

INSIGHT

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PRINTING HOUSE: Turkuvaz Matbaacılık Yayıncılık A.Ş., Akpınar Mah. Hasan Basri Cad. No: 4, Sancaktepe, 34885 / İstanbul

On behalf of SET VAKFI İktisadi İşletmesi (2008) owned by Taha Özhan / ISSN 1302-177X

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Insight Turkey is a peer-reviewed journal indexed by the following databases and indexes: Bibliography of Asian Studies, Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO), EBSCO, Elsevier Bibliographic Databases, European Sources Online (ESO), GALE-Cengage, Gender Studies Database, Index Islamicus, International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBR), International Bibliography of Periodical Literature in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBZ), International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), International Political Science Abstracts (IPSA), Lancaster Index to Defence and International Security Literature, Left Index, Middle East & Central Asian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences Bibliographies, Scopus, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, World Affairs Online (WAO).

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WINTER 2014 • VOLUME 16 NO. 1

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EDITOR'S NOTE

TALİP KÜÇÜKCAN

THE END of the Cold War ushered in a new era, leading to the transformation of the international system and shifting the power balances among regional and global actors. Not only have the conventional practices of international relations and foreign policy making undergone a radical change but also emerging actors began to exert their influence in regional and global economic and political configurations not previously seen.

With the decline and eventual disappearance of the Cold War paradigm, which was primarily informed by security concerns and ideological polarizations, the international community, has witnessed the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey) countries. The influence of the economic potential and growth of these emerging countries is not only limited to trade and industry. Rising actors have capitalized on their economic growth to challenge the existing international order.

Policy makers and commentators consider Turkey as one the emerging regional powers with its vibrant economy, young population, powerful military, political stability, democratization reforms, and active diplomacy. In this issue, *Insight Turkey* intends to launch a debate on Turkish foreign policy, especially since 2002 when the AK Party came to power. The majority of commentaries and articles are dedicated to analyzing the nature and making of Turkey's foreign policy. A number of authors chart the parameters of the AK Party policies in positioning Turkey vis-à-vis regional and global developments.

It is generally argued that Turkey was not able to follow an independent foreign policy during the Cold War since it was bound to remain within the political confines of its powerful allies. Moreover, domestic weaknesses of a political system plagued by coalition governments and political polarization, as well as isolationist foreign policy decisions pushed Turkey towards being an inward looking country with almost no relations with its neighboring countries.

Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party period represents a major departure from what it was under the previous governments. While the protracted domestic problems of democratization reform, civil-military relations, and the Kurdish issue were addressed, policy makers went beyond and began to mobilize the country's hard and soft power with a view to establish constructive

relations with its neighbors. On the one hand, Turkey has anchored itself in the European Union and NATO as a sign of its willingness to work with its old allies in the West. On the other hand, it also embarked on an ambitious project of diversifying its foreign policy relations in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East, and North Africa. Its new foreign policy motto of “zero problems with neighbors,” investing in economic and political relations, providing humanitarian and developmental aid, active engagement in conflict resolution and public diplomacy, lending support to democratization movements (especially in the Middle East) all helped Turkey to become an international player. As a result, Turkey succeeded in establishing new strategic partnerships with several regional and global powers.

Testimony to its successes, Turkey has been touted as a “model country,” especially in the Middle East and North Africa, for aptly managing Islam, democracy, and secularism. Yet, the architects of Turkish foreign policy are also accused of pursuing ideological policies, which might be described as a shift of axis towards the East. Commentaries and articles in this issue provide excellent insights on the transformation of Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party since 2002.

In the year ahead, we are very likely to witness major developments in regional and global politics. The Geneva 2 Talks and efforts of the international community to find a common ground for a solution in the Syrian conflict, the Iranian nuclear deal, Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, beginning of direct talks between Turks and Cypriots in the divided Cyprus, constitutional referenda in Tunis and Egypt will have direct or indirect influence on the new political formations and re-shaping of foreign policy in the volatile Middle East and North Africa. *Insight Turkey* will continue to cover the impact of such developments on Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy and highlight major issues impacting the regional policy decisions. ■