

From the Desk of the Editor

Since our fall issue of TPQ, a chain reaction of events in the Arab world has dominated debate in Turkey's neighborhood. The toppling of the Tunisian and Egyptian leaders and waves of protest spreading to countries such as Yemen, Jordan, Libya, Bahrain, Algeria, and Iran have incited questions on whether Turkey might be a "model" for the Muslim Middle East and discussions about Turkey's approach to democratization in its neighborhood. While many predict Turkey's role in the region will increase, others speculate whether Turkey is prepared for this responsibility. Dissecting the long and short term implications of Turkey's concrete policies towards different countries and geographies, authors of this issue provide a "balance sheet" of Turkey's recent foreign policy initiatives ranging from the Balkans to the Caucasus and Africa.

Ömer Çelik, Deputy Chairman in charge of Foreign Relations of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) underlines that Turkey is at the center of a geopolitical neighborhood that spans the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Middle East. Since the AKP came to power, Turkey has boosted its activism in these regions with the aim of eliminating confrontations and pursuing win-win formulas with its neighbors. However, Ankara's track record has arguably been patchy. As always, many of our authors carry contrary opinions, reflecting the deeply polarized policy debates. The leader of the main opposition, Republican People's Party (CHP) maintains that "all of our problems with our neighbors remain unsolved, while new troubles constantly arise" and that "because of its regional policies, Turkey has in effect distanced itself from its allies and friends in the Euro-Atlantic community." Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu adds that the AKP only pays lip service to the EU accession process and galvanizes the public against the United States.

The Israel-Turkey relationship is one that is analyzed in depth. Carol Migdalovitz, specialist of Middle Eastern affairs, points out that Prime Minister Erdoğan's stance towards Israel has benefited his popularity, yet reduced his government's chances of playing a mediating role between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as between Israel and Syria. Given one of the stated goals of the AKP foreign policy is to mediate in such conflicts, a discrepancy between the Party's domestic interests, and its articulated foreign policy goals is noted. This situation is exacerbated by the likelihood that tensions between Israel and Turkey have also weakened Turkey's hand in Washington, with implications for the country's national interests on other fronts as well. While some attribute the harsh statements of the AKP towards Israel as ideologically driven, or aimed at leading a resurgence of the Muslim world, Shahin Vallée explains the shift on the basis of economic interests.

In the Caucasus, Alexander Jackson believes Ankara's goal of "zero problems with neighbors" will not necessarily be achieved due to the complexity of the challenges in this geography. Strategic interests and public opinion in Turkey do not enable

normalization of relations with Armenia under the terms that Armenia demands. Normalizing relations with Armenia, would necessitate deterioration of relations with another neighbor, Azerbaijan. No matter how attractive a win-win formula sounds, sometimes there are conflicting interests. According to Jackson, other examples in which Turkey has had to choose allegiances was between Georgia and Russia, and Russia and the West.

In the case of Turkey-Armenia normalization, Thomas de Waal thinks that the problem is not that a win-win formula does not exist, but that Ankara has fallen short in pursuing it. Armenia-Turkey normalization would –in the long run– be good for Turkey, Armenia and even Azerbaijan, he writes. He attributes the failure of the process to insufficient efforts to persuade the Azerbaijani side. Whether by strategic miscalculation or lack of leadership, gestures towards Armenia have clearly not yet carried Turkey closer to the end-result it was designed to deliver. Quite the contrary, Ankara's tensions with Baku, Yerevan and Washington may have been aggravated.

Another theme of Turkey's foreign policy that this issue of TPQ examines is Turkey's soft power in neighboring regions. Ömer Çelik outlines that trade between Turkey and its neighbors has been on the rise, and visa free travel regimes have expanded positive interaction across borders. An overview of Turkish activism in Africa and in the Balkans from experts of these regions supports this approach. The popularity of Turkish soap operas across a wide-spanning geography and the success of large and small-scale Turkish entrepreneurs are two examples that underscore the edge Turkey has in its region. Istanbul, offers freedom yet also familiarity to many women and men traveling from neighboring conservative countries – as I noted on a recent trip to Iran.

Whether Turkey's successes are being emulated by its neighbors and Turkey serves as a role model is a question high on policy agendas everywhere. James Dorsey notes that Arabs are now 'receptive to what Turkey has to offer politically, diplomatically, economically, and culturally' and holds that the Arab uprisings 'put Turkish aspirations of being a model of development for the Muslim world to a litmus test'. But he also observes that 'the Turkish model' means different things to different people. Is Turkey's model of modernization based on military tutelage that safeguarded its political and economic privileges and ensured a pro-Western course until the country was 'ready' to transform into a consolidated democracy, he asks.

Dorsey asserts that efforts to restrain freedom of the Internet and the press as well as adoption of more socially conservative mores in government-owned establishments and yet unfulfilled recognition of minority rights have cast a shadow over the state of Turkish democracy. Years of free and fair elections and a decade of progressive reforms later, Turkey still shares with its neighbors some basic obstacles to consolidating pluralistic democracy: being critical of those in power is taken as a personal insult and comes with a price tag, and holding power brings impunity and a patronizing expectation of deference.

One may argue though that Turkey's deficiencies do not necessarily render it less of an inspiration. Turkey's "imperfections" aide Turks in connecting with and doing business

in the environments its restrictive neighbors offer. Moreover, it may be precisely because Turkey shares the same problems with many of its neighbors that Turkey's progress seems within reach and motivates its neighbors. Nevertheless, countries in transition need more than a model, they need support with institution building and the development of a civil consensus. Support in such spheres requires strong knowledge of the societies – which hardly exists within Turkish academia and civil society. Moreover, these elements of transition (building social consensus and stronger institutions) are precisely what Turkey needs from the European Union process. If Turkey wants to be a model, the way to do this is not to abandon its Western vocation, but to pursue it with even more gusto. This is even more relevant in light of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's recent statement, in discussing Turkey's influence on democracy in the Middle East, in which he said Turkey does not need to give advice but will advise with good example.

Exactly one year ago, TPQ's Winter 2009/10 issue was titled "Democratization and Disputes in the Neighborhood: Is Taking Sides Inevitable?" This question is even more relevant today. I noted in the editorial of that issue, that in the mid 2000s Ankara had introduced rhetoric about Turkey's role in spreading progressive values in its neighborhood, but this rhetoric had not been substantiated. The rhetoric faded quickly, arguably in order to be able to maximize economic and political dividends from regimes with democracy deficits around Turkey. An effort to distance Turkey from association with U.S.-driven interventions and democratization schemes was apparent, in tandem with the assumption that U.S. influence was waning and failure of its initiatives was likely. Other points reflected in last year's TPQ included the observation that cynicism of Western democracy promotion efforts had blinded many Turkish observers from seeing that demands for change were rooted in citizens and that significant improvements have been achieved in many areas. This has been the case in Georgia since the Rose Revolution. Conspiracy theories attributing demands for more rights as a U.S. plot also delayed the Turkish policy communities understanding of the growing demand for change within many societies neighboring Turkey. We noted that those who criticize Western democracy promotion efforts almost never have alternative approaches for improving conditions for citizens neighboring Turkey where anti-democratic repression is commonplace. Notably, even though the U.S. is not a driving force in the present uprisings, the position the U.S. takes is watched as closely as ever, despite the speculation that U.S. influence is waning in the global arena.

James Dorsey points out that Prime Minister Erdoğan calling openly for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to heed the demands of his people, represented a break with the Turkish policy that "until then steered clear of democracy and human rights issues in favor of pragmatism and trade deals". The sensitivity of this topic came to the fore immediately after the incident. While some questioned whether Turkey with its own democracy deficits had the right to preach to others, other Arab leaders who felt vulnerable to protests resented Turkey's weighing in on the side of the protestors. The need to evacuate up to 30,000 Turkish workers from Libya and the difficulty caused by problems with the Libyan leadership revealed concretely how Turkey might have justifiable reasons to restrain from angering even the more authoritarian leaders in its neighborhood.

Indeed, to maximize Turkish business interests or to prevent some neighbors' from exploiting Turkey's internal problems (such as the ethnic or religious weak links), Ankara's avoidance of confrontation with its neighbors has paid off. However, there is also a question of extent. Portraying warm friendship with Ahmedinejad is, for example, not necessary to further economic interests with Iran. In some cases, educated elites opposed to their authoritarian leaders resent a Turkish embrace of their regimes. A fine tuning may be in order.

Turkey's status of being a center of attraction in the region should and will grow, independent of government relations – with economic actors, human rights activists, entertainment, intellectuals, and cultural initiatives leading the way. Expectations of support from Turkey are high in Tunisia, as Mahmoud El-May underlines. More knowledge, increased human social networks and consistent attention to the region should be developed within Turkey.

Contradictions in Turkey's approach to human rights and democratic values among its neighbors are pointed out in this issue of TPQ with the examples of Iran and Sudan analyzed in more detail.

To this end, Carol Migdalovitz points out that on Iran, AKP government officials quickly accepted the disputed results of the controversial 2009 presidential election as an "internal" affair. This, she says, contrasted greatly with U.S. and EU criticism of the vote and of the regime's forceful suppression of the Green Movement opposition. She also reminds us that Prime Minister Erdoğan went so far as to describe President Mahmud Ahmadinejad as his "friend." Shahin Vallée, on the other hand, explains Turkey's Iran position with economic and financial reasoning; pointing out that the policy was designed to meet the growing economic demands of Iran, which Turkey is in a unique position to meet.' Inadvertently, Turkey's showcase of support strengthens Ahmedinejad both domestically and internationally. Sudan is another case in point. Carol Migdalovitz provides this example as one of 'AKP's Muslim chauvinism' when she points out that 'the Turkish government welcomed a visit by President Omar al Bashir in August 2008, after the International Criminal Court indicted him for genocide' and that 'Prime Minister Erdoğan has asserted that he does not believe that Sudanese forces committed acts of genocide in Darfur, arguing "It is not possible for those who belong to the Muslim faith to carry out genocide."' She sees this defense of Sudan's leadership as an extension of AKP's refrain from criticizing human rights abuses in Syria, Iran, and Hamas as well.

As Dorsey points out, 'While Erdoğan's support for regime change will stick in the minds of Egyptians and Tunisians, so will Iranians remember his failure to support the Green Movement when activists protested in 2009 against allegedly fraudulent elections that returned President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad to office. Similarly, many Sudanese, and particularly those in newly independent, oil-rich South Sudan are unlikely to forget Erdoğan's embrace of wanted Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir.'

Concurrently, Mehmet Özkan points out the positive change Turkey is making in Africa, and the economic gains it is uniquely positioned to reap. As a mid-sized nation with a

developing economy and one that does not carry the baggage of resentment by Africans he argues Turkish businesses are flourishing. He also points out that the concentration on lower profile development issues such as agriculture by Turkish initiatives “carry the promise of effecting genuine change in the lives of masses of Africans.”

One thing is for sure, by the time our next issue of TPQ hits the stands, the Middle East and North Africa will stand a changed region. As protests continue, geopolitical and geostrategic alliances re-align, and a new beginning for the Middle East seems inevitable, Turkey’s role in ushering in change, new partnerships and the shedding of old disputes will continue to be debated, discussed and analyzed among foreign policy experts around the globe. At TPQ, we will continue to strive to be a platform which gives all sides a space to express their viewpoints.

As we enter the new year with this issue, I would like to note some of the developments in our outreach and partnerships.

Abbreviated versions of TPQ articles continue to be published in Hürriyet Daily News, our outreach partner, regularly. Our developing partnership with Abhaber.com and Euractiv.com has enabled us to circulate our authors’ views widely in Turkish as well.

TPQ’s new interactive website became fully functional (www.turkishpolicy.com) and continues to provide all TPQ articles and other content free of charge. We now hope to stimulate more online discussion about both the articles and current affairs. You can also follow TPQ through our Facebook group *Turkish Policy Quarterly* and [Twitter@TurkishPolicy](https://twitter.com/TurkishPolicy).

TPQ held a series of roundtable discussion meetings in 2010 with the support of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST) and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Topics covered included Turkey-Israel relations, the regional energy powerplay and Turkey’s shifting foreign policy. In this issue of TPQ, Benjamin Katcher shares his analysis of the debates that took place at the most recent roundtable assessing the impact of Turkey’s new foreign policy on the Transatlantic alliance. We plan to continue with a steady pace of TPQ Roundtables in 2011 – not only in Istanbul but also in other cities of Turkey, as well as in Brussels and Washington.

The support of Kadir Has University and the European Stability Initiative (ESI) remain central to all of our work.

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As always, we look forward to your suggestions and constructive criticism.

Diba Nigar Göksel