Neo-Ottomanist Diplomacy: The Turkish Geopolitics in Syria

Syrian and Turkish relations: the balance of a conflict in an uncertain regional system

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Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate on the relationship between Turkey and Syria in the light of the revolts exploded in Damascus and Aleppo on March 2011.
“Syria has always represented the prototypical hostile neighbor for Turkey”\textsuperscript{1}: ancestral political questions disturb the peace in the region, and now the revolt in Syria, that has caused serious problems at the borders with Turkey, exacerbates the tensions. Water shortage, PKK’s menace and the negotiation with Israel for the resolution of conflict in Middle East are the Sword of Damocles on the Syrian and Turkish heads. Borders between two states are constantly in a situation of conflict early warning.

This is a fundamental incipit to explain the historical, political and regional contest in which Turkey and Syria are included. The so-called Arab Spring, that involved Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, which governments were toppled and that was followed by Syria, caused changes and mutations not only in the regional contest, but also for the international system. Leaders and their influence collapsed in Middle East and in Maghreb, where populations ceased to give support to a long – suffered dictatorship: the figure of Bashar al – Assad, the young president who cultivated a populist and anti-western image, during the last year tottered different times, while revolt caused the murder of more than 9,000 people. The crisis is boiling, and the precarious equilibrium between two States is every time more difficult to maintain. In this contest, the force of negotiation and diplomacy is inescapable to resolve the situation, according also to the Hans Morgenthau’s idea: “diplomacy is an element of national power. The importance of diplomacy for the preservation of international peace is a particular aspect of that general function. For a diplomacy that ends in war has failed in its primary objective: the promotion of the national interest by peaceful means. This has always been so and is particularly so in view of the destructive potentialities of total war”\textsuperscript{2}. Turkish ideology in foreign politics, given off by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, could be included in this type of national interest, and matched with the recent Turkish activism in regional contest: it advocates zero – problems with neighbor, presents itself like a dove, and could be calculated in mathematical terms.

\textsuperscript{1} N. Tocci and J. W. Walker, “From Confrontation to Engagement: Turkey and the Middle East”, in Ronald H. Linden et al., \textit{Turkey and Its Neighbors: Foreign Relations in Transition}, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Covent Garden, London, 2012, cit. p. 39

The crisis with Syria stopped this peaceful approach and could infect the regional stability. The prosecutions and the destiny of the struggle is an exam of the Turkish power and stability in its Regional Security Complex.

This study is only a part of one more deepened analysis of Turkish relations in its area and in the regional panorama. It is an instrument to discover the role of Turkish power in Middle East, by comparing Turkey with other single state. Syria is one of these, which role and relations with Turkey could clarify the future of Turkey. It is a case study that speaks about a story, about the conflict against Syria, which had acceleration with the so mentioned Arab Spring.

**Instrument of an analysis: history, geography and security dilemma**

**a. A history of violence**

The history of Middle East is a process of distinguished national identity unified by same roots. History aids International Relations, and the study of strategy and security, to better understand how political process can occur and iterate itself. “Political scientist aimed to identify recurring patterns of state and sub-state behavior, and to make generalization about such classes of events reoccur. A particular war, crisis or alliance was likely to be read as an instance of a larger phenomenon. While political scientist were often concerned with explaining why an event unfolded as it did in a particular instance, they also tend to view historical cases as comparable”\(^3\).

Since from Thermopylae, Carthage and the Ancient Greece, its memoir crossed the process of western construction. And since the past, population from Middle East tried to penetrate in Europe: in 1683, for example, Vienna had to driven back Ottoman Empire. This process of infiltration, on both sides, gained the apex with the First World War and the destruction of Ottoman Empire, starting from Balkans. In 1914, Turkey had already lost almost all European territories of its Empire, while in the North of Africa Great Britain, France and Italy had constructed their colonial settlements. The erosion of the regional system, from the “external”, started with the

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First World War, which brought the birth of a new state - system. With the withdrawal of Ottoman Empire, more space for European expansionistic intention was created, also if traditionally Turkey was able to establish an active policy of alignment with Great Britain and France, and to contrast the menacing power of Russia. Sevres Treaty changed situation: Turkey became an independent but weak State. The war conditions imposed the creation of a Kurdish state, the handover of some territories to Greece and the imposition of the international control on the Straits Bosphorus. Syria was divided between Great Britain and France, which wanted to divide the region and put it under their own control, interested in Middle East in a colonial optic. USA and URSS, at that moment, were only a dream at the border. The situation in Turkey and the acceptance of the conditions of war created revolts, inflamed around the figure of Mustafà Kemal Pasha. The last possibility of finding a solution was gained with Lausanne Treaty, in 1923. Also if the colonial presence was less huge in Middle East than in Africa, a lack of power was created after the First World War and foreign powers seek to play a predominant role in the region: “it was in this period that the administrative and state - system was born”. In this period rivalry for the control of the borders was born between Turkey and Russia, a rivalry that influenced, by the time, the relationship between Syria and Turkey cause of the respective alignment during the Cold War era.

Middle East and Arabs country, during the history, are oppressed by the European diplomacy, unknown in this space characterized by different political and cultural tradition. Negotiations in this region failed and created intestine conflicts: religious and ethnic factious also nourished the enmities. The majority of states in Middle East are authoritarian, and war often is the product of the struggle between state and society and foreign policy. Turkey has a nationalist behavior in front of the other Arabs states, and its relations with Syria, Israel, Iraq and Iran suffered of different problems. In Turkey the anti-Arabism is widespread, for an ancient rivalry born during the First World War: Turkey “had betrayed the Arab world”. For this reason, it could be considered as a part of Middle East, but not as an Arab state.

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4 F. Halliday The Middle East in International Relations. Power, Politics and Ideology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

5 Ibidem

6 Ibidem
The formation and the behavior of the states in Middle East was not only a consequence of the spirit of westernization operated by Europe: Turkey, with Ataturk, was quite neutral in the period between the two world wars. After 1918, states in Middle East was an empty box, inside that there was the chance to create statuality and a government. Beside the Sevres’ Syndrome and devotion for the modern and European values (Almaniya), secularization, in particular in Turkey, was pregnant: \textit{Laiklik}, or \textit{Sekularizm}, was a political tendency to reinforce state, a new possibility to forge an ideology of social control. In Turkey this was possible with Ataturk’s government and its Caliphate. Turkey and Syria were pooled by the same destiny against the influence of foreign powers: as alternative to the foreign dominium, the Young Turks organized a revolt in 1908, while Syria became nationalistic since 1925. The foundations of the future Islamist movements were lay in this period as alternative to domain from the foreign countries. In conclusion, after the First World War, Middle East changed for disaster, secularization, nationalism, and the birth of new state - system, new social and political movements. Colonialism was only apparently weak, but the division in states (Tasqim) constituted a problem for the separation in a lot of entities that were a single identity.

With the Second World War, situation changed, but only in part: the political map remained unaltered, and the French and British domain ended. Domestic nationalism reinforced its power, and the anti-colonial clime was the other side of the face. With the Cold War, Russian and American power started to become important in Middle East, also if USA arrived in the region during ‘70s. URSS was friendly with Syria, Yemen and Iraq. With the death of Ataturk, in the 1938, Turkish situation changed: in international contest, Turkey was aligned with the West, in front of a previous neutrality: Ankara gave troops to Korea and in 1947 joined Truman’s Doctrine; Turkey had fear of Russia, for the contentious on the Straits; it faced with major space of penetration in the private economy, after a long period characterized by Kemalist government control. Turkey lived the Islamic opposition and was attracted in the spiral of the Arab - Israeli conflict. Syria experienced parliamentary government since

\[\text{Ibidem, cit. p. 133}\]
\[\text{Ibidem, cit. p. 134}\]
\[\text{Ibidem}\]
1949, but then a new authoritarian state was enabled to control: it survived since the end of the Cold War era, when international system seemed to change, and a renewal interest for history emerged. “In recent years, theorists working from diverse perspectives have become more open to history. This was partly due to the influence of the events. As Reus – Smit notes, this trend begins years ago with the end of the Cold War. It has been reinforced by the events of 9/11. Much like the break –up of the Soviet Union and the demise of bipolarity, 9/11 has compelled IR scholars to rethink central paradigmatic claims”\textsuperscript{10}. With an approach nearer to Westphalia order and to the structure of the global system, since this period, at the center of the analysis in International Relations go concepts like war, states, power and decision makers, but with a new interest for gender, ideology, domestic politics, culture, human rights and religion. Qualitative approach explains better the relation with these variables, by comparing two or three states and with the knowledge of little dimension. An other instrument is the relation between cause and effect approach that is often “married to the belief that social world is complex, characterized by path dependence, tipping points, interaction effects, strategic interaction, two directional – causality of feedback loops, equifinality and multifinality. It is not hard to see why a causes – of – effects view of causation, together with a belief in social complexity, makes qualitative research ripe for integrating historical approach”\textsuperscript{11}.

\textit{b. A geographic destiny}

Before the First World War, the concept of Middle East was quite different, as Alfred Thayer Mahan suggested and elaborated, realizing the strategic importance of the region and of its center, the Persian Gulf: it was the space comprehended between Arabia and India\textsuperscript{12}. Turkey and Syria are included by the major part of scholars in Middle East, term that wants to underline that also the approach of this research is first regional, than systemic. Geography constitutes one of the preliminary steps to understand regional approach. “The world we live in happens to be a diversified, highly partitioned space. The surface of the earth is partitioned in a great many ways:

\textsuperscript{10} C. Elman and M. F. Elman, op. cit., cit. p. 361

\textsuperscript{11} Ibidem, cit. p. 363

\textsuperscript{12} A. T. Mahan, \textit{The Persian Gulf and International Relations}, Robert Theobald, 1902
politically and physically, economically and culturally. The political divisions are the *raison d'être* of international relations; the variety of the different parts of the earth's surface is the *raison d'être* of geography. If the earth were uniform, well polished, like a billiard ball, there probably would not be any such science as geography, and international relations would be much simpler”. Geography is a potent factor of international relations: the explication of the geographic position, and the importance of the contest in which a state is lost, is fundamental for the knowledge of the regional panorama, that crosses international and domestic dimensions. These are mechanism that we couldn’t eliminate for the general discovery of the entire structure of the globe. In conclusion, it is not only data about a statistical and descriptive nature, but a deeper analysis of how states are influenced in their political decision by geography, and how much problems, like conflicts on borders, constitute an obstacle or an advantage for the states. The conflict between Turkey and Syria, nowadays, is also a conflict at the border, that are, during history, interested by movements and changes of territoriality: colonialism, agreements and decisions taken by western Great Powers, like Great Britain and France, internal and ancestral conflict between Israel and Palestine, are decisive and crucial for the peace in Middle East and between Turkey and Syria.

In the study of International Relation, analysis of variable is crucial: there are some dependent, that change every time we consider a different part of the globe or a different state, while geography and “physical environment, most fully described by geographers” is certainly the most stable of all many factors. The "geographical conditions "of a political phenomenon seem not only stable but also rather easily surveyable and measurable, at least in many of their components. For a real complete analysis we would interweave historical, geographical and political knowledge and type of analysis to better go inside the problem. “Geography studies the existing order, registers it in the simplified but convenient form of maps, explains the interplay of the physical factors (meteorology, topography, hydrography, vegetation, etc.), and describes the distribution of the population and the forms of settlement. History is a

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14 Ibidem
much more turbulent process. If it could be explained by geography, some stable principles could be worked out helping to understand the past and to forecast the future”\textsuperscript{15}. But geography and environment, as Gottmann, explains, influence the nationalism and the internal dynamics. “Geography is about the power. Although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy and administer space”\textsuperscript{16}. This is what Gearoid O’ Tuathail has written in 1996 about a new way to study geopolitics, defined as Critical Geopolitics, that was born during ‘80s “to investigate geopolitics as social, cultural and political practice, rather than as a manifest and legible reality of world politics”\textsuperscript{17}. It makes reference to the geopolitical imagination and representation of a state, to its foundational myths and national exceptionalist lore, constructing its theory not considering only the “outside” of a state’s boundaries, but reflecting on the interlinked dichotomy between “inside” and “outside” of these, if “domestic” and “foreign” contributes to draw a unique geopolitical frame. Critical Geopolitics, that is an innovative approach to study the real world, realized the importance of three elements, which are the geo-cultural, geostrategic and geo-economic dimensions of politics. As Putnam said, “it is best to begin a journey of exploration with a map”\textsuperscript{18}: it means, as Bonura Jr explained, that to comprehend the real representation of a nation or of a state, is better to use a map, that could be constituted by geopolitical lines (geo-cultural, geostrategic and geo-economic parameters). So, there is a “relationship between geographic knowledge, cultural identity, and political boundaries that provides the central mechanisms of identity necessary to discourses and practices of geopolitics”\textsuperscript{19}. This is only a point of departure for this research, because to discover the real essence of the world order (if there is one), it’s important to get inside in a regional approach to IR and to reallocate these new proportions of interpretation to a regional world structure.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibidem
\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem, cit. p. 2
\textsuperscript{19} G. O’ Tuathail, op. cit., cit. p. 87
This introduction about history and geography is necessary to analyze relationship between Turkey and Syria: in the permanent and hidden conflict between these two States live domestic variables, like different example of leadership and of governments, regional questions, like water and the terroristic menace from PKK, but also different alignments in international order, which inflame border. The problem of water originates also because the origin of Euphrates River is in Turkish territory, while Kurdish identity is historically oppressed. It’s a clear example of how history and geography determine international dynamics.

c. Turkish security dilemma: the unwelcome neighbor

If Turkey is a centrally positioned international player, as its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, stated, it isn’t a peripheral State: this statement has significant consequences in the Turkish strategic approach. “Davutoğlu and the AKP’s foreign policy strategists contend that rather than being peripheral, Turkey is a centrally positioned international player. For them, “Turkey is a country at the epicenter of the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, the center of Eurasia in general and is in the middle of the Rimland Belt cutting across the Mediterranean to the Pacific”20. The recent Turkish activism in foreign policy, since 1990 – 91, in Middle East and Black Sea horizons, has changed the perception about Turkish foreign position, that have changed more and more also in the last year, as Ziya Onis referred about Turkish “coercive regional power”. Threat of force and other confrontation tools had characterized Turkish foreign policy in this period, fact that is explained also by the last attitude in front of Syrian crisis. The seeds of this “national security considerations” were sown immediately after the October 1998 crisis with Damascus. The Adana Accords, signed by both sides, didn’t give chance to Syria that had to denied support to PKK and its leader Ocalan. Turkey, in return, supported policies normalization in the relationship with Syria, in order to apply low – politics agreements and confidence – building measures.

One of the seeds of crisis point between two countries is the different state system. In Middle East, with the presence of authoritarian states, scholars have to use concept like supremacy and power to analyze states, while the theory about Kantian peace is

quite difficult to apply. So the attention for strategic and systemic view is fundamental. We have to think on two different levels: on global system, composed by great powers and empires, and on interregional system, with a sub-systemic perspective that includes the Arab – Israeli conflict. The perspective of the analysis of foreign policy, birth in ‘60s\(^{21}\), is also useful in this sense. To study Middle East we could combine realism and theory of foreign policy, as Hinnebush and Ehteshami suggested: state in Middle East is dip in a plurality of external and domestic forces, in changeable contest. Realism helps to understand strategy in Middle East, but, for the analysis of the region, we couldn’t neglect sociology: “domestic contest, for foreign policy, is always something different from the simple concept of the internal functioning of the State”\(^{22}\). Middle Eastern “bloody border”, as Huntington said, could be studied by a northern and hegemonic perspective, characterized by themes on order and conformity, or by a perspective on minority group, anti-hegemonic, theorized also by Edward Said. An other type of theory is linked with model of leadership: it seems that are leader in Middle East, which can take decision, and it is evident in countries like Turkey and Israel is evident that the control by governor class is a little bit complex than the past. In particular, Ankara suffered from strategic choices by military class. Otherwise, foreign policy is always an interactive process\(^{23}\) and the concept of Grand Strategy aids to specify the security and non-security goals that a state should pursue and to define how military power can serve those goals. Turkey, in this sense, seems to be surrounded by enemies, so its decision to pursue Kemalist teaching “Peace at home, peace in the world” in the new approach of “zero-problems” politics by Davutoglu, is like a neutral position to avoid tensions. But the more active Turkish role in regional contest exacerbates from one side its security dilemma. When security dilemma lies on a regional dynamics about foreign relations, it means: “an increase in one state’s security decreases the security of others”\(^{24}\). Every time a state is in front of a security dilemma there are two crucial variables: “whether defensive weapons and policies can be distinguished from offensive one’s, and

\(^{21}\) F. Halliday, op. cit. p. 53

\(^{22}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 57

\(^{23}\) Ibidem

whether the defense or the offense has the advantages. But when defensive weapons differ from offensive ones, it is possible for a state to make itself more secure without making others less secure. And when the defense has the advantage over the offense, a large increase in one state security’s only slightly decreases the security of the others, and status quo powers can all enjoy a high level of security and largely escape from the state of nature.”

Another time geography return in the analysis: “technology and geography are the two main factors that determine whether the offense and the defense has the advantage. As Brodie notes, “on the tactical level, as a rule, few physical factors favor the attacker but many favor the defender. The defender usually has the advantage of cover. He characteristically fires from behind some form of shelter while his opponent crosses open ground. When states are separated by barriers that produce these effects, the security dilemma is eased, since both can have forces adequate for defense without being able to attack. Impenetrable barriers would actually prevent war; in reality, decision makers have to settle for a good deal less. Oceans, large rivers and mountain ranges serve the same function as buffer zones. Although geography cannot be changed to conform to borders, borders can and do change to conform to geography. Borders across which an attack is easy tend to be unstable.”

As Taliaferro stated, the distinction between offensive and defensive realism is fundamental at this step: the difference stay in the divergence on anarchy, and between neorealism and neoclassical realism about ideas on cooperation and anarchy, that are dependent variable: neorealism seeks to explain international outcomes, and it is a theory that builds upon a few competitions about the international system and the unit that it comprises, without predictions. In neoclassical realism we find foreign policies strategies of individual states, with probabilistic predictions: it rejects the injunction that theories ought not to include explanatory variables at different level of analysis. In the defensive realism, with security dilemma “a state increase its security and decrease the security of others”, so there are some incentives for interstate to conflict or to cooperate. Also Mearsheimer speaks about

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25 Ibidem, cit. p. 184
26 Ibidem, cit. p. 189
28 Ibidem
security dilemma, offensive and defensive realism: “great power maximize their relative powers, in a never – ending struggle”\textsuperscript{29}. The main concepts are “animus dominandi”, “hegemon”, and “potential hegemon”. Snyder underlines the differences between the conception of State in Waltz and Mearsheimer: for the first they are satisfiers, less fearful, more accepting of risks, more willing to live with only a modest amount of security; for the second, “striving to attain security from attack, states are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others”\textsuperscript{30}. When there are competing units, states try to preserve status quo. Geographical variable are obviously important: in this case border constitute pregnant element, and the example of relationship and security dilemma between Syria ad Turkey is more evident in this sense. Also migration policy becomes a tool for states to exercise their national interest. Migration and human mobility influence three core areas of state power: economic, military and diplomacy. Beside, Syrian refugees escape in Jordan, and the military operation at the borders between Turkey and Syria are quite dangerous for the maintenance of peace in the region, for a status quo just compromised and for Turkish security dilemma. As Montgomery stated, “offensive realism and defensive realism therefore underestimate and overestimate, respectively, the possibility of overcoming uncertainty and the security dilemma”\textsuperscript{31}. As conclusion, Turkish position in the Middle East subsystem is an important element for itself security options, comprehended in an interacting strategic environments, menaced on regional level that, on its own side, is supported and rippled from international system\textsuperscript{32}.

\textbf{Turkish – Syrian relations, the region and the international asset}

After the Berlin Wall’s fall and the end of URSS the complete international structure


\textsuperscript{30} Ibidem, cit. p. 155


\textsuperscript{32} A. L. Karaosmanoglu, “Turkey’s Security and the Middle East”, in \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Fall 1983, pp. 157 - 175
of alliances and the world polarization changed: it means not only a turn over in the ideological reference point, but also a complete realignment of the states in the great geopolitical play. And a similar shift occurred with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which had triggered the global war on terror. “Cold War geopolitics could be dead, but struggle over space and power are more important than ever in the world of globalizing economies and instantaneous information”\(^{33}\). A new scenario has been opened in the great power’s landscape, and the equilibrium for countries in the same continents, or in the same atlas, has been upset. There are no more ideologies polarized by the two ancient blocks (USA and URSS), but new geopolitical coordinates that are linked with geo-cultural, geostrategic and geo-economic dimensions. World is not divided into areas such parts of the same globe, but we could consider the Earth as a globalized entity organized so strong on a regional basis. We could speak about boundaries, but not in reference to regions: “if regions have boundaries are usually vast grey areas that vary in tones and shades rather than black and white”\(^{34}\). Turkey and Syria could be included in Middle East, even if some scholars define Turkey as an interregional state, in a geographical space between two or more realities, like Europe, Middle East and the so – called Eurasia. To define regions there are some criteria: physical proximity and separateness, interdependence and homogeneity. Geographers before improvements in transportsations and communication made physical barriers such as rivers and mountains less important relied on indicators of physical proximity and separateness most heavily. But it’s important to consider that spatial definitions of regions are not enough. It depends on the fact that “physical indicators of separateness are inadequate for defining regions because pure physical space and physical boundaries are less important in today’s world”\(^{35}\), and same problems exist for the others indicators, because, for example, speaking about homogeneity, a large number of variables fit within this framework: similarity of values, of economic systems, of political systems, of way of life, of level of economic development and so on. So it’s important to find a clear approach, with an attention for the multi-level governance and for functionalist theories, which could

\(^{33}\) G. O’ Tuathail, op. cit., cit. p. 2


\(^{35}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 482
integrate globalization and realist basis on ideology, also if Realism could be see as an oxymoron.

But why study regions? Because regionalism is a strong force in the world today, and it represents a dynamic included between a comprehensive, if not homogenous, globalization and the more restricted forces of nationalism. This research deals with Turkey, its regional security complex and its relationship with Syria: we can include Turkey in Middle East, or in Europe, or in Central Asia, because of its nature of insulator state. Probably in Middle East and in Central Asia states are going to play the new battle for global power. Furthermore, in this atlas, there are many variables which open a great challenge: political fragmentation, weak system of government (in particular democracy), huge nationalism, widespread Arabism and shared Islamism, even if with different currents and confraternities, don’t give chance to really define the entity of region and to detect the conflicting forces that could threaten the stability of regional complex. Middle East, in fact, is an undefined atlas, nearly shifty and fluctuant, but not inconsistent and abstract. It could be included in other various continents, such as Eurasia, or Maghreb, or Far East, and this is because of the peculiarity of every single State that composes this puzzle area, and for the differences that stands inside the same states, with various ethnics and nationalism. In conclusion, Middle East is an intricate region, in which mechanisms work like dominos, in a game influenced by the force of great power, by the counterbalance of regional forces and by the internal factors that constitutes a net crossing fictitious state’s boundaries. Besides, nationalist, religion and ethnicity strongly permeate the Zeitgeist of this conflicting slice of world: “the decade that followed after the collapse of communism has been marked by remarkable outburst of nationalist violence, most notably, but far from exclusively. Despite the Gulf War, it is becoming increasingly clear that the importance of inter-state war is declining while that of nationalist conflict is increasing”. The key is to discover what is the real weight of this cultural fault lines and to investigate on the real possibility that these soothed conflicts are a menace for stability of the region. Turkey, in this contest, is included for its attempt to impose its leadership, and it could have a main and driving role for the rest of the


region in the conflict resolution.

Syrian and Turkish destiny is linked by unresolved questions: the presence of the PKK, the negotiation for the conflict with Israel, and the scarcity of the water in the region are only the main problems that trouble the two States. The regional contest in which they act is as much complex. Turkey lives in an unending security dilemma, surrounded by other regional powers, like Iraq, Iran, and Syria itself, which constitute its major enemy in foreign policy: “after the 1979 Iranian revolution, (…) relations were strained over the two issues lying at the heart of republican Turkey’s security dilemma: political Islam and the Kurdish question”\(^{38}\). It means that the changes in security and political realms “had formerly poisoned the relationship”\(^{39}\) between Turkey and the other states in the region. Relations between both countries were traditionally characterized by persistent conflict. Examples of this tension could be expressed by the October 1998 crisis, but the most notorious was the confrontation between the two countries in 1956, when Syria merged with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic. It was an ideologically and military struggle, with troops amassed against each other. The conflict was persisting throughout the Cold War, and worsened in the post-Cold War especially for Syria’s support for PKK terrorism, the sharing of the waters of the Euphrates, Turkey’s relations with the Arab world and the negotiation with Israel. The relations between the two States, during the past years, gave the chance to the realization of important agreement on different issues: Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister, from his settlement in May 2009, went in Syria beyond sixty times for diplomatic missions in less than two years. Between the Summer 2007 and 2008, besides, Turkey undertook many actions turned towards the signing of a real peace agreement between Syria and Israel. During the Autumn 2010, Syria asked Turkey to give an forceful recovery of the process interrupted in the Summer 2008 but, in reality, the first strikes in Daraa Square were certain and the huge repression committed by Bashar al-Assad’s regime for the contrast of the strikes damaged rapidly the Turkish – Syrian diplomatic relations. Ankara censored in all bases the action by Alawi’s regime and interrupted, finally, military furniture in favor of Damascus. Subsequently Turkish government, with the Conference for Change in Antalya, between May 31th and the June 3th 2011, offered to Syria and to the

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\(^{38}\) N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. p. 36  
\(^{39}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 37
opposition the chance to give voice to its own dissent. In the following August 23th, the main political base of the opposition of the regime, the Syrian National Council, was born in Istanbul.

This gradual approach by Turkey to the forces of opposition to Syrian regime and the interruption of the diplomatic relations with Syria provoked huge tensions between Ankara and Teheran. On the October 9th 2011, Rahim Safani, ex Commander-in-Chief of the Guardian of the Iranian Revolution (Pasdaran) menaced Turkish government publically. His declaration was furiously addressed against the protection of the Turkish regional power, against the Turkish linkage with NATO and against the process of secularization promoted by Ankara in front of Islam. The Islam Republic has always suspected of the Turkish cultural and intellectual influence, because Ankara is able to influence different Arabs and Islamic States.

Middle East is a region enriched by ancestral tensions, probably exacerbated by colonialism, influence from the great powers, Islam and intestine conflict. If we consider Turkey as a state from Middle East, it is included in a mishmash of conflict with the identities: “rarely do a state’s foreign policies undergo such a dramatic transformation as Turkey’s Middle Eastern policies have in the twenty-first century. A cursory comparison of Turkey’s policies toward Iran, Iraq, Syria and Israel and Palestine between the 1990s and the 2000s clearly brings this sea change to the fore”\(^{40}\). The analysis about negotiation the diplomacy between states like Turkey and Syria is so fundamental to discover how the equilibrium is changed.

One of the most important statements in Turkish foreign policy is “peace at home, peace in the world”, promulgated by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk: it is only an attempt to defend Turkey from the foreign enemies, which are its neighbor. “The idea that Turkey is surrounded by its enemies has determined not only the paradigm but also the habitus of Turkish foreign relationship. A Turk has no friend other than a Turk.”\(^{41}\).

But we can’t affirm that Turkey had suffered, during last decade, of the lack of foreign policy, as Aktay expressed, because, also for a defensive aim, Ankara has taken a choice to stay behind the decision and near to USA and Israel, and, also with a weak diplomacy and domestic government, against the Arabs country. Besides, the

\(^{40}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 35

Turkish dream to become a region power in Middle East was cultivate from Ataturk’s empire. Also Ahmet Davutoglu, in his Strategic Depth, had showed his perspective on the return of Turkey in foreign policy: “he stated that Turkey should not be imprisoned within limits of geography surrounded by enemies on all sides”\(^{42}\). For this, zero sum game is the most preferable approach for Turkish foreign policy: “especially when the formula is applied to threefold relationships such as Turkey – Iran – United States or Turkey – Syria – Israel maintaining a relationship with Israel does not have to work against third parties such as Palestine, Iran on the Arab World, or vice versa. Maintaining relationship with all parties could alternatively be considered an opportunity for transforming a poor situation into alternative policies. Maintaining bridges is the best channel for the political itself”\(^{43}\). As stated by Bulent Aras\(^{44}\) “Davutoglu developed his foreign policy on the basis of a novel geographic imagination, which put an end to what he calls the alienation of Turkey’s neighboring countries. One essential component of Davutoglu’s vision is to make negative images and prejudices, particularly those pertaining to the Middle East, a matter of the past. This shift has enabled Turkey to completely foreign policy from chains of the domestic considerations”. The Turkish strategic depth, as stated by William Hale, derived from its geographical position, had hitherto failed to exploit, while should develop an active engagement in the regional political system, in the three area of Middle East, Asia, the Balkans and Transcaucasia\(^{45}\).

Turkish foreign policy could be described like a Pax Ottomana, since the advent of the father Ataturk: Turkish geographic position, near to Mediterranean Sea and at the core of Eurasia, bridge on Europe, and in the contest of Middle East, gives to Turkey an integration into a basically, pluralistic, secular and globalized international order\(^{46}\). It is the 17\(^{th}\) economy in the world, with Brazil, China, India and Russia. After the rejection to enter in European Union, it joins the Arab League. In the domestic policy, the ruling party’s policies remain essentially nationalist, Turkey – centric and

\(^{42}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 72

\(^{43}\) Ibidem, cit. pp. 72- 73


\(^{45}\) W. Hale, “Turkey and the New Era in the Middle East”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, n.3, 2009, 144

commercially opportunistic. The AKP drives country with ideological roots in
Islamism, but it doesn’t have an Islamic agenda. Turkey has a pluralistic political
culture: in 1990s there were a weak government, three - digit inflation, open military
interference in politics and the vicious conflict between Turkey’s armed forces against
Kurdish insurgents. Then revolutionary changes occurred: between 1999 and 2002 a
broad left – right coalition government oversaw remarkable reforms, like one – third
constitution, human rights legislation, end of capital punishment, expansion of woman
rights, freedom of expression and civil rights. “The Middle East dimension of
Turkey’s new policy has attracted much debate and caused some concern in the
West” 47. Also if Davutoglu spoke about “settlement of attack”, Iran, Iraq and Syria
are sources of terrorist menaces, political subversion and regional destabilization. In
2009, a new border crossing between Turkey and Syria was inaugurated. Irrigation
problems remained and the ancient link between Syria and Turkey with their railway
from Hejaz is like a weak dream, only an important hub: from Turkey there is also
visa requirements, also if the economic innovation and liberalization crosses toward
Syria and Egypt. Turkey could be a beneficiary of any economic opening in Syria,
since 1998, when the two economies converged, but between two states there is a long
– standing divergent political interests.

Syria, from its side, continues to claim the Turkish province of Hatay, which is
Turkish for the 40%. The exacerbation of relationship occurred for the water problem:
Syria is implacable in the opposition to Turkish control on Euphrates water 48. Others
questions are constituted by the Turkish involvement in Arab – Israeli conflict, and
their different alignment in international alliances. Russia was a threat, while Turkey
occupies a peripheral area of Heartland. Soviet – Syrian alliance is also a worrisome
development for Turkish strategic planners. For this reason, Turkey acts at the same
time decisively and cautiously 49. With the idea of Peace at home, peace in the world,
“Kemalist principles eliminate the theocratic remnants of the Ottoman Empire and to
develop a secular political structure. Despite its religious and historic affinity with the
nations of the Middle East, modern Turkey preferred not to show much interest in the

47 Ibidem, cit. p. 165

48 L. G. Martin and D. Keridis (eds.), The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004

49 A. L. Karaosmanoglu, “Turkey’s Security and the Middle East”, in Foreign Affairs, Fall 1983, pp. 157 - 175
region and especially in the Arab world, although it tried to maintain friendly relations with all its neighbors\textsuperscript{50}. Probably this past Turkish attitude to not intervene in the region situation or to maintain status quo was suggested by the not more solid domestic situation: governments in Turkey were weak, characterized by frequent military coup, and this political situation didn’t give possibility to act as regional power. Now some things are changed, and Turkish behavior is like a catch - all party, but also a state that wants to impress its decision in regional relations.

Syria, as Jordan and Lebanon, is a mosaic of network of urban center, lined up long the ancient way of the commercial traffic, instead of the nowadays states, weak structured with scattered population. It is in the heart of Mashreq, like Uzbekistan is for Eurasia: an historical crossroads between Egypt and Mesopotamia, crossed by Silk Road and the Hejaz Railway, this latter an ancient symbol of the whole Arab world, of a link between Turkey and Syria, now abandoned. Latakia and Tartarus are peaceful harbor of Mediterranean Sea. Turkey is, historically and geographically, the bridge for Europe to the main danger zone comprehended between Syria, Iran and Iraq, in an optic of the western strategy country – to – country. Now, with the so - called Arab Spring, the crisis is widespread and the uncertainty for the future is high. If Geopolitics gives life to states, it is necessary to consider the interests that guide these births.

The presence of Sunni and Shite is fundamental to understand the Syrian dimension, like also the Hezbollah, which are defined as “a state in a state”. In a domestic dimension, leadership by Hafez and Bashar al Assad are a huge inheritance for the State and a binding variable to understand the movement of Syria in Middle East and its behavior with an important and powerful neighbor like Turkey: “in Syria, stability is guaranteed by a political class which is interested in not to concede freedom and democracy”\textsuperscript{51}. Baathist Socialism rules Syria, transforming country in a governable and unified state. Bashar al – Assad chose to stay with Alawi, and purged the Baath Party together with the security service. Turkey and Syria are divided even on the front of the alliances in the international contest: Ankara stayed, more during the Cold War, with West, and only with the Iraqi War on 2003 and with the non – accession to EU, now tries to become more independent from the Western influence. Turkey is a

\textsuperscript{50} Ibidem, cit. p. 162

long-standing USA ally and staunch member of NATO. Its role is pivotal for Middle East, but also in an international view, fundamental also for the defense of Europe. In the first years after the II World War, Turkey was an Islamic country with a democratic government. It received Truman Doctrine, for the containment of Middle East, and the Marshall Plan. A bridge also on the Black Sea, “Turkey would play an important part in the defense of the West”, a deterrent against Soviet attack, as well as military and economic assistance. Bosphorus Straights are an important piece for the strategy in Turkey. “In the past, Turkey has appeared increasingly reluctant to allow the United States use of its territory as a staging ground in non – NATO contingencies”. Syria, on the contrary, is a faithful ally of Russia, and it is evident also after the veto from Moscow inside United Nations to intervene to arrest the last conflict and violence in Syria. Like Iran, it was considered a “rogue state” by American administration.

In a regional perspective, Middle East live in an “autonomous level of security”, despite from the imposition of the global level, while its Regional Security Complex (RSC) is a clear example of conflict formation. In its space, three sub-complexes coexist: two main centered respectively in the Levant and in the Gulf, and a considerably weaker ones in the Maghreb. The first sub-complex, for example, is which one of Israel and Palestine, that creates a perennial struggle. “All of these define a strong set of rather Westphalian – looking interstate (in)security dynamics at regional level”. While from one hand territorial disputes are considerable and evident, security interdependence of Middle East could be explained in terms of simple ethnic and religious formula: for example Arab Syrian are aligned with non – Arab Iran. The situation is generated also by the insecurity of ruling elites and by the nature of postcolonial modern states. Another element of destabilization is often generated by the relationship between clan, tribe and religion. Turkey feels the effect of its geographical position, being an insulator country. Besides, as Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey is distinguished from others country in the region, because it was never colonized.

52 B. R. Kuniholm, “Turkey and the West”, in Foreign Affairs, Spring 1991, pp. 34 - 48

53 Ibidem

54 B. Buzan, op. cit. p. 187

55 Ibidem, cit. p. 193
The Turkish involvement in the Middle East was clear since the 1990s, but has changed during the last years. “Turkey’s military ties with Israel, its coercive pressure on Syria, and its participation in Western sanctions against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq largely framed within a realist understanding of the Middle Eastern balance of power.”\textsuperscript{56} Peace and regional integration are at the first place in Turkish political philosophy, and it presents itself as a mediating power in the region. The change in the relationships with USA defined a new space for maneuvering for Turkey in the region.

A symbolic event in the history of relationship between Turkey and Syria was in 2000, when Turkish president Necdet Sezer attended the funeral of former Syrian president Hafez al – Assad in 2000. “With that gesture by the Turkish state, followed by friendly overtures by the ensuing AKP governments, the scene was set fort the historic visit by Syrian president Bashar al – Assad to Turkey in January 2004”\textsuperscript{57}. Tensions were eased and Syria declared that it wants to become a bridge for Turkey on the Arab world, while Turkey had to transform itself in a door for Europe. From then, bilateral free - trade agreements were stipulated, while the Iraqi war in 2003 constituted a deterrent to prosecute toward peaceful relationship, and Syria remained isolated. Now Turkey is in a new position in the middle of its neighbors, and could become the key not only for Kurdish problem, but also for insurgency in the Arab Spring. Syria is aware of this Turkish potentiality, in particular for the capacity of Turkey to foster relations with all parties through bilateral relations, but also to take advantage from the developing and independent economy of its neighbors: this is a process that could stabilize the region and create a more engaged net of relations between states.

The 1998 crisis: PKK’s threats and the water controversy

A first Turkish – Syrian crisis erupted in October 1998: it was a landmark in the post – Cold War Middle East policy\textsuperscript{58}. On October 1998, Adana Accords signed the end of

\textsuperscript{56} N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. pp. 35 - 36

\textsuperscript{57} Ibidem, cit. p. 40

the struggle. The core of the agreement dealt with the no-support from Syria to PKK: Syria recognized the PKK as terrorist organization and had to expel Ocalan, to arrest its militants, to cease to give economic support to them and to extend cooperation with Turkey against PKK.

After and before the Cold War, Turkey was menaced particularly from south, the north and the southeastern, by different threats: collapse of Soviet Union, preservation of neutrality in Arab – Israeli dispute, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, myriad religious ethic and border conflicts, and last, but not the least, the presence of PKK. This terrorist organization had different roots: from inside, from an economically undeveloped southeast region in an effort to carve out an independent Kurdish state also if it was not supported by the majority of Kurdish population in the west of Turkey; and from outside, because PKK is supported by regional neighbors in various degrees to extract different concessions from the Turkish State. Otherwise, diplomacy has been the preferable instruments in foreign policy to tackle threats and to mitigate tensions. “As the primary supporter of the PKK, Syria has always been the focal point in Turkish post – Cold war strategy”.

Abdullah Ocalan was in Syria since 1979: “Syria provided financial, military and logistical support to PKK, hosting its headquarters and training camp”. Turkey has to struggle the ancestral solidarity between Arabs against itself. According to Ankara, Syria uses PKK to pressure it to be more forthcoming about the waters of Tigris and Euphrates rivers, both originating in Turkey. In fact, the second problem in the relationship between Turkey and Syria, beside the presence of PKK, is water. Jordan is the most moderate State against Turkey in order to water problem: water shortage, in fact, is a plague for Middle East. In the region, alliance between Syria, Greece and Russia and against Turkey is strong: Moscow permitted the third meeting of the Kurdish Parliament in exile. On 23th January 1996, “Turkey charged Syria with having engaged in de facto aggression by supporting the PKK and self-defense measures against Syria, as art. 51 ONU stated”.

According to Economic Cooperation Protocol, stipulated on July 17th, 1987, Turkey had to release at least 500 cubic meters of water per second to Syria. Syrian fear was...

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59 Ibidem
60 Ibidem
61 Ibidem
62 Ibidem
about the development of southeastern Anatolia, a project for agriculture and industry
with 21 dams and 17 hydroelectric power plants on the Euphrates and Tigris and their
tributaries during the early 2000s. In 1998, Turkey posed a peace initiative for the
Middle East aimed to regional cooperation for stability. The dialogue with Syria was
cut off since 1995, and Cetirge, a Turkish Ambassador, restarted it in 1998. “Turkish
political leaders called their policy toward Syria in October 1988 “crisis management”,
a “flexible response” strategy that would gradually escalate the crisis so long as Syria
decided to respond to Turkey’s demand. It was military coercion without the direct
application of force. The crisis that it started was perceived with equal apprehension
both within the regional and outside. It was feared that if Turkey resorted to military
force against Syria, the bilateral crisis could turn into an Arab – Turkish one, further
exacerbating tensions caused by the stalling of the Arab – Israeli peace process.”63
After tottering attempts by diplomacy to resolve situation, also with the intervention
on United Nations, the two states gained Adana Accords: “the agreement included a
clause which said that the parties agreed to establish certain mechanism so that the
measures, that are supposed to be taken by Syria against the PKK, will be
implemented in an effective and transparent way. In the October crisis, the fact that
the Turkish government did not go before Parliament to ask permission to use force
against Syria suggests that ill still preferred other options.”64 Like in October 1998,
also nowadays, with the recent crisis, Turkey waited so long to act. “Turkey had been
categorically opposed to any initiative that might bring about the establishment of an
independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Turkey’s preferred solution was to
facilitate a compromise”65. It would be premature to predict that the October 1998
crisis opened a new period of relations between Turkey and Syria involving
cooperation on the PKK issue. “If the Turkish leaders were to conclude that Syria,
having expelled Ocalan to avert Turkish military intervention, is inclined to backslide,
possibly on the grounds that Turkey is not reciprocating on water, the crisis could start
all over again”66. The Lebanese aid was maintained on the board, and this was another
victory of Turkish diplomacy. “All in all, the Turkish – Syrian crisis of October 1998

63 Ibidem, cit. p. 177
64 Ibidem, cit. p. 178 - 179
65 Ibidem, cit. p. 179
66 Ibidem, cit. p. 184
testifies to Turkey’s diplomatic, economic and military abilities as a rising regional power, while simultaneously revealing the limits of its relations not only with the East, but also with the West in the post Cold – War era”\(^\text{67}\).

Crisis of October 1998 was a sum of burning and unsolved questions between Turkey and Syria: a diplomatic resolution or a coercive intervention directed by international system could be efficacious only with the consideration of the single problems that inflame the enmity on the road between Ankara and Damascus.

**a. PKK: a lonely threat or a way to struggle?**

“The Kurdish separatist movement in southeastern Anatolia as historically plagues Turkish – Syrian relations. From the inception of violence in Turkey by the PKK, Turkey had consistently argued that Syria was the organization’s major backer. While Turkey wanted to contain its Kurdish problem and viewed it as a predominately internal matter, the PKK’s regional network increasingly forced Turkish foreign policy to deal with countries like Syria from an adversarial position. For much of the 1990s most of Turkey’s relations with Syria were dominated by the issue of Syria’s support for the PKK, particularly its involvement in harboring PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan”\(^\text{68}\).

The PKK’s insurgency finds its roots in the ancient Treaty of Sevres, that, in a colonial optic, divided a society and a nation. PKK, and its ideology, was created in 1971, and the choice of guerrilla warfare became the expression against the repression from central Turkish government. This organization, which violence shocked Kurdish in the period between 1977 and 1980, was one of the most important objectives of military regime of September 12. Its headquarter killed themself to protest against humiliation in prison. In this situation, the leader Abdullah Ocalan decided to reorganize the PKK in Syria and Lebanon, where he was refugee\(^\text{69}\): after some years in Bekaa Valley, he decided, on August 15, 1984 that it was the moment to reorganized guerrilla against Turkey. “During its first insurgency from 1984 to 1999,

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\(^{67}\) Ibidem, cit. p.187

\(^{68}\) N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. p. 40

\(^{69}\) A. Biagini, *Storia della Turchia contemporanea*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002
the PKK’s headquarters and main training camps were located in Syria and the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, which was then under Syrian control. However, Syria was not an appropriate launch pad for insurgent operations into Turkey as the Syrian – Turkey borders runs through relatively flat and heavily mined terrain”\textsuperscript{70}. Young Kurds received the initiative enthusiastically, like a \textit{revanche} against military regime. Despite the internal coercion, guilty of the murder of dozens of peoples, a lot of young people took participation to the organization, which had contacts also with politician or ex nationalist governing people. After the guerrilla of 1987, the state of emergency started in every Kurdish cities, and a typical governor was provided on all the Kurdistan, aided by a paramilitary forces. At the beginning of 1990s, the military adopted the strategy of \textquote{low intensity}\textsuperscript{71} that implied that the Kurdish problem was considered as not a political or cultural question, but as an origin of separatist terrorism. Every Kurdish expression was considered as the principal strategic menace to Turkish integrity and identity: new national and military strategy became rapidly synonymous of operate a scorched earth policy. In 1993, President Ozal decided to arrive at a negotiated solution with PKK, without the consensus of military and government. The project would have been based on an administrative devolution, like a federal state, where local power was assigned to Kurdish representatives, with a five years amnesty, if PKK would abandon violence. But military and PKK disagreed. In this period, Kurdish political party (Dep, Ozdep, Hadep) was banned and its leaders were imprisoned or deprived of their immunity.

By the time, the PKK returned to violence in June 2004, while Syria had closed the PKK camps inside its territory. Nowadays, with the Syrian conflict, the fear of a PKK’s return is concrete, in particular if Damascus wants to use the terroristic organization to weaken Turkish military on the borders but even at the center. Claims are a serious menace to destabilize weak equilibrium, and are a new sign of tension that could trigger a military escalation at the border. In particular, Turkish government said that the crisis in Damascus and the outspoken Turkish criticism of the Syrian government’s clampdown may have prompted Damascus to change its position and allow the PKK to operate in Syria.

\textsuperscript{70} G. Jenkins, Unsafe Heaven, Turkey damages Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Jane’s Intelligence Review, August 2008, cit. p. 14 (14 – 17)

\textsuperscript{71} A. Biagini, op. cit.
b. Water controversy

Water deficiency for Syria is another long-standing contentious that had scattered tensions with Turkey. The mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris River originate in Turkey, and Ankara has used this power several times to threaten Syria about political and strategic decision. “Syria, as a downstream nation, has always claimed water rights to part of the Euphrates River that flows through Turkey. Turkey has accused Syria of backing the PKK to leverage this “water controversy”, while Syria has complained Turkey of violating Syria’s water rights with the development of dams for the Southeastern Anatolia Project.”\(^{72}\) Several times the two States tried to find an agreement for the resolution of the water conflict, like when the President Turgut Ozal attempted to forge a comprehensive settlement over water rights in 1988: however the negotiations failed after less than six months.

“The hydrographic network is an other physical feature that has played a role in disputes between nations”\(^{73}\): this is also the case between Turkey and Syria. It is a domestic and regional problem, that influences the relations between two states, and it’s linked with another regional variable of conflict, that is the presence and the support of the PKK by Syrian government. “Whether a river ought to divide or unite riparian interests is an old problem. Many conflicting answers were given to it. In some cases a river served as a boundary”. This time, river doesn’t constitute a border between two states, but Syria depends from Turkey for its supply. Water controversy is an ancient issue for Middle East: “desiccation took place in the region before the great empires arose there. The rules of water conservation set forth in Hammurabi's Code refer to a situation much worse than any water shortage”\(^{74}\).

During the government of the previous Ministry of Agriculture, Adel Safar, then become Prime Minister during the Assad’s attempt to sedate population, water crisis worsened, cause of the bad management of resources and for widespread corruption of the Syrian government.

\(^{72}\) N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. p. 40

\(^{73}\) J. Gottmann, op. cit.

\(^{74}\) Ibidem
Israel

One of the most important points that regard relationship between Syria and Turkey is the Arab – Israeli conflict. Turkish negotiations have always played an important role in this dispute, and during 1993 and 1994 there was a sense of optimism for the temptation of a resolution. But then violence restarted, whit a renewal of hostility from Syria and OLP against Israel. The Israeli – Syrian conflict dates from the 1948 Arab – Israeli war, when Syrian forces moved down from the Golan Heights and seized a small amount of territory assigned to Israel. Borders played another time an important role, representing the heritage of the complex colonial era. Conflict between Israeli and Syria could be divided in period: between 1948 – 1951 Israeli – Syrian negotiations occurred thank to Adib Shishakli, the new Syrian leader; from 1951 to 1967 there was a growing Israeli – Syrian conflict; then in the 1967 the war and the struggle for the Golan Heights exploded. Hafiz al – Assad was Syrian leader against Israel par excellence. The use of arms of mass destruction and their proliferation had menaced every time the stability of region and the peace between Turkey, Israel and Syria, or the others Arabs states. Another time the ghost of PKK returns to destabilize situation: “deteriorating relations with Syria throughout the 1990s prompted Turkey to seek closer ties with Israel to coerce Syria into dropping its support of the PKK. The full-scale mobilization of the Turkish military along the Syrian border in 1998 forced Damascus to change its strategy concerning PKK and take Ankara’s threats seriously. This led to the expulsion of Ocalan from Syria in October 1998 and a subsequent reduction of violence in Turkey’s Kurdish regions”\textsuperscript{75}. The year 2000 represented a landmark: the peace process between Israel and Syria collapsed\textsuperscript{76}. Israeli and Syrian negotiations came much closer to producing a comprehensive peace treaty than did the Israeli – Palestinian process.

\textsuperscript{75} N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. p. 40

Domestic dynamics: two leaders in comparison

Turkey could be considered a *sui generis* democracy: military coup, Kemalism, Islam, secularization, multi – party democracy since 1950\(^{77}\) are only some elements that could describe its state system, and that could lean towards one or another definitions. “Does or can Turkey have a role to play in assisting or diffusing democracy in its neighborhood?”\(^{78}\). Kemal Kirisci ask himself if Turkey could be a light for the rest of the region, or if internal problems in its political system could obstruct a new democratization wave, like Huntington suggested. “Turkey is not exactly a bastion of pluralist democracy, let alone a declared agent for diffusing democracy into its neighborhood. Yet in policy circles there is also a long tradition of citing Turkey as a model. In 2009, Freedom House listed Turkey only as an electoral not a liberal democracy”\(^{79}\). Kirisci thinks that, in spite of some difficulties for Turkish democracy, Ankara is now involved in a “modest exercise of democracy diffusion”\(^{80}\).

Syria, on the contrary, is just a Republic, but its President exercises the major powers, like the nomination of Ministries, the possibility to declare war, to promulgate laws and to revise constitution. Bashar al – Assad came to power disappointing the promises of reforms that his father had done. The today’s conflict in Syria, and the threats of a an overflowing of violence in Turkey, puts in comparison also to type of state, with different history, different government, and ruled by two different leader, like Bashar al –Assad and Recep Tayyp Erdogan. The difference stays behind the party at the government in Turkey, the AKP, center – right conservative, and in Syria, the Ba’ath Party, with an ideology that mixed together Arab nationalist, anti – imperialist, pan – Arabism and Arab – socialist interests. Assad, besides, is from family of Alawite background, the mystical religious group centered in Syria. Also

\(^{77}\) S. Alpay, “Making Sense of Turkish Politics”, in *International Spectator*, Vol. 43, n. 3, September 2008, pp. 5 - 12


\(^{79}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 145

\(^{80}\) Ibidem, cit. p. 145
Turkey experienced dictatorship, and the government with Turgut Ozal, defined the one – man rule\textsuperscript{81}, but Syrian government had faced less changes than Turkey, in order to start the process of a real democratization.

AKP obtained power with the elections of 2002: this choice was innovative for different point of views. “The new ruling party was a coalition of liberal and conservative elements – mostly concentrated in the Anatolian part of the country – whose common goal was the establishment of a cultural and political hegemony alternative to the traditional Kemalism one, as represented by the Republican’s People Party (CHP), and others sectors of secular elite”\textsuperscript{82}. Since then, more mediation was opened with Syria, and AKP used soft power in foreign policy in the relations with Damascus, but also with Afghanistan and Pakistan\textsuperscript{83}. Beside Erdogan, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, with his ideology and on foreign policy and his attempt to make Turkey a Great Regional Power, is seeking to restore Turkey’s role in the East on a par with its position in the West, in other words to promote Turkey as a real bridge and to abandon any kind of defensive definition. Considering his theory of the \textit{Strategic Depth} and five principles of foreign policy – making (balance between security and democracy, zero problem policy toward neighbors, development of relations with neighboring regions, multidimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy), Davutoglu’s vision cannot but have an impact on the country’s foreign policy activity\textsuperscript{84}. “The domestic contours of Turkey’s foreign policy establishment are notoriously fractious, consisting of institutional actors such as the military and a bureaucracy that must work with the democratically elected legislature. Given the country’s political history of highly unstable coalition governments and corruption scandals, it is unsurprising that political parties have commanded far less public trust and support than the military, which is seen as the

\textsuperscript{81} B. R. Kuniholm, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{82} E. Alessandri, “Turkey’s New Foreign Policy and the Future of Turkey – EU Relations”, in \textit{International Spectator}, Vol. 45, n. 3, September 2010, pp. 85 - 100


\textsuperscript{84} Ibidem
ultimate caretaker of Ataturk’s secular republic”\textsuperscript{85}. Recep Tayyp Erdogan is one of the three longest – serving prime minister, with Adnan Menderes and Turgut Ozal, which implemented relationships between greater democratization and Eastern – oriented foreign policy initiatives. Some important events in this optic are the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the Central Asian Initiative 1991, and strategic depth in 2004, oriented toward a democratization effort\textsuperscript{86}.

While Turkey is like a gleam for its democracy in construction in the middle of a region that every day matches with problem linked to social and political stability, Syria had experienced, before Bashar al – Assad, his father, Hafez, defined one – man dictatorship: “President Assad unilaterally issues the county’s laws and makes most of the life – and – death decisions affecting the 12 million Syrians he rules. Understanding Syrian politics, therefore, means beginning with Assad”\textsuperscript{87}. Pipes compared Assad with Saddam Hussein, making a precise reference to the importance of leadership in Middle East and in Syria. The dictator seeks to construct the dream for his country, speaking about a Greater Syria, composed by Syria itself, Lebanon, Israel, the occupied territories, Jordan and a portion of Turkey. “Is he a powerful dictator who can ignore public opinion and end the struggle against Israel if he wanted to? Or is his minority government too precarious to afford such a step?”\textsuperscript{88}. This is a question that probably now his son has to ask to himself, to discovery how the conflict could gain a resolution.

Domestic policy matches with foreign policy, in the process of democratization and in the construction of a more stability at home: “at the international level one important consequence of domestic troubles was that Turkish foreign policy became aggressive, and Turkey came to the brink of war with a number of its neighbors. A leading figure of Turkish diplomacy, Sukru Elekdag, a retired ambassador and former undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), advocated that Turkey prepare itself to fight “two and half wars” simultaneously against Greece, Syria, and

\textsuperscript{85} N. Tocci, J. W. Walker, op. cit., cit. p. 48
\textsuperscript{86} Ibidem, cit. p. 49
\textsuperscript{87} D.Pipes, “Is Damascus ready for Peace?”, in Foreign Affairs, Fall 1991, pp. 36 - 52
\textsuperscript{88} Ibidem, cit. p. 47
the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)”89. One of these examples is the war against Syria in 1998. The Turkish political tradition was characterized by a weak coalition of government since 1990s, that failed to impress an strong response to Kurdish problem: “Turkey was a country with a poor human rights record, sporadic violence, and the closure of political parties. Those developments played an important role in reinforcing the view of Turkey as an illiberal democracy. However, the situation began to change once the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, was apprehended in 1999 and put on trial”90. Some improvements in Turkish democracy are evident also with the election of AKP in 2002: “for the first time in republican history, lively public debates occurred on taboo subjects ranging from the place of Islam in the public realm and civilian – military relations to the Cyprus question, Armenian genocide claims, the Kurdish question, and the rights of non – Muslim minorities”91. But the most important changes in Turkey were about foreign policy, with the improvements in the relationship with Syria, when Turkish president attended to funeral of Syrian president Hafez al – Assad in 2000. The landmark was the definition made by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu about policy of zero problems with neighbors. “The current policies of Turkey are much more driven by pragmatic considerations than ideological ones, as has always been the case. Moreover, there is a strong relationship between domestic change and reforms in Turkey and the new Turkish foreign policy. Openness at home has spilled over into improved and expanded relations with the Middle East. That transformation reinforces the prospects of Turkey playing role of a model or example for the diffusion of democratic values and entrepreneurship in its neighborhood, especially in the Arab world”92.

The nowadays situation: conflict early warning at the border

“Boundaries are like any sort of man-mad partitions: they stand or shift according to

89 K. Kirisici, op. cit., cit. p. 146

90 Ibidem, cit. p. 148

91 Ibidem, cit. p. 148

92 Ibidem, cit. p. 150
what happens in the spaces they enclose and separate, rather than according to the material they happen to be made of." Question about boundaries is proper for the tensions between Syria and Turkey: the conflict, that has assumed the form of a civil war, had caused problems on the boundaries between two states, and now million of Syrian refugees are crammed in Turkish territory. We have also to remember the different critical situation during last year between Damascus and Ankara, when Syrian forces shot down a fighter jets over the Mediterranean Sea on June 2012, or when a car bombs exploded on the Turkish/Syrian borders.

The explosion of Syrian conflict differs from the other of the so – called Arab Spring because the first centers that were involved in the tensions weren’t the big cities and Damascus, where only intellectuals and families of detained politicians participated to revolts, but the agricultural and peripheral ones in the south, where tribes have the power on local affairs. By the time, the rebellions were extended in the rest of the country: in the north – eastern at Qamishli e Dayr az Zor; in the north – western at Baniyas and Latakia; in the center, at Damascus and in its suburbs like Duma; in the south at Quneitra and Daraa. Here, and in particular in the entire southern region of Hawran, one of the poorest regions of the country, the unrest is sensibly widespread, cause of a sense of ostracism from Damascus and of the water scarcity. Latakia too was involved in the conflict: the family of Assad and of Makhluf, who manage the majority of the Syrian public and private affairs, come from this country town of the Alawi region, that is also the most important harbor of the state.

When protests reached Deraa in March 2011, population asked Assad to make reforms, but faith in their leader soon evaporated. Syrian leader approved reforms that deal with the end of the monopoly of Baath Party, and with the abolition of the regime of national emergency that is in force in the country since 1963, but then he accused United States to be involved in a Zionist protest in order to destabilize region. In this accuse also Muslim Brotherhood were involved, also if there isn’t a direct proof of their real participation to the conflict. After the first revolts, State security forces responded to protests killing hundred in Deraa and elsewhere, while president offered only piecemeal reforms. Criminal armed gangs divided population in Syria, and sectarianism was deeply increased. Yet the regime still appears far from collapse, and

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Assad several times had declared that Syrian revolts are far from to be comprehended in the famous and so-called Arab Spring. The opposition, both within Syria and exiles abroad, has tried unable to wake Syrian population and to respond to the attack. The international community is frozen, between the possibility to intervene or to stay outside from violence. Kofi Annan didn’t have success in his attempt of negotiation and resigned his duty. Meantime, Russia, China and Iran continue to explicitly or implicitly back Assad. After a year of violence, the conflict is become a bloodbath between a regime and a poorly armed but determined opposition, and it could continue to transform itself in a powder keg for the entire Middle East.

When civil war reached Damascus, the event flows fast, but from the other hand the actions from the regional and international involved actors weren’t so immediate. UN had a sort of structural delay, probably for the mechanism of decision – making of Security Council. The possibility of eventual sanctions against Assad’s regime was discussed, while rebels tried to throw it down. Russia and China stopped every resolution or sanction provided for chapter VII of UN chart, while USA too tries to give more responsibilities to regional actors, like Turkey and Gulf Arab states. Resolution 2043 of April 21th was obsolete for the prosecution of the event, cause it stated to organize a mission of observatory (UNSMIS) in order to verify the respect of cease – fire, that never happened according to the so-called Annan Plan. 300 UN observers were directly menaced and compelled to leave the most violent zones, but it evident that a huge protection misses, and UN could only exercise a moral pressure and maintain an apparently international cohesion. The same problem concerns the diplomatic situation: West, and Europe in particular, had done only UN Security Council was willing to do. This attitude conditioned naturally the Kofi Annan’s decision, nominated by UN an Arab League: his plan counted a negotiation that had to involve Bashar al–Assad, or his government, an hypothesis that every Syrian military part refused. Meantime, there is a radical division inside government since Easter, when three deputies of Parliament of Damascus, all from the south of the country, dismissed. Also the Mufti Rizk Abdel Rachman Abasid, the most important Sunni authority from Deraa, nominated by Minister for Religious Affairs.

Since the explosion of the revolt, Ankara had to face with a scenario of regional crisis, that could have a huge impact on its own internal security. The Syrian wind change threats constantly to become sectarian struggle and to menace stability of both countries. Damascus suppressed violence also in the Kurdish regions, like Al–
hasakah and Ar – Raqqah. The crisis could become unmanageable, because, by the time, the higher risk is the fragmentation of the rebels. Little by little Assad suffered defeats, while anarchical violence increases. Erdogan and Davutoglu had, on the first time, exhorted Assad to listen to the request of the population, since when the first military operations on the borders constrained Turkey to appeal to art. 5 of NATO, while international community didn’t take a position, cause of the Chinese and Russian veto. With the escalation of violence, Turkey had expelled Syrian diplomats from its territory, and USA, Japan, Canada, Australia and a lot of country from Europe had done the same. International community had been shocked by the massacre of civil people during the conflict, while Assad’s regime uses the term “terrorist” to define the rebels who wants to overthrow the regime.

The worsening of the situation in Syria pushed CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), the most important party in the Turkish opposition, to press government for a more active diplomatic action. The AKP and its leader Erdogan are in fact in a too tricky position: Davutoglu had invested much of his credibility on the peaceful relationship with Syria. The personal relations of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs with Syrian establishment, but also the Hamas leadership, based in Damascus, had been an important element for the affirmation of Turkey as bridge for an European, Western, and more dynamic politics.

At the distance of more than ten years from Adana Accords, the relations between Damascus and Ankara totter as never has happened: Assad is stubborn to continue on his own way, without grant reforms, and repressions had constrained Turkey to took position against Damascus, also if Erdogan seems to want Syria with Assad’s government, but only if he approves the reforms. Syria, from its own side, seems to be frozen on its positions, and violence couldn’t have an end. This different attitudes and the collapse of peaceful relationships suggest the return of the ghost of PKK and of the support of it from Syria against Turkey. One of the reasons could be found in the fact that Ankara hosts and supports the Syrian National Council and also the Free Syrian Army, the soldiers of Syrian revolt, born in 2001 from deserters of Syrian regular army. On the other side, Cemal Bayik, the leader of the PKK guerilla, said that if Turkey engaged war against Syria, PKK doesn’t hesitate to stay with Damascus. According to Zaman, a Turkish newspaper, there is properly a group of guerrilla in the province of Ras al - ‘Ayn, in the territory of Hasakah, a zone largely populated by Kurdish. The PKK’s ghost could disappear only with a serious intervention from
international community: with this decision, Assad couldn’t anything, while Turkey would support a new ally government.

To gain peace, what is less are people and politicians who want to face with solution. It’s important to remember that Syria has a deeply fragmented society, and its history is not rich of peaceful compromise: Alawi have Shiite confession and control the power. They are less than the 15% of the populations, which in majority is Sunni. Besides, in the country Kurdish and Christians are only a minority. The most important risk is that Muslim Brotherhood comes to power, which political agenda is probably more influenced by extremists wings. Resolution has to consider this religious and sectarian fragmentation of society: peace couldn’t throw down the entire Alawi class now at the power, if regional and international security has to be guaranteed. The struggle, in fact, involved several ethnic and religious factions. The regional context in which Syrian conflict is occurred could be summarize in a triangular geopolitical milieu, where Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey struggle for dominance, and ancient rivalry between Sunni and Shia factions of Islam are continuously cultivated. Turkey is a fundamental key player in the Syrian conflict, and it is too much worried about a rapprochement between Damascus and Teheran, also for the warning of the use of nuclear weapon. When the Syrian conflict exploded, Turkey tried to make a common cause Saudi Arabia, in order to bring a new regime in Damascus, whit a particular attention for the religious factor. As the violence in Syria escalated, conservative Sunni party in Turkey didn’t accept the massacre of the Sunni insurgents and civilians committed by mostly Alawi. Ankara has provided aids and funds to the insurgents and had opened sanctuaries inside Turkey for Free Syrian Army. After the incident occurred to the Turkish military jet in June, then two countries came to the breakthrough of the war. It is important to consider if Turkey has totally embraced the Sunni cause, because, if Syrian conflict is only a part of a larger regional geopolitical mosaic, it could be a sign of a new consideration for Turkey of sectarian spirit. From the other hand, a victory by the FSA would lead to enhance Saudi influence in the Turkish immediate neighborhood. Davutoglu is optimist in this sense, because he said that “a new Middle East is born” and that Ankara “will be the owner, pioneer and servant” of that new Middle East. However, the most important consideration for Turkey is that Syria conflict isn’t merely a civil war, but one theater in a very dangerous regional struggle that could involve borders between Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey, creating new dynamics and questions in an
already complex contest.

Conclusion

After a year of revolts, Syria is in any case in stalemate. The regime is far to be in crisis and at the end, but it is not solid and stable. Sectarianism is widespread, and violence looks set only to increase. Opposition moves between Islamism and sectarianism. The most unlike scenario is that of a popular protest that break through and topple the regime: in fact rebels are too weak, and opposition seems unable to reach the same support that has success for example in Tunisia. It’s also unlikely the possibility of an ally between military and merchants, because the first are constructed to be loyal, while the second have more interest to emigrate than to stay quite to struggle against international sanctions.

The most likely scenario, instead, is that history never ends and repeats similar circle: like happened with Saddam Hussein after 1991, Assad holds on. FSA is just weak, but would ever surrender, and the conflict risk becoming a long – running guerrilla insurgency. Alternatively, the authority of Syria could be eroded, leading to a weak central state in Damascus and Aleppo, with the possibility that Syria will become a failed state, also if militia has the power in the countryside. So the future looks bleak, while civilian, and neighbor like Turkey, wait for the resolution from international system.

Anyway, it seems to be arrived the moment in which Turkey has to revise its strategy of “zero – problems” with neighbor. The Sunni AKP could propose in Syria a renewal process of reforms in a democratic optic, but this could create a domino in the entire region, and not only in Damascus. The real question is if Turkey decides to choose for change or for maintenance of status quo in the region. The Turkish political model, in the case of a possible peaceful and democratic transition for Turkish, could be challenged. Syrian dilemma could reveal decisive for the Turkish role in the future in Middle East: so the difference states in the change in the system or of the system, because, as Waltz stated, “changes of the system would do it. Changes in the system
would not”94.

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