresolved Kurdish issue is particularly damaging in the context of the Arab spring. Advocating the rights of the Arab street while circumscribing Kurdish political participation at home weakens the AKP’s soft power. At the time of writing, there are six parliamentarians of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in prison facing charges of membership in the illegal Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK). Thirty-two mayors are in prison and a further 200 Kurds have been imprisoned as alleged members of the KCK. Disappointment with the ruling party has led to a hardened Kurdish position, indicated by the following developments. Firstly, in the PKK’s negotiation strategy: whereas in previous talks of a political process, the PKK would symbolically offer a unilateral ceasefire (as in the 1999-2005 period), they now maintain that it is up to the AKP to take the first step (which it has now done). Secondly, recent years have seen a return to the zero-sum demand of territoriality which was abandoned by the PKK in the 1990s in favor of greater cultural autonomy. Statements from leading figures of the PKK indicate that a change is underway. On 23 July 2012, the PKK announced that it would abandon its ambush strategy in favor of large scale ground control of the mountainous areas bordering Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. The battle of Semdinli was a reflection of the state’s efforts to regain control. In the words of a leading PKK commander, Duran Kalkan, “The aim is not just to inflict damage on the opponent but also to bring about democratic autonomy, build a democratic self-government for the Kurdish people.” This is also evident on the ground, where, according to a prominent security analyst, Gareth Jenkins, Kurdish activists in the south east have established their own courts to settle disputes and are in effect acting as “a state within the state.”
Another development that may complicate efforts to arrive at a solution between the State and the Kurds is the strengthening of other Kurdish groups who compete with the PKK for the sympathies of the Kurds. Focus is almost exclusively on the PKK’s activities at a time when there are a number of other groups operating over which the PKK either has little control and/or might be considered rival organizations. In the first category of splinter groups is the Kurdish Freedom Falcons (TAK), responsible for several attacks focused in urban centers, and in the second, Kurdish Hizballah. The latter has grown in strength, for the most part, away from media attention. A rally they held on 22 April 2012, gathered around 400,000 demonstrators. Jenkins, who was present at the rally notes that while identity politics are important to Kurdish Hizballah, “They are not Kurdish nationalists. Their nation is the ulema and the PKK fears them.”

Pressure from the grassroots of Kurdish Hizballah to form their own party has resulted in the launching of Hur Dava Partisi (abbreviated to Huda-Par), on 17 December 2012 which, given their significantly different ideological position from the PKK, has the potential to make it even more difficult to arrive at a compromise between the State and Kurdish political actors.

These shifts – a quantitative rise in violence, increasingly irreconcilable political demands, and more violent incarnations of Kurdish dissent – have been instrumental in leading the AKP to negotiation table. The upcoming presidential election in 2014 will undoubtedly be affected by Erdoğan’s ability to deliver Turkey from PKK violence. As for the PKK, their willingness to negotiate may arise from a combination of losses they have incurred in 2012 (particularly after the Semdinli assault) and more importantly, the recognition that a window of opportunity may shut with the end of the Syrian civil war. Should Syria stabilize, even if only in the Kurdish north, then the PKK will have less leverage to negotiate with the Turkish State. Thus, indications of a mutually hurting stalemate, a stage during which “neither side perceives it can win,” are now coupled with clear incentives to find a solution.

**Turkey’s international role after the Arab Spring**

This final section briefly examines the future aspirations of Turkey’s foreign policy and in particular how the regional and national developments outlined above affect Turkey’s global position.

It is clear that regional political and economic power, not least the social networks they foster, have been a stepping stone towards greater international prominence for Turkey. The country has emerged as a regional power player, capable of maximizing its “soft power” potential, driven, to a great extent, by the Turkish need for new markets for its Muslim entrepreneurs. The benefits of this strategy have been both diplomatic and not least, economic. Turkey’s GDP rose by 8.5% in 2011 after a 9% increase in 2010, drawing Turkey into the group of rising middle powers described by Goldman Sachs by the acronym MIST (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey). CHINA and India, due to their size and economic stature are in a category of their own, often defined as “rising powers,” despite their established status as such. Other middle powers such as Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey are eager to join this club. One of the inroads can be recognition as a regional leader with aspirations to play a global role, particularly as the general relevance of regions in geopolitics increases.

The importance of the regional dimension as it links to the international dimension was the focus of a high level conference organized by the Turkish Foreign Ministry in early 2012. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has in the past few years built up its own capacity to act as a regional conflict mediator, increasing the number of diplomats both at home and abroad and building up a program of conflict resolution training for its diplomats. Finally, Turkey’s middle power status, its traditionally good relations to the West, both as a member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership, also make it attractive as a regional partner for both the United States and the EU.

Beyond the region, Turkey has increasingly taken on global responsibilities. It is actively engaged both as a humanitarian power, with an increasingly strong presence (particularly in Africa), and as an active promoter of a global peace mediation agenda. The latter has resulted in the promotion of a joint resolution with Finland on peace mediation, adopted by the United Nations on 22 June 2011.

However, Turkey is not the only regional state capable of taking on the role of regional power broker. Other regional states, such as Egypt, may be better placed both culturally and historically to claim the leadership role. How these powers develop politically and the relationships they forge with one another will decide whether they will be regarded as competitors or collaborators. As an example, Erdoğan’s decision to make Egypt the first stop on his successful tour of the region in
2011 pays tribute to Egypt’s role as a natural leader of the Arab world – and a potential competitor.\textsuperscript{42} A billion dollar loan agreement intended to support the export of goods and services from Turkey to Egypt, signed by Erdoğan and Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi at the end of September, might indicate the beginning of “a beautiful friendship.”\textsuperscript{43} It is also worth noting that Turkey is not the only state courting Egypt. On 6 February 2013, at the first visit of an Iranian head of state to Egypt since the Iranian revolution in 1979, President Mahmud Ahmadinejad called on Egypt to form a strategic alliance with Iran strengthening his commitment with the concrete proposal that visa requirements for Egyptian tourists and businessmen would be lifted.

**Conclusion: Still a regional model?**

This report would be inconclusive without revisiting the question posed at the start: How has Turkish soft power fared after the Arab Spring?

As illustrated above, the AKP has served as an example of how a conservative Muslim party, coming to power through the ballot box, is able to sustain its position by dramatically improving the economy and diplomatically raising a country’s regional and international profile. Turkey is regarded as a success for its ability to combine secularism with Islam – maintaining the secular state while clearly promoting its Muslim identity. Indeed, Turkey often represents a model to actors on opposite sides of the political spectrum. In Egypt, both the Muslim Brotherhood and the secular opposition parties speak glowingly of the Turkish example for entirely different reasons. The Muslim Brotherhood voiced their admiration for the ability of the AKP to consolidate power as an Islamist party in a secular state and bring about a successful transformation, while the secularist opposition spoke of the moderation of the AKP which they hoped would be a source of inspiration for the Muslim Brotherhood.\textsuperscript{44}

In advocating for Turkey’s demonstrative effect, Kirişci makes the point that one of the strengths of the Turkish “model” is that it is still in a transitional phase – or to put it in his words, “a work in progress.”\textsuperscript{45} This makes it easier for Turkey to collaborate with regional states that are in earlier stages of the democratization process. However, implicit in the argument is the assumption that Turkey’s policies are heading in a direction towards greater democratization. This is perhaps where the discussion is not conclusive.

Turkish soft power is tarnished by the vast number of oppositional civil society actors – journalists, intellectuals, business leaders – as well as military officers in prison. Some are charged with allegedly plotting to overthrow the government while others await trial and are held for long periods in pre-trial detention. The 2012 report of the Committee to Protect Journalists ranks Turkey as the highest offender (above Iran and Russia) in a year in which a record number of journalists have been imprisoned.\textsuperscript{46} As of 1 December 2012, 49 journalists were in prison.\textsuperscript{47} Increasingly, these transgressions are also receiving international attention. While Turkey is accustomed to regular critical reports from the EU (not least as part of the yearly Progress Report of the EU Commission), the weaknesses of the justice system are now also being openly questioned by its staunchest ally, the United States. In a briefing to reporters on 7 February 2013, American ambassador Francis Ricciardone criticized the long detention of army officers, scholars and students, eliciting an angry response from the deputy head of the AKP, Hüseyin Çelik, who admonished the ambassador to “know his own place.”\textsuperscript{48} Increasingly, these concerns are raising questions of Turkey’s soft power – its ability to attract other states to its model. The caveat is, of course, the assumption that soft power in the Turkish context is as much about the attraction of the democratic model as it is of the economic.

In conclusion, Turkish ambitions in the Middle East have been moderated by the limitations of regional and national concerns revived by the Arab awakening. The Syrian conflict has exposed the difficulties of maintaining two very difficult positions – that of a leader with a normative “soft power” agenda versus the pressures of regional realpolitik. Despite these challenges, Turkey’s economic successes, regional role and international engagement have promoted the country as an example for other states after the Arab awakening, even if questions are increasingly being raised about the deficiencies in its own democratic model.
Endnotes
2. Stone, N. (2012), “Turkey would do well to remember its history,” The Times, 8 October, see: http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article3561164.ece
3. Interview with Atilla Kiyat, retired Admiral, 18 September 2000.
4. One important development during the Gulf War which impacts on today’s Kurdish issue was the establishment of safe havens for the Iraqi Kurds through UN resolution 688. Although autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan was originally agreed upon in 1970 with the government of Iraq, battles between the Iraqi central authorities and Kurdish separatists continued until 1991, the most notorious being the chemical bombing of Halabja in 1988. The no fly zone established after 1991 (Operation Provide Comfort) gave Kurds the protection needed to begin developing autonomous state structure in Northern Iraq.
5. These include the Progressive Republican Party (banned 1925), the National Order Party (banned 1971), the Welfare Party (banned 1998), and the Virtue Party (banned 2001). The National Salvation Party was closed after the 1980 coup. As for the AKP, they have faced two closure cases, once in 2002 and once in 2008, both unsuccessful.
6. In a headline article on the 28 October 2009, The International Herald Tribune warned that Turkey’s turn to the East would have significant consequences for the West, noting that the country is an indispensable ally at a critical time.
8. This was evident in its 1998 encounter with Syria when Turkish troops massed at the border to convince Syria to dispel PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.
12. This has been capitalized on by the Turkish secular opposition who, in a twist of irony, are eager to portray the AKP as a lackey of the West
14. One indication of improved relations was the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Iran which increased tenfold from 1.2 billion dollars in 2001 to 10.6 billion dollars in 2010 according to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (See: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-iran-relations.en.mfa). Interestingly, despite the strains in the political relationship between the two countries, trade volume continues to rise (according to some sources by almost 50% in 2012). One example is the export of Turkish gold for Iranian oil. See: http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/162976.
16. Ibid.
18. Kirkuk is currently under the control of the Iraqi government.
22. Geography presents a challenge to the development of a Kurdish entity in the north. In contrast to Iraq and (most of) Turkey, Syria’s roughly 2 million Kurds are spread amongst several non-contiguous regions. Around 30% of the Syrian Kurdish population lives in the highlands northwest of Aleppo another 10% at the point where the Euphrates enters Syria, 40% in the northeastern half of the Jazeera governorate and the remainder lives in urban neighborhoods around the country. Gambill, G.C (2004) “The Kurdish Reawakening in Syria”, Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, 6:4, April. See: http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0404_s1.htm


26. Turkey’s Syria policy has also reactivated other militant organizations such as the far leftist Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party DKHP-C who claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack at the American embassy on the 1 February.

27. In November 2012, Erdoğan forwarded to the parliament a proposal to move to a presidential system from the present parliamentary system. See: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/06/us-turkey-presidency-proposal-idUSBRE8A50VS20121106.


30. For the Turkish report, see: http://www.akparti.org.tr/acilim22011.pdf


32. The Democratic Society Party metamorphosed into the present Peace and Democracy party (BDP) following the 2009 ban by the Constitutional Court.


35. Interview with Gareth Jenkins, 20 June 2012, Istanbul.

36. Ibid.


40. The author attended the Istanbul conference on mediation in 2012 where the Turkish, Brazilian and Finish Foreign Ministers gave key-note addresses focusing on the links between regional and international efforts at conflict mediation. See: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/istanbul-conference-on-mediation.en.mfa.


42. Egypt’s success in securing a ceasefire on 21 November 2012 following the eight day war between Israel and Hamas after the killing of Hamas’ military leader Ahmed al-Jaabari is an example of its potential as a conflict mediator.

43. See:http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/30/us-egypt-turkey-loan-idUSBRE88T0G920120930

44. Interviews with political actors in Egypt, October 2012.


46. See Committee to Protect Journalists (2012), Special Report at http://www.cpj.org/re-


48. The comments came following the 1 February suicide bombing of the US embassy in Ankara and the US ambassador was clearly airing his frustration at the failure of the Turkish security services to prevent the attack and implicitly suggesting that this was due to their pursuit of other alleged terrorists. See: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/akp-deputy-head-slams-us-envoys-criticisms-on-long-detentions.aspx?PageID=238&NID=40646&NewsCatID=338