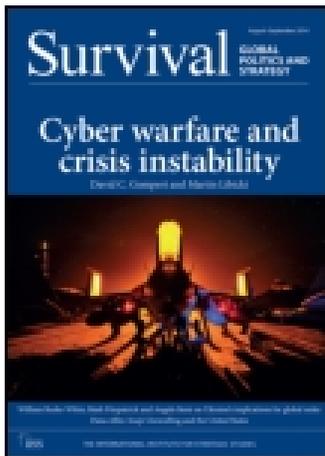


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Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism

Behlül Özkan

Over the past decade, Turkey's foreign policy has been synonymous with Ahmet Davutoglu and his doctrine of 'stratejik derinlik' (strategic depth). In 2010–11 he was on *Foreign Policy's* list of the 'Top 100 Global Thinkers'. Yet, despite this popular interest in Davutoglu, there are few academic studies of his foreign policy. He devised Turkey's current, pan-Islamist approach in his work as an academic during 1986–2002, detailing his vision in hundreds of articles published in that period. Davutoglu consistently argued that the end of the Cold War provided Turkey with a historic opportunity to become a global power, as long as it followed an expansionist foreign policy based on Islamist ideology. According to Davutoglu, Turkey was to dominate its hinterland – the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus – and thereby create a new *Lebensraum* (he uses the Turkish words 'hayat alanı', which is a direct translation of the German *Lebensraum*, or 'living space').¹ He began to turn his pan-Islamist vision into reality after 2002, following his appointment as foreign-policy adviser to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), a position he held until he was made foreign minister in 2009.

Turkish foreign policy has had a troubled relationship with Islamist politics since 1970, the year in which Necmettin Erbakan established the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party), the first Islamist party in the history of modern Turkey. At the time, Erbakan criticised other mainstream parties

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for striving to be part of the 'Western club', and opposed close links with Europe, instead idealising his country as a part of a future 'Islamic Common Market'.² Islamist intellectual Necip Fazıl Kısakürek similarly imagined Turkey as the leader of an awakening Islamic world. Sezai Karakoç, an influential poet and thinker, claimed that the political borders of existing nation-states caused the partitioning of the *umma* (Islamic community); in his view, a 'Great Islamic Federation' ought to be established in place of 'artificial' nation-states.³ These claims remained rhetorical, however, and were not taken seriously by Turkish elites, as Islamist politicians and intellectuals did not provide a feasible strategy for realising their ambitions. Erbakan's Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) led Turkey's 1995 elections (with 21% of the vote) by promising a 'just order' as a way out of the country's political and economic crisis, but failed to deliver an equally appealing foreign-policy vision. Indeed, appointed in 1996 as the first Islamist prime minister of Turkey, Erbakan was unable to make significant changes to the country's pro-Western foreign policy. Not only were the Islamist elites unskilled in diplomacy and unable to offer a credible alternative to Western orientation, they also had to contend with the long-standing domination of foreign policy by the country's army and bureaucracy.

Davutoğlu was the first intellectual to devise a rationalistic and pragmatic Islamist foreign policy. He rejected Turkey's traditional stance as a pro-Western regional power, claiming that he had developed a new strategy to raise Turkey to the level of a global power. Davutoğlu's book *Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth)*, which was published in 2001 and has sold nearly 100,000 copies, familiarised Turkey's Western elites and urbanites with his expansionist foreign policy. By the early 2000s, when he became prominent in Turkish public life, Davutoğlu already had over a decade of political experience within the Islamist movement. During that period, he had strengthened his political message among his own audience through hundreds of journal, magazine and newspaper articles, in the mode of an Islamist 'organic intellectual' (to use Antonio Gramsci's term). Davutoğlu was therefore the first scholar to establish an Islamist foreign-policy vision that provided a viable alternative to Erbakan's rhetorical, populist discourse. Davutoğlu was not only rationalistic, but was also pragmatic enough to

state in 1996 that 'in a sense, international relations operate on the basis of stock market principles'.⁴

He believes that the era of nationalism will eventually come to an end, and that Islamic unity can be achieved through a new political project:

[Middle Eastern] states first emerged on the maps of [the Sykes–Picot agreement that broke apart the Ottoman Empire], then by colonial methods, and finally on maps that were artificially drawn. You cannot build a future based on these states, which are at enmity with each other due to nationalism. We shall break the mould shaped for us by Sykes–Picot.⁵

According to Davutoglu, Turkey should spearhead this grandiose political transformation in its neighbourhood. To achieve this, he advocates abandoning the country's status quo foreign policy of remaining within its current borders. He believes that Turkey should instead adopt an expansionist, pan-Islamist stance based on the imperial geopolitical theories developed by Western strategists in the first half of the twentieth century. Such figures include Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford Mackinder, Karl Haushofer and Nicholas Spykman.

The influence of Western imperial geopolitics

Davutoglu's education at the prestigious, German-language Istanbul High School and Bogaziçi University (a former American missionary school where lessons were taught in English) had significant influence on the development of his political ideas and career. A star of Turkey's Islamist movement, he has published most of his work not in peer-reviewed international journals but in Islamist journals, magazines and newspapers. He has been portrayed by his supporters as a grand theorist who challenges well-known Western scholars such as Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama.⁶ Islamist intellectuals have depicted Davutoglu as a scholar of 'international relations, political science, psychology, history, history of religion, and philosophy'.⁷ Simply put, he is seen as an academic who tries to understand the big picture, and who seeks to answer difficult questions.

Contrary to his assertions and those of Islamist intellectuals, however, Davutoglu's foreign-policy vision is not original, but imported. One of his first articles, 'The World's Balance of Power and the Middle East', written when he was a doctoral student of 27 and published by the Iskenderpasa Religious Brotherhood's journal *Bilim ve Sanat (Science and Art)*, referenced the works of Mackinder, Spykman and Haushofer.⁸ It is striking that his criticism of Turkey's Westernisation drove him to analyse the Middle East using Western geopolitical theories. The influence of Western imperial geopolitics is conspicuous in *Strategic Depth*, in which Davutoglu states that 'Turkey has not seen the emergence of an approach that combines theory

Davutoglu uses Western theories

and practice in a manner similar to the effect of Mahan and Spykman on American global strategy, Haushofer on German, and Mackinder on English and Russian strategy.'

He explains his mission as 'filling in the gap in terms of strategic theory in Turkey', and discusses the importance of 'projections by strategists such as [Henry] Kissinger and [Zbigniew] Brzezinski, who are experienced in harmonizing theory and practice', perhaps justifying the label given to him by certain journalists: 'the Kissinger of Turkey'.⁹

The era of imperial geopolitics, during which European powers continued their colonial expansion and the United States extended its frontiers into the Pacific Ocean, lasted until the end of the Second World War. Mackinder, Mahan, Spykman and Haushofer, among others, argued that implementing their strategies could allow their respective countries to become global powers; they were influential not only in academia, but also in foreign-policy circles, sometimes serving as government advisers.¹⁰

The preface of *Strategic Depth* claims to introduce 'strategic analyses that would develop alternative perspectives on the future of Turkey', which is 'probably going through the most important transformations of its time'. Davutoglu claims that he has developed a new 'strategic world view', different from that of his predecessors, about the 'geographic *Lebensraum* in which history was formed'.¹¹ The imperial geopolitics that prevails throughout Davutoglu's writings attempts to justify states' expansion of their spheres of influence. Most of the few sources that Davutoglu cites in

Strategic Depth refer to figures such as Mackinder, Spykman, Haushofer and Kissinger. The concepts Davutoglu uses, such as '*Lebensraum*', 'hinterland', 'pivotal country' and 'rimland', are borrowed wholesale from imperial geopolitical theorists. Echoing Spykman, Davutoglu writes that 'the geography of a country is a constant factor'. He proclaims his objective to be gaining the advantage in geopolitics through the use of diplomacy and the global balance of power.¹² Like the imperial geopolitical theorists, who explained the complicated problems of early twentieth-century imperial rivalries using simple narratives, Davutoglu proposes solutions based on the establishment of a sphere of influence and a hinterland, but applies the idea to Turkey in the post-Cold War era, a time when radical changes were taking place in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Davutoglu insists that Turkey has long since repaid the debts it inherited from the Ottoman Empire, but has missed out on major opportunities due to an inability to collect on its legacy. He defines the country as the 'product of a historical [Ottoman] heritage which had been formed as the result of an intensive and centuries-long struggle against the prevailing [Western] civilisation, which constituted the international system'. According to him, Turkey is not an ordinary nation-state, but 'the centre of [Ottoman] civilisation, which had established an original and long-lasting political order'.¹³ Moreover, the country is one of just eight powers that began the twentieth century as an empire (the others being England, Russia, Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, China and Japan). Among these powers, six managed to preserve their spheres of influence as their empires collapsed, with Turkey and Austria-Hungary refusing to prolong their imperial legacies, retreating to their national homelands and pursuing a far less ambitious status quo foreign policy.¹⁴ According to Davutoglu, it was only after the Cold War that Turkey found an opportunity to once again appear on the 'stage of history'. The country would either reconstitute its hinterland by acquiring new *Lebensraum*, or collapse due to its adherence to the status quo.¹⁵ For Davutoglu, the changes in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus at the end of the twentieth century invalidated Turkey's foreign policy of preserving peace and territorial integrity by adhering to national borders. Turkey would either put itself at the centre of a circle of alliances and control

its hinterland, or insist on a defensive foreign policy that made it vulnerable to attack by those who had scores to settle with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶

The pivotal-country concept that underpins Davutoglu's foreign policy can be seen as an adaptation of *Mittellage* (central position), which was often used by German scholars in the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II and during the interwar period.¹⁷ These thinkers contended that Germany did not have natural borders to its East, so had to create spheres of influence beyond its political frontiers in order to defend the homeland. Similarly, Davutoglu argues that

the countries that are in a position of being pivotal countries do not have a chance to remain constant; they either shrink or – I do not say this necessarily in the sense of an expansionist policy – gain dominance by enlarging their spheres of influence.¹⁸

Consequently, Germany's post-Cold War economic hegemony in Eastern Europe, which its armed forces failed to establish in the Second World War, should serve as a model for Turkey in relation to the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.¹⁹ Davutoglu not only advocates economic dominance, but also the use of Islam to legitimise the undertaking (as Gramsci pointed out, consent is needed to establish hegemony). Arguably, such considerations do not apply in the case of Germany, which derived consent for its hegemony in Eastern Europe from liberal democracy.

Davutoglu writes that 'geography is an objective reality', reflecting a determinism that is also evident in the subtitles of *Strategic Depth*, such as 'An Unavoidable Hinterland: The Middle East' and 'Marine *Lebensraum* and the Aegean Sea'.²⁰ He describes Cyprus as 'in the heart of the *Lebensraum*', and concludes that 'Turkey would be bound to have a Cyprus question even if not a single Muslim Turk lived there'. One of Davutoglu's most revealing claims is that 'the defence of Eastern Thrace and Istanbul now begins in the Adriatic Sea and Sarajevo, and the defence of Eastern Anatolia and Erzurum begins in the Northern Caucasus and Grozny'.²¹ It is striking that such passages appear not in a book published at the beginning of the twentieth century, but in the early twenty-first.

The book, which is presented as Davutoglu's manifesto by scholars and journalists close to him, is not a stand-alone academic work, but rather a collection of pseudoscientific articles written during the 1990s for Islamist daily newspapers and magazines. In all of these pieces, Davutoglu seeks to provide a comprehensive solution to the range of problems faced by Turkey. Similar to German geopolitical theorists during the interwar period, who pointed out the benefits and dangers stemming from *Mittellage*, Davutoglu claims that his expansionist foreign policy will transform Turkey's pivotal geographical position from one of vulnerability to one of opportunity. He claims to pave the way for a better future and underlines the political utility of the power vacuum that emerged at the end of the Cold War. Davutoglu at times seems confident that Turkey will become a global power by employing his strategy, but at others fears that the country will collapse if it does not take into account its pivotal position and expand its *Lebensraum*. For him, Turkey's political borders, like those of other nation-states in the Middle East, are geopolitical errors that separate Islamic communities from one another. Indeed, as minister of foreign affairs, Davutoglu promised that 'between 2011 and 2023 we are going to meet again with our brothers in those territories from which we retreated and which we lost between 1911 and 1923.'²²

The mirage of pan-Islamism

The concept of pan-Islamism, first put forward in Europe during the 1870s, has always been controversial. According to orientalist thinkers, pan-Islamists aimed to establish a political union of all Muslims, partly by liberating Western colonies that had significant Muslim populations, such as India, Egypt, Tunisia and Indonesia. The concept was never used or internalised by Ottoman elites, however, who instead referred to *ittihadi* Islam (the unity of Islam). The term had a defensive meaning: maintaining loyalty to the Ottoman state among the various Muslim nations in the empire, against increasing Western encroachment. Namik Kemal, a prominent Ottoman intellectual, first referred to *ittihadi* Islam in 1869. In an 1872 newspaper article, he argued that the economic and military strength of the Ottoman Empire did not compare to that of the European powers, and was insuf-

ficient to integrate the Islamic world. Abdülhamid II, Ottoman sultan from 1876 to 1909, believed the aim of uniting all Muslims under the Ottoman flag to be a fantasy, but that *ittihadi* Islam could be used to strengthen solidarity among Muslim peoples in order to prevent the disintegration of the empire.

Discussing pan-German and pan-Slavic movements in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt pointed out that 'the hallmark of the pan-movements was that they never even tried to achieve national emancipation, but at once, in their dreams of expansion, transcended the narrow bounds of a national community'.²³ For Arendt, such movements were distinct from overseas colonialism in that they sought expansion in Europe through 'continental imperialism'. In its aim to dominate regions beyond Turkey's borders, Davutoglu's pan-Islamism is more similar to pan-Germanism than to the defensive doctrine of the late Ottoman Empire. In this respect, Davutoglu disowns the traditional foreign policy of Turkey that, after the Second World War, was 'based on an impulse to protect its borders, which had been inherited from the Ottoman Empire'. Following this approach, Ankara 'showed a preference for any power that backed this policy in the international system'.²⁴

Davutoglu believes that Treaty of Sèvres scenarios, a common feature of Turkish nationalist discourse which suggests Turkey will be partitioned by Western powers, 'prevent us from making great strides forward and ... [render] us passive and defensive ... thus creating psychological frustration'. He also deviates from the prevailing explanation for the Ottoman Empire's acceptance of the humiliating treaty. Davutoglu argues that the reason for the Ottoman Empire's collapse was 'not our separation from the Balkans, but from the lands of the Middle East inhabited by a Muslim majority'.²⁵ He contends that Turks must 'analyse our weaknesses in the run-up to Sèvres with composure', and establish close political, economic and cultural relations with Muslims in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus, thereby positioning Turkey as the centre of the region.²⁶ Similar to German geopolitical theorists, who argued after the First World War that the Treaty of Versailles borders did not give Germany enough *Lebensraum*, Davutoglu has claimed that Turkey's borders, which are based on the National Pact of 1920, do not reflect today's realities.²⁷ Ankara is therefore obliged to define

a new *Lebensraum* determined by cultural and economic factors. Davutoglu judges that, if Turkey bases its identity on Islam, 'its borders, to say nothing of border defence, can be moved to a better point'.²⁸

The opposition of East and West, Islam and Christianity, play an important role in his pan-Islamism. Although Davutoglu criticises Western scholars for using derogatory expressions in their analysis of Muslim societies, he does not hesitate to use language such as 'Crusader psychology', 'barbarian' or 'terrorist' to describe the other side in conflicts that involve Muslims. Accordingly, in the Bosnian war, Muslims were under the threat from 'Christian terrorism and fundamentalism', 'Serbian terrorists', 'Serbian killers' and 'European fascism', while Muslim combatants were 'the leader[s] of the jihad'.²⁹ He refers to the wars in Afghanistan (against the Soviets) and Chechnya as 'jihad'; for him, the mujahideen in Chechnya fought against 'the attacks coming from the barbaric Russian steppes'.³⁰ Likewise, he calls the Christian conquerors of Andalusia 'Catholic Spanish barbarians'.³¹

In Davutoglu's pan-Islamist imagination, Bosnia and Albania should be regarded as 'natural allies of Turkey', and the Muslim population of the Balkans are the 'most important elements of Turkey's Balkan policy'.³² Characterising Bosnia-Herzegovina as a 'political, economic, and cultural outpost of Turkey in Central Europe', Davutoglu boldly defines the societies of Bosnia and Albania as 'the remnants of the Ottoman Empire whose fates are tied to Turkey's regional power and hegemony'.³³ But his pan-Islamism particularly focuses on the Middle East, which he claims has a geopolitical potential that can only be realised by ending the separation of its nation-states.

According to Davutoglu, Turkey has an important role to play in this process of unification. Ankara has to cherish the Ottoman legacy in the region just as the Soviet Union did that of the Russian Empire, dominating Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Contending that 'geopolitical realities are not affected by ideological differences and regime changes', Davutoglu states that 'Turkey is now obliged to become a "political centre" that will fill the power vacuum which emerged after the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire'.³⁴ He sees the core values of the Middle East as being the unity furnished by Islam and the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire.

Consequently, he regards Lebanon and Israel as artificial countries because they were established after Ottoman rule and their politics have been dominated by their Christian and Jewish communities. Davutoglu even defines Israel as a 'geopolitical tumour' and 'a state that is politically foreign to that geography'.³⁵

He sees Turkey as the only country that will be able to overcome the geopolitical disintegration of the Muslim community caused by the foundation of the Middle East's modern nation-states. But, in the last decade, Turkey has not pursued a neo-Ottomanist foreign policy, despite the claims of

many journalists and scholars.³⁶ Davutoglu criticises the neo-Ottomanist approach of Turgut Ozal, Turkish prime minister from 1983 to 1989, for being 'theoretically insufficient, superficial, and journalistic'.³⁷

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The ideology of Ottomanism, which marked the Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat eras, was based on reforms that modernised state institutions and social structures. It was designed to halt the collapse of the empire by uniting diverse ethnic and religious groups within a single identity. Ottomanism was embraced not only by Muslims, but

also by a considerable portion of the empire's Armenian, Anatolian Greek and Jewish elites. The ideology was not a nationalist pretext for the Turkish elite's assimilation of other nations, but rather an all-encompassing system for overcoming ethnic and religious differences.

Ozal, whose influence on Turkish politics lasted until his death in 1993, cherished the ideal of neo-Ottomanism as a means of integrating with the European Union through modernisation, and of adopting a supra-national identity that went beyond ethnic allegiance. His enthusiasm was reflected in Turkey's 1987 application for European Union membership; its attempts to expand its sphere of influence in the Caucasus and the Balkans; its efforts to solve the Kurdish issue through reforms; and his dream of bringing northern Iraq under the control of Ankara, after Baghdad's power was diminished by the First Gulf War. Davutoglu treasures Islamism as the only valid ideological legacy of the Ottoman Empire, however, and likens Ozal to the 'Tanzimat pashas who tried to protect

the internal integrity of the Ottoman State via friendships developed with strong Western countries'.³⁸

In his opposition to the ideal of Westernisation that has shaped Turkey's politics and society for the last century, Davutoglu argues that those who founded the republic rejected Islamic political ideals and institutions:

Turkey took a serious and radical decision with respect to its international position and chose to become an element of the periphery under the security umbrella of the prevailing Western civilisation, rather than being the weak centre of its own civilisation. This decision had a deep impact on the political psychology, ideals, attitude, culture and institutions of the society.

Davutoglu sees such reforms as clashing with 'the realities of Turkish society, its historical legacy and its ideals and expectations for the future'. He highlights the fact that Turkey remained on the periphery of the West after the Second World War and 'neglected its own natural hinterland, as well as other alternative power centres'. 'The fact that Turkey was among the first countries to recognise Israel in 1947 [*sic*]', and that it supported the French colonial government during Algeria's struggle for independence, 'pushed Turkey into the position of a peripheral country that favoured the interests of Western colonialism in the East'.³⁹ Davutoglu's main objection to such policy is Turkey's impassive attitude, especially towards the Middle East. He harshly criticises a small-scale, status quo approach, as well as the foreign-policy elites who accepted Turkey's peripheral role in NATO.

Davutoglu also rejects the Westernisation of Turkey and other Islamic countries because he argues that there is a crisis of values in Western societies and political institutions. His objective of uniting Islamic societies under Turkey's leadership is contradictory, however, because his assertive foreign policy is based not on Islamist values, but on archaic Western geopolitical theories unsuited to international relations in the twenty-first century. Indeed, Davutoglu's writings reveal his central concern to be not values but power politics. As a scholar and as foreign minister, he has failed to address Turkey's real problems and those of other Islamic countries, and has not given

a convincing answer as to how his imagined Islamic unity will challenge Western scientific, economic and military supremacy. Davutoglu's praise for the Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union never accounts for American military aid to the mujahideen, whom he believes were victorious thanks to Islamic solidarity.⁴⁰ Similarly, during the 1990s, he supported Chechen independence and truly believed in the victory of jihad, but ignored the fact that the rebels lost their fight against Russia.⁴¹ Davutoglu's pan-Islamism is therefore a mirage. His political analysis remains on the level of prophecy rather than prognosis; his ideas are pseudoscientific, based on inspiration related to historical destiny rather than rational thought.

In the preface of *Strategic Depth*, Davutoglu claims that he can remain in the 'river of history' on which Turkey is sailing, thus avoiding alienation from the religious and cultural values of Turkish society. He asserts that this does not diminish his objectivity and scientific responsibility because he has the unique ability to step out of the water in order to analyse the 'bed of the river, its rate of flow, its current and its relation to other rivers'.⁴² As an analyst 'possessing a self-confidence arising out of the depths of history and geography', he places himself among the ranks of policymakers and intellectuals who are 'determined to embark on a historical march with their societies'. Davutoglu claims that, as a strategist, 'he strives to pave the way for future generations to become worthy historical actors'. Probably inspired by Brzezinski, whose views he quotes, Davutoglu rejects the idea of being a pawn in the 'great game', instead aiming to be 'the player who moves the chess pieces'.⁴³ He aspires to be 'dominant, not passive, in history; to write, not to read, history', believing that the Arab Spring created an opportunity not only for Turkey, but also for him.⁴⁴

The Arab Spring

Since the mid-1990s, Davutoglu has warned that Middle Eastern governments that did not have popular support would be dissolved, as were communist regimes in Eastern Europe after the Cold War. He believes that Turkey has a historic opportunity for leadership in the Middle East, which is on the brink of massive changes. Davutoglu holds the view that authoritarian Arab regimes in the Gulf will try to survive by demonising non-Arab

countries such as Israel, Iran and Turkey, but will nonetheless perish in the long term. He argues that ethnic nationalism and Islamism are the two growing trends in a Middle East, where monarchies and other dictatorships have become weaker, and that competition among Arab, Turkish, Persian and Kurdish nationalisms would be to Turkey's disadvantage. He stresses that the nationalist and ethnic-separatist movements fragmenting the Middle East are supported by the US and other Western powers because the conflicts in the region provide them with room for strategic manipulation. Davutoglu writes that, 'according to an objective foreign-policy assessment, the most advantageous option enabling Turkey to become influential in the Middle East is the rise of Islamic movements'.⁴⁵ In other words, he claims that support for such movements is an objective strategy that he developed through rational, rather than ideological, analysis.

Presenting himself in this way, Davutoglu accuses Turkey's pro-Western foreign-policy elites of having an ideological bias against Islamism that prevents them from recognising the opportunity for Turkish leadership. For him, the most serious obstacle to Turkey taking an active role in the Middle East is the 'psychological imbalance experienced by an elite that wants to toe the line' of European civilisation.⁴⁶ Stating that 'the imposition of a pro-European identity [on Turkey] has gone bankrupt', Davutoglu criticises previous Turkish governments for being unaware of the country's potential.⁴⁷ According to him, 'the Turkish elite of the last century is the most conspicuous example of an elite unaware of its own reality and background'.⁴⁸ Davutoglu bases his belief that 'Turkey will never be admitted to the EU' on the opposition of Europe and Islam:

Societies and civilisations which are in collision with each other cannot think rationally. They need to be continually wary of one another. They are always plagued by the anxious conviction that the opposite party will resume hostilities again. This is an oppositional relationship that we cannot change.⁴⁹

Davutoglu exalts Abdülhamid II's policy of a balance of power, which centred on continual conflict between the interests of Western states, as well

as regional alliances in the Balkans and the Middle East. He concludes that Turkish foreign policy should learn a lesson from history, taking advantage of the balance of power in the West to maximise its own interests.

Davutoglu's 2002–09 position as an adviser to the prime minister did not provide him with enough influence to shape Turkish foreign policy in line with his pan-Islamist vision. Abdullah Gül, who was briefly prime minister before serving as minister of foreign affairs between 2003 and 2007, had begun to successfully implement the reforms required for Turkey's EU candidacy. He was particularly effective on the Cyprus issue, which at the time was regarded as a pressing problem for Ankara. In contrast, Davutoglu's main contribution to foreign policy before 2009 was in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Between 2002 and 2011, the year in which the Arab Spring unfolded, the country's annual foreign trade with the Middle East and North Africa increased by nearly 5.4 times, from \$10 billion to \$54bn. During this period, in which the AKP formed a single-party government, visa-free travel was established with many Middle Eastern countries, including Syria, Libya and Egypt. In line with Davutoglu's strategy of 'not having a single destination in Turkey's hinterland that is not covered by flights', Turkish Airlines opened routes to all major cities in the Middle East.⁵⁰ Turkish companies' construction investments in the region exceeded \$10bn, as a result of the increase in the oil revenues of Middle Eastern states and of post-war development in Iraq. In short, Davutoglu's strategy of increasing Middle Eastern economic cooperation and ensuring that there were 'zero problems with neighbours' improved Turkey's economic relations with the region. But this approach was the product of a Cold War world view based on the development of inter-state relations, and did not question the legitimacy of the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. In effect, Davutoglu's 'zero problems with neighbours' became a strategy of zero challenge to these governments.

Before the Arab Spring, Davutoglu's pragmatic stance on Middle Eastern authoritarianism led Turkey to foster good relations with dictators such as Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muammar Gadhafi in Libya. This was displayed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who referred to 'Assad, my brother' and spent a family holiday with the Syrian

leader; accepted a 'human rights award' from Gadhafi in November 2010; and was one of the few leaders to congratulate Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the massive protests that followed Iran's 2009 elections.⁵¹ Before 2011, Davutoglu's ideology remained in the background as he pursued a policy of increasing regional trade, while keeping to his vision of the Middle East as Turkey's hinterland. Indeed, he contended that Turkey's role in the region had similarities with West Germany's Ostpolitik in Eastern Europe, which aimed to improve economic relations without questioning the legitimacy or territorial borders of communist regimes. Davutoglu was aware of the fact that Turkey had neither the power nor the opportunity to challenge authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Following his guidance, Ankara chose to overlook its vast ideological differences with such leaderships in service of increasing its influence.

Such pragmatism is also apparent in Davutoglu's writings from the 1990s, in which he describes Syria as both an oppressive 'Nusayri' (a derogatory name for Alawites) regime and 'one of the most important pillars of Turkey's Middle East policy'.⁵² He believed that, as long as Ankara did not have the ability to topple the Assad regime, it should seek to turn Syria into Turkish hinterland: 'the development of relations between Turkey and Syria, especially in the realm of economics, would enable Anatolia's overflowing potential to decisively penetrate the areas to its south, which are its natural extension'.⁵³ Davutoglu's belief that the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East could not survive in the long term led him to conclude that Turkey would have to change its relations with these governments if they threatened to collapse. In such a scenario, he argued, Turkey would be able to lead the Middle East by supporting the Islamic groups that came to power.

Davutoglu was convinced that Turkey's long-awaited opportunity came with the upheaval that began in Tunisia in late 2010, and continued into Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. His support for the overthrow of Middle Eastern dictators did not stem from a preference for democratic government, nor was he an ardent supporter of human rights, a free press or individual

*Davutoglu
was convinced
Turkey's
opportunity
had come*

liberties, given Turkey's poor record in these areas. Davutoglu argues that unity among the peoples and governments of the Middle East can only be achieved if political regimes derive their legitimacy from Islam. He believes that the Western model, whose legitimacy comes from elections, parliament and other representative institutions and mechanisms, is inadequate for the Islamic world.⁵⁴ Indeed, according to Davutoglu, 'the West has turned into a civilisation with a merely mechanical supremacy'.⁵⁵ He argues that 'humanism, which is claimed to be the source of Western civilisation, is nothing but a delusion', and that Western democracies are dangerous because they lack religious values to keep them in check.⁵⁶

In line with Davutoglu's views, Turkey supported An-Nahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria. As the Syrian civil war intensified, the Republic of Turkey opened its territory to fundamentalist armed groups for the first time in history. Along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, it provided these organisations with shelter, medical treatment and arms. Davutoglu persistently refrained from calling Jabhat al-Nusra a 'terrorist group', despite its connections with al-Qaeda, instead dubbing it an 'extremist group'.⁵⁷ Together with Doha and Riyadh, Ankara adopted a sectarian strategy based on a Sunni axis that opposed Hizbullah, the Assad regime, Baghdad and Tehran. Until then, Turkey had been able to maintain a non-sectarian stance, in stark contrast to Iran's approach of allying with Shia groups throughout the Middle East. After the fall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq's sectarian conflict reached unprecedented levels, and Turkey sought to remain on good terms with different religious groups, playing the role of intermediary. But an increase in sectarian violence in Syria caused Ankara to change tack. Although it is unclear whether this was a deliberate choice or the product of circumstances, Turkey became merely one party among many in a sectarian war that engulfed many Middle Eastern countries.

This shift culminated in Erdogan's May 2013 statement that '53 Sunni fellow citizens have been martyred', following bombings in the Turkish town of Reyhanli, and Vice-Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag's assertion that 'Hizbullah [the Party of God] needs to change its name to Hizbusatan [the Party of Satan]'.⁵⁸ In these new circumstances, 'zero problems with neighbours' became untenable.

Three years into the Arab Spring, it is clear that Davutoglu has failed in his strategy of increasing Turkey's influence through the support of the Middle East's once-ascendant Islamic parties rather than through the promotion of human rights, democracy and individual liberties. Turkey has become a participant in a Syrian civil war that, by June 2014, had claimed the lives of more than 160,000 people, and in the struggle for power in Egypt. Ankara faces problems with Tehran over the conflict, and its relations with Baghdad are in crisis.

In his assessment of the 1996 Turkish–Israeli security agreement, Davutoglu raised the prospect of Turkey's isolation in the Middle East:

No regional agreement can be advantageous enough to simultaneously offset the growing tension in Turkey's relations with Iran, Syria and Iraq. The concurrent onset of a tense situation with Iran, Syria and Iraq may leave Turkey faced with significant problems in both regional relations and security issues in the East. If Turkey finds itself alienated in the Balkans and the Middle East, it will become increasingly dependent on the US–Israel axis.⁵⁹

It is remarkable that Davutoglu's own foreign policy has had a similar effect. Today, Turkey has deteriorating relations with not only Iran, Syria and Iraq, as in 1996, but also with Egypt and Israel. This isolation has been defended by Ibrahim Kalin, Erdogan's chief adviser on foreign policy, as 'precious loneliness'.

* * *

One of the leading architects of Turkish foreign policy during the 2000s, Davutoglu was often portrayed as an advocate of peace due to his use of concepts such as 'zero problems with neighbours', 'soft power' and 'regional integration'. In reality, his interpretation of international relations as an unmediated power struggle has not been conducive to peace. Prior to the Arab Spring, his belief that Turkey needed to create a hinterland in order to be a global power led Ankara to establish close relations, and

to increase bilateral trade, with authoritarian regimes in Syria, Egypt and Libya.

As an adviser to the prime minister, Davutoglu's ability to implement his ideals was limited. After becoming minister of foreign affairs in 2009, however, he held the reins of Turkish foreign policy and attempted to turn his vision into reality. Turkey severed relations with Israel in May 2010, after Israeli commandos killed nine Turkish citizens aboard an aid flotilla bound for the Gaza Strip. The Arab Spring marked a turning point, and presented Ankara with significant problems. In 2012 Davutoglu said that 'if you will not change the world, if you will not have your say, then there is no point in practising politics or making foreign policy.'⁶⁰ He aimed to spearhead change in the region as protests erupted against the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East. He contended that the region would experience a shift similar to that in Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War, and believed that Turkey had a great opportunity to assert its leadership, especially after the overthrow of Mubarak and Gadhafi. In his view, Turkey could turn the Middle East into its hinterland by helping to empower Islamic groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.

Davutoglu's ambitious pan-Islamist vision dismisses the Arab nationalism, secularism and socialism that shook the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of his foreign policy, Turkey has participated in the Syrian civil war, and faces major challenges in its relationships with Egypt, Israel and Iraq. Three years after the Arab Spring began, it is clear that his assessments are off the mark, and that he was wrong in his judgement on the balance of power in Syria. As foreign minister, he has proved incapable of adjusting policy to changing conditions. For ideological reasons, he has been fixated on providing support to radical armed groups in Syria. His greatest mistake was to expose the huge gap between his ambitions and Turkey's capacity to achieve them. Davutoglu and his entourage do not see themselves as unsuccessful and responsible for these failures, as indicated by their references to 'precious loneliness'. But there is nothing noble about this isolation; instead of defending human rights or individual liberties, Turkey has pursued an expansionist foreign policy for ideological reasons.

More worrying than Davutoglu's failures as a policymaker is the fact that he does not see his critics as legitimate. Both he and his supporters believe him to be infallible, a dangerous conviction for an academic, let alone a politician. Critics are labelled as either 'conjuncturalist' (meaning that they have good intentions but are wrong) or 'ideologically blinded' (meaning that they are wrong and have bad intentions).⁶¹ Davutoglu's failure cannot and should not be considered Turkey's failure, as the country has many more assets than he acknowledges. A less ideological management of foreign policy would certainly improve its position in both the region and the world. Turkey should not be an expansionist power that seeks to dominate its neighbours through the application of archaic geopolitical theories or support for armed extremist groups. Instead, it should continue its progress towards becoming a secular and democratic country that respects human rights and individual liberties.

Notes

- 1 In using the term, Davutoglu cites references to works of German geopolitical theorists Karl Haushofer and Friedrich Ratzel, and '*Lebensraum*' also appears in German, followed in parentheses by the Turkish translation, in the index of *Stratejik Derinlik*. Ahmet Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Istanbul: Küre Yayinlari, 2001).
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- 3 Burhanettin Duran, 'Cumhuriyet Dönemi Islamciligi', in Murat Gültekingil and Tanil Bora (eds), *Islamcilik* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayinlari, 2005), pp. 138-44.
- 4 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Iç Siyasi Belirsizlikler ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Üzerine', *Aksiyon*, no. 78, 1 June 1996.
- 5 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Büyük Restorasyon: Kadim'den Küresellemeye Yeni Siyaset Anlayışımız', 15 March 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-ahmet-davutoglu-nun-diyarbakir-dicle-universitesinde-verdigi-buyuk-restorasyon-kadim-den-kureselles-meye-yeni.tr.mfa>.
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- 7 Ahmet Davutoglu, *Teoriden Pratige: Türk Dis Politikasi Uzerine Konusmalar* (Istanbul: Küre Yayinlari, 2011), pp. 317-21.
- 8 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Dünya Kuvvet Dengesi ve Ortadogu', *Bilim ve Sanat*, vol. 1, no. 6, 1986, pp. 9-14.
- 9 Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 51-2; Eyüp Can, 'Yeni Osmanlıcilik mi Yeni Türk Vizyonu mu?' *Hürriyet*, 5 May 2010.

- 10 Gearóid O'Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 11 Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 29.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 81.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 556–8.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.
- 16 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Daralan Bölgesel Kıskaç ve Türk Dis Politikası', *Aksiyon*, no. 81, 22 June 1996.
- 17 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Türkiye-Almanya İlişkileri I', *Yeni Safak*, 9 June 1999.
- 18 Davutoglu, *Teoriden Pratige*, p. 342.
- 19 Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 145.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 170.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 22 'Kaybettigimiz Topraklarda Bulusacagiz', *Habertürk*, 21 January 2012.
- 23 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), p. 299.
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- 25 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Sevr Senaryolari ve Lawrance Denklemi', *Yeni Safak*, 25 November 1998.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Yeni Dünya Düzeninde Misak-i Milli', *Aksiyon*, no. 69, 30 March 1996.
- 28 Davut Dursun, 'Türkiye'nin Yeri Islam Havzasidir', *Izlenim*, no. 14, 1994, pp. 5–11.
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- 30 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Çeçen Mücahidlerin Strateji Dersi', *Aksiyon*, no. 59, 20 January 1996; Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Kuzey Kafkasya Kapanında Rus Stratejisi', *Aksiyon*, no. 6, 14 January 1995.
- 31 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Sabit ve Ufuk Cografyalari Acisından Türkiye', *Aksiyon*, no. 89, 17 August 1996.
- 32 Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. 123, 317.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Dünya Siyasi Tarihi İçinde Ortadogu'nun Jeopolitik Onemi ve Dis Müdahaleler', *Bilim ve Sanat*, vol. 1, no. 8, 1986, pp. 46–7; Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Balkanlar ya da Tamamlanamamis Bir Tasfiye', *Islam*, vol. 71, no. 6, 1989, pp. 32–3.
- 35 Yazar, 'Yeni Ortadogu Düzeni ve Israil', p. 8
- 36 Andrew Finkel, 'Erdogan, the Not-So Magnificent', *New York Times*, 30 November 2012, <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/erdogan-the-not-so-magnificent>; Omer Taspınar, 'Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2008, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec10_taspınar_final.pdf; Delphine Strauss, 'Turkey's Ottoman Mission', *Financial Times*, 23 November 2009, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/o/af859474-d868-11de-b63a-00144feabdco.html#axzz348O6lL4T>; Michael Rubin, 'Shifting Sides?: The Problems of Neo-Ottomanism', *National Review*, 10 August 2004, <http://www.meforum.org/628/shifting-sides>.

- 37 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Yakin Tarihimizin Ana Akimlari ve Seçim Sonuçları', *Yeni Safak*, 23 April 1999.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Ahmet Davutoglu, '21. Yüzyıla Girerken Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu', *Cerçeve*, no. 17, 1996, pp. 62–8.
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- 41 Davutoglu, 'Çeçen Mücahidlerin Strateji Dersi'.
- 42 Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, pp. v–vii.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11, 33–4.
- 44 Davutoglu, 'Sabit ve Ufuk Cografyaları Açısından Türkiye'.
- 45 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Ortadoğu'nun Geleceği ve Türkiye'nin Dis Politika Alternatifleri', *Yeni Safak*, 7 July 1996.
- 46 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Fukuyama'dan Huntington'a Bir Bunalımı Ortme Cabası ve Siyasi Teorinin Pragmatik Kullanımı', *Izlenim*, no. 10, 1993, pp. 14–6.
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- 54 Ahmet Davutoglu, 'Uzun Süren Bir Savasın Arkaplanı', *İslam*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1986, pp. 24–5.
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- 57 Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 'Yazılı Soru Onergesine Yanıt', 26 July 2013, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/d24/7/7-18110sgc.pdf>.
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- 60 'Bekle Gör Politikasını Takip Etmeyeceğiz', *ntvmsnbc*, 26 July 2012, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25369304/>.
- 61 Davutoglu, *Teoriden Pratige*, pp. 31–2.

