TURKEY: ADDED VALUE TO THE U.S.A. AS A POWER BALANCER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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**Turkey: Added Value To the U.S.A. as a Power Balancer in the Middle East**   
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The balance of power perception in international relations was first developed by Hans Morgenthau[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn1" \o "). In his influential work, which is also considered the first major research of realist international relations theory «Politics Among Nations» Morgenthau considers the «balancer» as a constituent providing balance of power. Balancer, he argues, is not permanently identified with the policies of either nations or group of nations, its only objective within the system is to equate and put into operation the requisites of the power balance, regardless of tangible policies which the balance will serve.

Realist scholars in the international relation discipline in general argue that the international system thus far is anarchic because there is no world government above the sovereignty of individual states; therefore states are unitary actors in international relations. However «anarchy» doesn’t mean conflict, or chaos according to realist perception, rather it is an ordering principle[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn2" \o "). If we to look at the detailed analysis of realist theories regarding international politics we realize that it is pessimistic about human nature and behavior and conduct of states towards each other. Realists argue that, it is the power of states which determines the manners of activities among states and that the balance of power is what holds the regional and international systems in order and peace.

Realist perspective provides us some understating of the current developments in the Middle East. It is basically the increase of relative power of one country that destructs the stability and stillness in the region and the negligence behavior of the holder of balance to establish the peace and stability. Then the question to be answered is what are the obstacles that the balancer is facing preventing its ability to provide peace and stability process in international conflicts and specifically in the Middle East?

Morgenthau, provides us how states hold balance of power among themselves and the role of the most powerful states position especially in the regional conflicts. Morgenthau presents three possible ways that the balancer utilize in such situation; using power to restoring balance, providing peace through the use of inducements, and act according to objectives of its own national policy, benefiting from being the maestro of balance of power maintenance.

Recent developments is the Middle East and direct involvement of the U.S. in recent Middle East crises requires explanation because of the position that the U.S. hold in the world and in the region as the guardian of the new international order. Regional peace is important for the U.S. at least for two reasons; one is oil and markets and the second is whether to use hard or soft power against Iran to convince it to change its nuclear policies.

As the most powerful country in the world, the U.S.A. plays a key role position of balancer in the region. Previous administrations played this role more openly by creating a peace process between Israel and Palestinians. From Morgenthau’s perspective, it’s the U.S.A. national interest which redirects its policies to a position which is blamed to be as «double standard».

Looking at the U.S.A. involvement in the Middle East and the main obstacles for it to play an influential role in the current regional conflict, one could observe the following:

      1. Not having the cooperation of the different allies to achieve the promising results in terms of stability and conflict in Iraq after the invasion and collapse of Saddam regime.

      2. Paradoxical and double standards involvement in Israeli politics and its compromise policy yielding to Israeli government pressures[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn3" \o ").

      3. Perceiving the complexity of the issue as a conflict between state (Israel) and a non-state military organization (Hizbullah). In addition to their sever commitment in Afghanistan.

      4. A diverse and perplex impulse and strategy towards Iran and WMD (Weapons of Mass destruction).

Those are the immediate issues but not the sole ones that call for reevaluation of US foreign policy preferences in the latest Middle East Crises, however more can be found by opening the «black box» of the state and the institutions, as well as congress and presidency[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn4" \o ").

Developments in the Middle East are rarely a cause for optimism when it is perceived from the perspective of American foreign policy. Recent years have seen an almost unbroken series of setbacks and rebuttals to U.S.A. influence and prestige in the region. Critics, both within the U.S.A. and abroad, have assailed the administration’s policy, whether regarding the stagnating Arab-Israeli peace process, the eroding containment of Iran, or the protracted Iraqi security and political situation. Iran’s recent successful test of a medium-range ballistic missile and the devastating terror attempts by proclaimed Al-Kaida group have in turn highlighted the dangerous limitations of U.S. counter-proliferation and counterterrorism measures.

Even other theories such as liberalism (they would argue that the conflict is a result of the lack of cooperation among states against the aggressor, and the lack of effective norms to encourage cooperation among states) and constructivism (the conflict is a result of religious identities) which provides valuable explanations for the fact. The latter is a point that is worth investigating, however, the intention of this article is to evaluate the concept and the idea of «balancer» and to argue that the U.S.A. has weakened its position as a balancer in the region as a result of foreign policy preferences and should support an international response to solve the problem.

In his attempt to restore U.S.A. image and renovate his predecessor’s foreign policy, President Obama has so far hoped to reduce the U.S.A. involvement in this volatile region while still ensuring a strategy for peace and stability has thus far remained short of achieving the vital goals. Obama’s policy of relying without announced endorsement on a vital Turkish role in cooperation with Israel is strongly encountered by the obvious fact that at present Turkey is welcomed for such role but Israel is not. If coercion is to be considered then Turkey and Israel have no military alliance as such to impose cooperative power of balancing in the Middle East. They signed two defense cooperation agreements in February and August 1996. However, although the contents of these two agreements remain secret, they are believed to include protocols concerning officer exchanges, visits by military delegations, naval port calls, and access to training areas, joint air and naval training, cooperation in the areas of counterterrorism and border security, and defense industrial cooperation. In addition, Israel and Turkey are thought to have strengthened long-standing intelligence ties capable of detecting but not jointly executing. What is not known, however, is whether there are any provisions for joint contingency planning or war-fighting; a commitment that seems, at this stage, unlikely as well as unnecessary. Israel would certainly not want to be dragged into hostilities in Cyprus and Turkish public opinion would definitely not tolerate an outright alliance against its Muslim brethren.

Even without a full-blown military alliance and despite the deterioration in the Turkish-Israeli relations, however, Turkish-Israeli cooperation which is encouraged by the U.S.A. still carries important strategic value for the latter. Turkish and Israeli troops are not practically fit to be fighting together for the relationship to induce caution and restraint in their adversaries. The primary strategic objective of the Turkish-Israeli entente is to deter a war against either party rather than actually win one.

Turkey would gain little by openly supporting the Israeli war effort, which would make Turkey a target for Arab retribution and political censure. Turkey is therefore more likely to render assistance to the Israeli war effort quietly, providing intelligence, missile early-warning data, and refuge for damaged Israeli aircraft or warships.

**Restoring M.E. Balance of Power Trough Turkey**

The changing dynamics of Turkey’s relations with the West, arguably it’s most precious connection - economically, politically and strategically - is said to be triggering new foreign-policy activism in the Middle East and the Greater Black Sea area. On the one hand, Turkish-EU relations that have anchored Turkey in the Western political community and served as the prime engine of Turkey’s domestic transformation have been going through difficult times. While the Turkish government is criticized by certain EU leaders for failing to maintain the pace of democratization reforms, Turkish intelligentsia increasingly blame the EU for applying double standards and stalling Turkey’s membership process because of intra-European problems[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn5" \o ").

On the other hand, Turkish-American relations were disappointing following the invasion of Iraq and Turkey’s refusal to allow the United States to open a second front through Turkish territory. The downward spiral of this relationship was accelerated by the U.S. failure to address the threat to Turkey’s territorial integrity posed by PKK insurgents, who enjoyed a safe haven in Northern Iraq. The growing divergence between Ankara and Washington on regional issues became apparent once again during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, when Turkey limited the passage of American warships into the Black Sea in order to avoid a confrontation with Russia. Despite the improvement of relations under the Obama administration, serious differences of opinion remain on the Iranian nuclear issue, the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and how to deal with a resurgent Russia. At any rate, «Western orientation» no longer occupies the central place in Turkey’s international relations, as Ankara has deepened its ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors and realigned its geopolitical agenda with Moscow thus allowing it to become fit for a major balancing power role in the Middle East something that the U.S.A. favor despite all the differences between the two.

It is worth mentioning here that since Israeli commandos stormed a ship carrying aid to Gaza killing nine activists, the face of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan – the man who led denunciations of the raid – has been prominent on front pages and television screens across the Middle East. This bloody incident has led to a crucial change in the balance of power in the Middle East, greater than anything seen in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived the Arabs of their most powerful ally.

While Muslim states were always going to praise any leader who confronted Israel, Mr. Erdogan’s personal role is one that will have lasting significance across the region. With his leadership, Turkey is once more becoming a powerful player in the Middle East to a degree that has not happened since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War.

Turkey’s assertive new foreign policy is the product of a unique combination of factors: the reconfiguration of power relations in the international and regional systems, transformations in Turkish domestic politics, the agency and identity of the ruling elite, and public opinion.

**Systemic Power Transformations in Turkey**

Turkey’s role is likely to transcend well-established images and will be increasingly independent and assertive. From the Western perspective, Turkey will become a more active, capable and, in some instances, independent ally[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn6" \o "). The structural context of Turkey’s foreign-policy transformation lies in the shifting balance of power and the changing security perceptions of Turkey and its Western partners. Long-term power transitions in both regional and international systems have increasingly expanded Turkey’s relative economic and military weight in its surrounding regions. The military modernization programs that Turkey has undertaken in recent decades make the Turkish armed forces a strong deterrent in the Middle East and other regions that the Turkish security elite traditionally considered dangerous. For instance, Turkey no longer perceives Russia as a conventional threat and shows more confidence in its diplomatic maneuvers in the Caucasus. Similarly, a major factor that forced Arab neighbors to abandon their strategic negligence toward Turkey and end their support for the PKK was Turkey’s effective use of coercive diplomacy backed by military power.

The further Turkey moves from its alliance with Israel the better its status become as a balancer in the Middle East. The distance established in the Turkish-Israeli relationship started from within Turkey itself: Turkish public opinion. According to many commentators, Turkish-Israeli cooperation is flawed because it receives little, if any, support from the majority of the Turkish population. Most people have viewed Turkey’s move toward Israel as directed by the country’s political and military elite, the last bastion of the staunchly secular values of the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kamal Ataturk. Turkish society, they say, more traditional and religious, is opposed to a relationship they see as against the rest of the Muslim world. Most Turks sympathize with the Palestinian cause and have little, if any, fondness for Israel. Some observers thus put down the Turkish-Israeli entente as merely a «generals’ agreement» and, as such, as inherently unstable and unreliable.

There is some truth to this claim, as demonstrated by the electoral support for Turkey’s Islamist party, the Welfare Party, which was virulently anti-Israel and opposed to Turkey’s agreements with Israel from the beginning.

The Turks are optimistic that while their relationship with the European Union may be deteriorating, their relationship with Washington is improving as a result of their new role in the Middle East[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn7" \o "). Turkey’s close ties with Iran can undoubtedly be strategically important to the region. Turkey has also thus far done well in undertaking key social and political reforms in completing its required EU chapters.

When Turkey barred Israel from a joint military exercise earlier this October, there was a great deal of speculation about the seriousness of a rift between the two allies. Although the strategic relations between the two regional superpowers is critical to both nations it also transcends the bilateral benefits that Turkey and Israel individually derive from it, as their alliance is fundamental to the region’s balance of power and political stability. Turkey’s desire to further develop and sustain its leadership role in the region is directly linked to its ability to foster constructive relations with both Eastern and Western nations, including a non- contending status towards Israel which remains central to regional peace. The following four regional issues are integral to illustrate the significance of the Turkish role as a balancer in the region[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn8" \o "):

The ongoing negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France plus Germany) have reached an impasse and it is unlikely now that Iran will concede on the nuclear issue through this channel. Turkey shares with other Middle East states fears about Iran’s nuclear agenda, and will undoubtedly support any peaceful efforts to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power. But Turkey’s close ties with Iran can undoubtedly be strategically important to the region. The improved political and economic ties between Tehran and Ankara can enhance the prospect of Turkey playing a mediating role to dissuade Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons in defiance of the international community. There is no doubt that Turkey, as a predominantly Muslim state, is better received and will have far greater sway in Tehran than any Western nations. Turkey’s Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan can meet face-to-face with Iran’s supreme spiritual leader Ayatollah Khamenei who refuses to meet with Western officials and address some of the security issues at the forefront of the regimes’ foreign policy concerns.

Turkey can also play the unofficial mediating role by speaking privately and directly to the Israelis, Iranians, Russians, Europeans and Americans. Turkey’s own worry about a nuclear Iran can be mitigated by its ability to offer its good offices to all sides in this conflict. Moreover, Turkey can offer a more palatable venue than Russia to process Iran’s low grade uranium and convert it into nuclear rods for medical and other peaceful purposes. For all these reasons, the stronger the Turkish-Iranian relationships are, the more significant and positive role Ankara can play in becoming integral part of any solution to Iran’s nuclear program.

In 2008 Turkey mediated admirably between Israel and Syria, and brought both parties to a near agreement. There are absolutely no inconsistencies or contradictions between having equally good relations (not necessarily an alliance) between Turkey and Syria and Turkey and Israel. Being in good terms with Israel and Syria places Ankara in the enviable position to play a decisive role in any future talks between the two nations, as the solution to their conflict over the Golan Heights can be resolved only through negotiations. Maintaining equally good relations with all of its neighbors is a prerequisite to Turkey’s national aspirations that transcends the Middle East, as Turkey continues to eye European Union membership. The fact that the Netanyahu government wants to involve France in future negotiations with Syria should not preclude Turkey from future involvement, as Damascus insists on Ankara’s continuing its mediating role at a minimum side-by-side Paris.

The hostile relations between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority offer another critical area where Turkey is uniquely positioned to play a most constructive role. The prospect of making any significant progress between Israel and the Palestinians ultimately depends on a political agreement that governs the relationship between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. No negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority alone will lead to a sustainable agreement without the full direct or indirect participation of Hamas in the political process. Turkey was the first country that offered Hamas official recognition more than three years ago by inviting its leader Khalid Mashaal to Ankara, and there still exists trusting relations between the two sides to this day. Notwithstanding the importance of Egypt’s role in mediating between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority and the undeclared sensitivity of Egypt for stronger role of Turkey is not thus far an obstruction to Egypt’s efforts, by helping Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to reach a political understanding or by participating unofficially in talks.

Turkey’s desire to become an EU member hinges on many expectations, one of which Turkey’s standing with its neighbors. Turkey’s potential of becoming an EU member-state would make Iran, Iraq and Syria all EU Border States, which would have major implications to national security, trade and commerce. Turkey has thus far done well by signing a historic reconciliation agreement with Armenia, and is introducing major new legislations that will give its Kurdish minority equal political and cultural freedoms as any Turkish citizen. This most significant progress has brought Turkey much closer to EU standards, but will not be sufficient unless Turkey demonstrates both the ability and the resolve to maintain excellent relations with all of its Middle Eastern neighbors, specifically with Iran and Egypt.

Prerequisites of Turkey as a Balancer

Basing its foreign policy on the principle of «zero-problems with neighbors», Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) has embarked on several projects to achieve «limitless cooperation» with near-by countries. As Turkey became increasingly able and willing to play an assertive role in the management of security and economic affairs on its periphery, observers focused on two related aspects of its new orientation: Many of those good-neighbor policies, which developed momentum after the appointment of Ahmet Davutoglu, the architect of what some call a «brand new doctrine», as foreign minister in May 2009, frequently concerned foreign-policy activism in the Middle East. Also, while formulating its regional policies, Turkey has emerged as more self-confident and autonomous, and most important, has deviated occasionally from the transatlantic political agenda.

Turkey’s rising profile and ambitious agenda in regional affairs have elicited discussion of the causes of its realignment toward the Middle East. The debate, which is often centered on the provocative question, «Is Turkey shifting its axis?» is linked to a broader question: How will all these changes affect Turkey’s traditional Western-oriented foreign policy? While some observers emphasize the role of external factors in provoking these transformations, especially the patronizing behavior of some Western countries, others point to domestic forces, primarily the ideological leanings of the JDP and the growing conservatism of the public. They maintain that the difficulties in Turkish-Western relations are exacerbating religiously conservative and nationalist tendencies among the Turkish people, who in turn force their leaders to seek realignments elsewhere. Concomitantly, it is argued that the JDP’s ideological platform motivates the party elite to become an integral part of the Middle East when it comes to Turkish foreign policy. Another argument, in contrast, welcomes the transformation in Turkish foreign policy as a positive new geopolitical trend, attributing it to a novel strategic doctrine developed under the guidance of Davutoglu, first in his capacity as chief adviser to the prime minister and now as foreign minister[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn9" \o ").

**Turkey New Involvement in the Middle East**

It is important to explain why Turkish foreign-policy activism and its liberal agenda are being implemented largely in the Middle East. In the 1990s, the debate over Turkey’s regional role was mainly focused on the Balkans and Central Asia. Although Turkey refocused its attention on the Caucasus after the Russo-Georgian war and on the Balkans following Davutoglu appointment as foreign minister, the Middle East has been its main concern. This was epitomized by Prime Minister Erdogan’s walkout at the Davos economic summit over the Israeli war on Gaza in January 2009. This spectacular outburst plus Erdogan’s public embrace of Iranian President Ahmedinejad have sparked a debate over Turkey’s foreign-policy orientation, particularly toward the Middle East, which was traditionally an area where the republican elites avoided active involvement. Partly for ideological reasons, they wanted to accentuate the country’s break with its Ottoman and Islamic past and its reorientation toward the West. But ever since Turkey, in the late 1980s, started to become involved in the region, its role has raised questions concerning identity and whether Turkey might abandon its European vocation[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn10" \o ").

After reading the Turkey Analyst Journal beginning of 2009 to present[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn11" \o "), observers point to a series of developments; the JDP’s hosting of Hamas leader Khalid Mashaal in 2006, subsequent visits by the Saudi King and the Iranian president, Ankara’s position on the Iranian nuclear issue, and its attempts to forge economic and political ties with Syria and Iraq, as strong indications that Turkish foreign policy has been increasingly involved in the Middle East, reflecting the religious-conservative ideology of the JDP. They contend that the conservative identity of the ruling elite has become increasingly dominant in their handling of Turkish domestic and foreign policies, and that the reorientation toward the Middle East is yet another indication of the Islamization of Turkish society and politics under the JDP[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn12" \o ").

Turkey’s recent activism paradoxically signifies a geopolitical retreat. Compared to the grandiose rhetoric of the early post-Cold War period, the renewed drive for regional-power status has been more realistic and pragmatic. The broader geopolitical developments in the intervening period forced a reconsideration of Turkey’s areas of influence and its pursuit of this dual strategic identity, based on both cooperative security and Real-politick, within a more realistic assessment of the limits of its power and reach. The EU’s absorption of southeastern Europe and the stabilization of the region diminished Turkey’s relevance as a regional power in the Balkans. Turkey still exercises some influence over developments concerning Bosnia and other smaller Balkan countries; yet in this region it has already reached its limits[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn13" \o "). Similarly, it is difficult to talk about a proactive Turkish presence east of the Caspian Sea; due largely to Russia’s regaining its influence in Central Asia and Turkey’s limited access to the region. These transformations leave only the Middle East, and to a lesser extent the neighborhoods bordering Russia in the Caucasus and the Black Sea, for Turkey to play an active strategic role[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn14" \o ").

It is only logical here to assume that the changing Turkish foreign-policy initiatives in the Middle East stem from U.S.A. plans to withdraw from Iraq. This, along with the EU’s inability to play an effective strategic role in the region, sets the structural background for active Turkish involvement[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn15" \o "). A familiar combination of factors has facilitated Turkey’s move: a perceived security vacuum and the possibility that Turkey could serve as a conduit between Middle Eastern countries and the international system. It is no coincidence that Turkey uses the same liberal rhetoric of economic integration, institution building and cooperative security to advance its role in the Middle East. Among many possible examples, Turkey’s active contribution to the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon suffices to illustrate the similarities between Turkey’s involvement in the Middle East and its earlier activism in the Balkans and the Caucasus.  
This last point highlights the argument that the new JDP foreign policy is not the invention of a new strategic doctrine. Rather, it is the extension of a liberal economic and cooperative-security approach to a new region where realist concerns traditionally determined Turkey’s conduct. Even in the Middle East, one has to recall the regional policy promoted by former Foreign Minister Ismail Cem (served 1997-2002), who emphasized the greater use of cultural factors and Turkey’s multi-civilizational identity, along with reconciliation with the Middle East. He worked to initiate a dialogue with Syria and Iraq, as well as among the countries neighboring Iraq, and sought to make greater use of cooperative-security instruments. Though he failed in some of his projects because of adverse regional and domestic political conditions, these initiatives were promoters of things to come[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn16" \o "). Perhaps the JDP leaders can earn status for partially managing the security dilemmas in the region and fostering an environment conducive to using such preexisting ideas and instruments more effectively and on a more institutionalized basis. As such, they come close to realizing a thwarted objective of many of their predecessors since the 1950s who sought to reconnect Turkey with the Middle East.

**Turkey’s National-Interest Roots**

There are an interest-driven motivations and security concerns behind Turkey’s Middle East agenda. For example, the recent economic initiatives spearheaded by Turkey correlate nicely with its aspiration to become an influential actor in the region. The government’s desire to develop joint projects with neighbors, attract foreign direct investments, and gain access to new markets for Turkish exporters and contractors constitutes what one might call the geo-economic dimension of foreign policy[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn17" \o "). Ankara considers such flourishing ties as consistent with its new foreign-policy doctrine, which emphasizes avoiding disputes with neighbors and maintaining balanced relations with all stakeholders through multidimensional partnerships. This optimistic vision, not unlike the neo-functionalist foundations of European integration, is an outgrowth of the liberal tendencies in Turkish strategic thinking. As a result, Turkey acts as a «trading state» or a «benign regional power». Ankara’s emphasis on the advancement of commercial interests through mutually beneficial positive-sum policies reduces strategic competition and contributes to a peaceful neighborhood[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn18" \o ").

By considering Turkey’s activism in the Middle East against the backdrop of this growing economic emphasis, its new foreign-policy agenda can be better comprehended. Turkey has signed various economic and trade agreements, including energy deals, with Middle Eastern countries, especially Iran, Syria and Iraq. Considering Turkey’s ambitions to assert its role as an energy hub, deepening cooperation with Middle Eastern producers has a rationale of its own, independent of identity-related considerations.

Moreover, Turkey’s efforts to forge closer cooperation with the Middle East are driven by its immediate security vulnerability. The threat posed by the PKK still remains the most immediate issue shaping the thinking of the Turkish security elite[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn19" \o "). Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, while Washington maintained a hands-off approach to the threat to Turkey from the PKK bases in Northern Iraq, Turkey secured cooperation from Syria and harmonized its tactics with Iran, which also encountered security challenges in Kurdish-populated areas. After years of bickering with the Iraqi Kurds and the Baghdad government, Turkey has managed to establish a security mechanism, which the United States now supports with actionable intelligence, to coordinate the fight against the PKK. Although paranoia over the PKK has diminished, Turkey still has various security-driven reasons to remain engaged, not least to prevent the region from descending into instability following the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq.

**Turkey’s New Role Limits**

Some current discussions are concerned with the question; whether Turkey is pursuing «neo-imperial» policies in order to reclaim the Ottoman legacy. The JDP’s growing involvement in the former Ottoman realm leads many observers to label its foreign-policy doctrine «neo-Ottomanism.» Some understand this term as a metaphor for creating a sphere of influence, while others believe it connotes an Islamist agenda. Davutoglu and other Turkish leaders supply evidence to those who accept the neo-Ottoman interpretation. They frequently refer to historical and geographical imperatives that force Turkey to adopt proactive policies and assume a leadership role. For instance, Davutoglu has increasingly referred to Turkey’s «order-instituting» role in the surrounding regions. Nonetheless, he and other JDP leaders reject the neo-Ottoman term, preferring less controversial ones, such as «zero-problems» or «limitless cooperation» with neighbors[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn20" \o ").

In recent months, less ideological, yet more ambitious, labels have been applied to Turkey’s emerging international role, including that of regional superpower. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for example, included Turkey among the seven rising global powers. Especially energized by Turkey’s election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, JDP leaders too have been inclined to define Turkey’s interests on a global scale. In addition to attaching more ambitious objectives to Turkey’s regional role, such as economic and political integration with Syria and Iraq, the government has been seeking to assert itself as a facilitator in various disputes and to defend Islamic causes in multilateral forums. The scope of Turkey’s agenda is reflected in the frequency of diplomatic visits undertaken by Davutoglu, Erdogan and Gull. For instance, in a recent address at a conference that brought together the Turkish diplomatic corps from around the world, Davutoglu maintained that the scope of activism for Turkish diplomacy should be the entire globe. Revising a popular saying of Kamal Ataturk, he called for a «diplomacy of zone» rather than a «diplomacy of line», adding that this zone is the entire globe. He went on to vow that by 2023, the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic, Turkey should be among the top 10 economies in the world, and then, in addition to achieving integration with the neighboring regions and the EU, it should also be actively involved in all global affairs[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn21" \o ").  
Defining Turkey as a global power might be questionable, but Turkey is already a regional power; its actions can make a decisive difference in the security of the regional systems in which it participates. Turkey has also increasingly assumed managerial responsibilities in its neighborhoods by using both hard- and soft-power resources. Furthermore, Turkey can not only shape local political dynamics; it also possesses another property of a regional power: the capacity to challenge global leaders and deny access to extra-regional actors. This was the case in the Iraq War and the Russia-Georgia war, and now is also the case in the context of the Iranian nuclear standoff. Turkey reacted against the harsh American response to the Iranian nuclear program, not out of complacency, but out of concern over the negative implications of such a policy for the Middle East[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn22" \o ").

The real issue at stake is not whether Turkey is a regional power, as it already has the resources and the will. More relevant questions are, What form will this regional role take? and to what ends will this role be put to use?

The real challenge facing Turkish foreign policy may not be ideological, i.e., whether Turkey is changing axis, as much as it is a practical one pertaining to the capabilities-expectations gap. The JDP will face the test of whether the Turkish state can sustain its ambitious, multi-dimensional foreign-policy agenda and fulfill the many expectations created by its involvement in so many critical situations without overstretching both its material and human resources. A sphere-of-interest policy implies logical limits. Turkey does not have to interpose itself as a mediator in all crises; some are irresolvable or hopelessly protracted. Turkey also has to recognize that its hasty interventions may do more harm than good, complicating already complex local crises. Moreover, Turkey has to prioritize among its foreign-policy initiatives. As long as Turkey can create stability within its immediate periphery so as to advance Turkish national interests and can expand its global economic reach by penetrating new markets, JDP foreign policy will earn status in both the domestic and international arena. Overreaching, however, will strain Turkey’s resources and diminish its ability to influence external developments[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn23" \o ").

**New Turkey And The United States**

Since the Iraq debacle, there has been much talk about how to «save the Turkish-American strategic partnership». The Obama administration’s overtures to Turkey and his call for a «model partnership» during his Turkey visit in April 2009 inspired hopes that the parties could move past the legacy of the Bush era. However, a new model has not emerged, and «model partnership» still remains an enigma. Even Erdogan’s December visit to Washington did not produce any tangible results. To be sure, attempts under the Bush administration to repair the Turkish-American strategic alliance also failed. Despite signatures on «shared-vision» documents, the parties could not reestablish the partnership on sustainable foundations[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn24" \o ").  
Such a rethinking requires that American diplomacy toward the Middle East be based on a more realistic evaluation of how regional actors like Turkey view their security situation. Since congruence of interests is key to a successful alliance, the United States must take into account Turkey’s threat perceptions and interests. More important, this move requires that the United States redefine its role on the basis of an offshore-balancing strategy and allow regional-security dynamics to operate. Even after its scheduled withdrawal from Iraq, the United States will remain a major factor in the regional balance of power[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn25" \o "). Yet the key question remains: What strategy will it pursue? Already a readjustment is taking place in other regions, seeking to align American interests with the rise of China and Russia in East Asia and Eurasia, respectively. At the same time, the United States now plays a less significant role in European strategic affairs. The United States cannot manage security in all regions of the globe. And the recent American position on Turkey’s role in the Middle East reflects just such an understanding, for it is based on both an appreciation of Turkey’s stabilizer role in the region and a willingness to allow Turkey to assume managerial responsibilities, without dictating how Ankara should define its priorities[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn26" \o ").

**Future Challenges of Turkish Foreign Policy**

A major challenge facing Turkey’s efforts to assert its will in the region will be the government’s ability to manage domestic issues. Although the JDP has succeeded in maintaining its electoral support base, Turkish society is growing increasingly polarized. In an effort to address the country’s major problems, most notably Islamism, the Kurdish issue and the role of the military in politics, the government has initiated several reforms, with varying degrees of success. Some of these have fundamentally restructured the domestic balance of power and led to discontent among certain interest groups and ideological factions. The reshuffling of domestic power relations is one reason the transition period is likely to remain difficult. It is too early to predict the outcome of the recent «Kurdish opening», yet this program in particular could be troublesome, especially as the 2011 national elections approach, and might curb the government’s ability to play an effective role in the region. The sustainability of the new foreign policy is also threatened by the government’s inability to establish a healthy dialogue with opposition parties. Not only domestic policies but also foreign-policy initiatives have emerged as battlefronts in the confrontation between the JDP and its rivals. The JDP’s preference for controlled confrontation, rather than building bridges, will adversely affect the success of its Middle Eastern policy[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftn27" \o ").

[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref1" \o ") -    Hans Morgenthau, **Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace,**(1948) New York NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref2" \o ") -    John J. Mearsheimer,**The False Promose of International Institutions,** International security, Winter 1994/1994. Vol 19. no.3 pp. 5-49

[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref3" \o ") -    Alain Gresh, **Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and Their Impact on The Middle East**, Middle East Journal, 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 192.

[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref4" \o ") -    http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\_id=3506, And Daniel Pipes, **A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente**, National Interest, 50 (Winter 1997/98): 37.

[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref5" \o ") -    Dual Loyalties: The Bush Neocons and Israel available:

        http://www.counterpunch.org/ christison09062004.html

[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref6" \o ") -    Joshua Holland, in AlterNet, Available @ http://www.alternet.org/story/39235/

[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref7" \o ") -    Michael Eisenstadt, «Turkish-Israeli Military, Cooperation: An Assessment,» Policywatch, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, no. 262 (July 1997).

[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref8" \o ") -    Alan Makovsky, Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Turkish ‘Periphery Strategy?’, in Henri J. Barkey, ed., Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey’s Role in the Middle East (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1996).

[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref9" \o ") -    See Alan O. Makovsky’s contribution in Robert Chase, et. al., eds., **The Pivotal States: A New Framework for U.S. Policy in the Developing World,** (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref10" \o ") -   For a detailed discussion of the evolution of domestic debate on the place of Middle East in Turkish foreign policy from the perspective of identity, see Meliha Benli Altunisik, **Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East**, New Perspectives on Turkey, No. 40, Spring 2009, pp. 171-94.

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref11" \o ") -   Soner Cagaptay, **The AKP’s Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of Neo-Ottomanism**, Turkey Analyst, Vol. 2, No. 8, April 24, 2009, http://www.silkroadstudies.org/ new/inside/turkey/2009/090424B.html.

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref12" \o ") -   For extended scholarly treatments of the debate on «Middle Easternization,» see Tank Oguzlu, **Middle Eastemization of Turkey’s Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?** Turkish Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1 2008, pp. 3-20.

[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref13" \o ") -   Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, **Globalization and Its Impact on Turkey’s Security**, in Ali L. Karaosmanoglu and Seyfi Tashan, eds., **The Europeanization of Turkey’s Security Policy: Prospects and Pitfalls**, (Ankara: Foreign Policy Institute, 2004), pp. 1-24.

[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref14" \o ") -   As a side note, Turkey’s active role in Afghanistan seems to be the exception but one has to consider it in the context of the American military presence there. Without U.S. intervention and its aftermath, it would have been hard to imagine Turkey playing an extended role in the region.

[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref15" \o ") -   This logic also applies to Turkey’s opening to Northern Iraqi Kurds as well; since the latter view Turkey as their only feasible door to outside world, they are forced to normalize relations with Turkey.

[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref16" \o ") -   For more illustration on this poit refer to Kirisci, **The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy**.

[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref17" \o ") -   Ziya Onis, **Turkey and the Middle East after September 11: The Importance of the EU Dimension**, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Vol. 2, No. 4, Winter 2003, pp. 83-92.

[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref18" \o ") -   For a detailed review of different scholarly explanations of the causes of transformation in Turkish foreign policy, see: Kemal Kirisci, **The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State**, New Perspectives on Turkey’, No. 40, Spring 2009, pp. 29-57.

[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref19" \o ") -   An important mechanism through which Turkey’s involvement in the Middle East gained pace was the foreign ministerial meetings among the countries bordering Iraq. This platform served Turkey’s goal of addressing the challenges posed by the instability in Iraq, including the threat of the PKK. See Ali Balci and Murat Yesiltas, **Turkey’s New Middle East Policy: The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq’s Neighboring Countries,** Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 29, No. 4, Summer 2006, pp. 18-38.

[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref20" \o ") -   Davutoglu even maintains that those who insist on using this concept are ill-intentioned as they spread this concept to undermine Turkey’s new initiatives by presenting them as imperialistic moves.

[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref21" \o ") -   Analyses related to this idea are based on the Transatlantic Trends survey. The latest results, released in September 2009, identify a **Turkish enigma**, because, unlike the growing popularity of American policies in Europe under the Obama administration, Turks still remain skeptical of the U.S. role in international and regional affairs. Available at: http://www.gmfus.org/trends/index.html. These results corroborate the findings of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, released on July 23, 2009, which identified that although the election of Obama improved the U.S. image around the world, in Turkey along with other Muslim nations, U.S. favorability ratings still remained low. Available at: http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/264.pdf.

[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref22" \o ") -   The concept of regional power as understood here is based on Mohammed Ayoob, **From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order**, Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 53, No. 3, November 1999, pp. 247-60; and Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref23" \o ") -   Aware of the strains placed on the Foreign Ministry bureaucracy by the recent expansive agenda, Davutoglu initiated a reform of the ministry in order to increase the number of personnel and improve the quality of training. He is also seeking to convince the Cabinet to increase the resources of the ministry drastically.

[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref24" \o ") -   See the Forum **Major Powers and the Middle East**, Middle East Policy, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 2009, pp. 1-26.

[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref25" \o ") -   Saban Kardas, **Turkish-American ‘Strategic Partnership’: On the Way to Rejuvenation?**, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 6, No. 45, March 9, 2009.

[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref26" \o ") -   See the debate during a recent hearing at the U.S. House of Representatives, which was also attended by some Turkish speakers:**Turkey Hearing in U.S. Congress Sees Tension, Controversy**, Today’s Time, December 5, 2009.

[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east" \l "_ftnref27" \o ") -   Ziya Onis and Suhnaz Yilmaz, **Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era**, Turkish Studies, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 7-24.

**تركيا: قيمة مضافة للولايات المتحدة الأميركية كموازن للقوى في الشرق الأوسط**

كان Hans Morgenthau أول من طوّر مفهوم ميزان القوى في العلاقات الدولية. فهو، في كتابه البالغ الأهمية "السياسات بين الدول" الذي يعتبر أول بحث بارز في نظرية العلاقات الدولية الواقعية، يرى أن "الموازين" عنصر يؤمن توازن القوى.  
يناقش الباحثون في نظام العلاقات الدولية عامة أن النظام الدولي فوضوي بسبب عدم وجود حكومة عالمية متقدمة على سيادة الدول الفردية، لذلك فإن الدول هي عناصر وحدوية في العلاقات الدولية.  
غير أن "الفوضوية" لا تعني النزاع أو الفوضى وفق مفهوم الواقعيين بل هي بالأحرى قاعدة نظامية.  
ويؤمن لنا مفهوم الواقعيين فهمًا للتطورات الحديثة في الشرق الأوسط الذي يتلخَّص مبدئياً بزيادة القوة النسبية لأحد البلدان ما يؤدي إلى القضاء على الاستقرار والهدوء في المنطقة، كما إلى السلوك المهمل لحامي التوازن، ويحول دون تثبيت السلام والاستقرار.  
وعندها يبرز السؤال الذي ينتظر إجابة وهو: ما هي العقبات التي يواجهها موازن القوى والتي تمنعه من تأمين السلام والاستقرار خلال النزاعات الدولية وخاصة في الشرق الأوسط؟  
التطورات الأخيرة في الشرق الأوسط والتدخل المباشر للولايات المتحدة في الأزمات الحديثة في الشرق الأوسط تستلزم تفسيرات بسبب موقع الولايات المتحدة الأميركية في العالم والمنطقة كحامية النظام العالمي الجديد. وهي بصفتها الدولة الأقوى في العالم، تؤدّي دورًا رئيسًا كقوّة موازِنة للقوى الموجودة في المنطقة. وقد أدّت الإدارات الأميركية السابقة هذا الدور بوضوح أكبر عبر استحداث عملية سلام بين الإسرائيليين والفلسطينيين.  
في محاولة منه لترميم صورة الولايات المتحدة وإصلاح السياسة الخارجية التي انتهجها سلفه، أمِل أوباما بخفض مستوى تدخّل الولايات المتحدة في هذه المنطقة المتفجّرة من العالم، إضافة إلى مواصلة تأمين إستراتيجية للسلام والاستقرار ظلّت حتى الآن بعيدة عن تحقيق الأهداف الحيوية.  
إن سياسة أوباما، المعتمدة من دون موافقة علنية على دور تركي رئيس بالتعاون مع إسرائيل، يواجهها الواقع البدهي الذي يفيد بأنه من المرحّب به أن تضطلع تركيا الحالية بمثل هذا الدور بعكس إسرائيل.  
وإذا كان ثمة أفكار لجهة فرض دور كهذا فمن المعلوم أن ما من تحالف يجمع بين تركيا وإسرائيل وقادر على فرض قوّة موازِنة في الشرق الأوسط. وقد وقَّّع البلدان اتفاقيتي تعاون دفاعي في شهري شباط/فبراير وآب/أغسطس من العام 1996 كما يُعتقد أن إسرائيل وتركيا عزَّزتا روابط استخباريّة قائمة منذ زمن بعيد وقادرة على الرصد من دون تنفيذ المهمات بشكل مشترك.  
إلاّ أن ما ليس معلومًا هو ما إذا كان هناك أي شروط  تقف عائقًا أمام التخطيط المشترك لمواجهة الحالات الطارئة أو لخوض الحروب معًا. هذا الالتزام يبدو في هذه المرحلة بعيد الاحتمال وغير ضروري وإسرائيل لا ترغب بالتأكيد في الانجرار للقيام بأعمال عدائية في قبرص، والرأي العام التركي لن يتسامح مع أي تحالف صريح ضد إخوتهم المسلمين.  
حتى من دون تحالف عسكريّ تامّ، وعلى الرغم من تدهور العلاقات الإسرائيلية التركية، ما زال التعاون بين هذين البلدين، والذي تشجّعه الولايات المتحدة الأميركية، يحمل قيمةّ إستراتيجية.  
إضافةً إلى ذلك فإن القوات التركية والإسرائيلية ليست مهيّأة لتقاتل جنبًا إلى جنب وتفرض على أعدائها اتخاذ تدابير الحيطة وضبط النفس.  
ويبقى الهدف الاستراتيجي الرئيس للحلف التركي الإسرائيلي الحؤول دون اندلاع حرب ضد أي من الطرفين بدلاً من الفوز بحرب ما معًا. وستكون مكاسب تركيا ضئيلة إذا ما دعمت علنًا جهود الحرب الإسرائيلية وسيجعلها ذلك هدفًا للعقوبات العربية والانتقاد السياسي.  
لذلك، من المرجّح أن تقدّم تركيا المساعدة لجهود الحرب الإسرائيلية بصمت وتأمين المعلومات الاستخباريّة ومعطيات بشأن الإنذار المبكر من إطلاق الصواريخ إضافةً إلى تأمين ملاذ للطائرات أو السفن الإسرائيلية المصابة.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-added-value-usa-power-balancer-middle-east#sthash.Eo5u3OmX.dpuf