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Foreign policy as a means of the AKP's struggle with Kemalism in relation to domestic variables

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ABSTRACT

This article provides analyses as to how foreign policy affects domestic politics, in particular the AKP's struggle with Kemalism. It examines how Kemalism was delegitimized through the initial democratic, pro-European Union and pro-West discourse of the AKP. It then analyzes Kemalism's marginalization under the civilizational, neo-Ottoman discourse advanced by Ahmet Davutoğlu. Finally, it explores Kemalism's alienation through the opposition CHP, which has been impacted by the neo-Ottoman discourse, as currently constructed. It concludes that the AKP's struggle with Kemalism did not end even when it established control over the state and when the ideological Kemalist nation-state identity was replaced by a new content in the form of an Ottoman-Islamic civilization. The article relies on a method of interpretative analysis of the AKP and Kemalist movements.

KEYWORDS AKP; kemalism; Turkish foreign policy; neo-Ottomanism; democratization; islamization

Introduction

The strained nature of the relationship between the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Justice and Development Party) and Kemalism can be explained by an identity problematic in capturing the state. In particular, the nation-building dynamic of the Kemalist Westernization paradigm, with its positivistic methodologies, suppressed Islamic and Kurdish identities in favor of the idea of a secular nation-state based on the Turkish core. As a result, Kemalism also broke with Ottoman past, considered within a Muslim-Eastern context and therefore part of the 'Orient'. The AKP has challenged the Kemalist narrative¹ in forging a post-Kemalist Turkey with a new national identity centered around Islam, where nostalgia for and use of the Ottoman past plays an important role.² However, the two movements resemble one another in their authoritarian traits, in particular in their goals and strategies for state control³, their preoccupation with existential insecurity,⁴ their

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secularism in regard to religious freedoms,⁵ including the role played by the *Diyanet* (Presidency of Religious Affairs),⁶ and by their headline policies toward the Kurdish question, despite a brief (2009–2015) AKP opening on this issue.

While it is possible to note the similarities between both movements, few studies have explored the impact of the AKP foreign policies on its domestic ones. In this framework, Beken Saatçioğlu argues that the AKP specifically used the European Union (EU) reform process as an instrument of political survival followed by power consolidation after 2007, therefore explaining why, while reforms targeting civilianization vis-à-vis the military persisted over the years, democratic progress in the areas of rule of law and fundamental freedoms stalled.⁷ However, how Kemalism was positioned in the face of this evolution has been less examined. Lisel Hintz seems to close this gap somewhat by suggesting that the AKP took the battle with its opponents ‘outside’ and into the foreign policy realm by engaging with the EU to weaken domestic challengers and broaden support for neo-Ottomanism and Islamism at home.⁸ However, Hintz’s study did not strictly engage with Kemalism, apart from mentioning republican nationalism among three options for national identity content in Turkey, and did not include a multi-layered procedural analysis of the devaluation of Kemalism, especially in the relationship between the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and Kemalism. In another study, Mustafa A. Sezal and İhsan Sezal assert that the AKP’s neo-Ottomanism as a foreign policy orientation became an instrument to legitimize its Islamist policies and anti-secular transformation.⁹ In the same vein, Cenk Saraçoğlu and Özhan Demirkol claim the AKP’s concept of nation and nationalism is primarily produced by its neo-Ottomanist foreign policy.¹⁰ Yet, in both studies, the direct effects of neo-Ottomanism on Kemalism remain unexplored. Similarly, in the case of Turkey’s AKP, Cengiz Günay examines foreign policy as a source of legitimation for ‘competitive authoritarian regimes’, but he does not do this by referencing the positioning (alienation) of Kemalism.¹¹ Lastly, although Oksan Bayulgen, Ekim Arbatli, and Sercan Canbolat also recognize the impact of geopolitical conditions in elite survival strategies to explain the authoritarian turn and resilience in the case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s rule in Turkey, Kemalism is taken only as one among other diverse elements, being the object of the AKP’s strategies of repression, centralization, and ideological legitimation.¹²

In this sense, the contributions of this article to the existing literature as something new lie in the answers given to several questions. First of all, in what sense and through what processes did the AKP’s foreign policy devalue Kemalism? Second, what are the processes of the background story in the context of the (de)democratization and Islamization problematic?¹³ Third, from the delegitimization of Kemalism to its marginalization

and finally alienation and from a conservative democratic AKP identity to a de-democratizing Islamist party identity with reference to the displacement of the West in Turkish foreign policy, how can previously detached analyses of these phenomena be placed in an more dynamic, interactive formulation and with a linear perspective? In this sense, this article is a study that fills some gaps in the previous studies, synthesizes them, and gives an idea about the broader picture of Turkish politics.

Moreover, another original contribution of this article to the current literature lies in these questions: what kind of nuance does the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism bring to the earlier, Davutoğlu-era neo-Ottomanism?; how does the CHP position itself in this current trend?; and how does the AKP's positioning vis-à-vis the CHP serve to alienate Kemalism? These last questions remain a topic that have received little to no academic attention. In the end, the article explains how the AKP, through alienating the CHP, also alienates Kemalism, a point that has also not been explored previously. Some studies have analyzed the AKP's othering of the opposition but they did not do this by establishing the relationship with Kemalism and how foreign policy impacts Kemalism.

In this vein, this article consists of three sections encompassing the AKP's three different terms in power, namely, 2002–2007, 2007–2011, and 2011-present. In the first section, the AKP's conservative democratic identity, which helped the party come to power in 2002, is explored in its relationship with Kemalism. Here, it is put forward that the party's pro-Western/EU orientation in this period also delegitimized Kemalism as an anti-democratic ideology. The second section, starting with the developments after 2007, examines the AKP's neo-Ottomanism during the Davutoğlu period under which with the West was sidelined and Kemalism was marginalized, and state identity gained an Ottoman-Islamic civilizational content. At this time the AKP reduced democratic expression and more openly embraced Sunni Islam, the latter assisted by an opportunity space opened up for Islam under the party's initial pro-Western/EU orientation. The last section starts with 2011, when the AKP established its hegemony. In this context, and again observed from a linear perspective, the de-democratization, ideological Islamization, and anti-Westernism that set the political environment of the AKP's hegemony are first analyzed with references to Kemalism. It is suggested that these features also largely shape the party's current neo-Ottomanism in its revisionist, anti-Western character, which prefers hard power instruments to soft power ones. In so doing, it is revealed that despite the selective adherence of the CHP to this foreign policy orientation, the AKP's positioning of the Kemalist CHP on the 'inimical' (Western) side also alienates Kemalism. The article therefore, concludes that from Kemalism's delegitimization to its marginalization and from there to its alienation, the AKP's struggle with Kemalism never ended,

even when the AKP established control over the Kemalist establishment and when the ideological Kemalist nation-state identity was replaced by new content in the form of an Ottoman-Islamic civilization.

The article adopts a post-structuralist theoretical framework to analyze the AKP's struggle with Kemalism. Mainstream approaches to international relations presume the foreign policy practice of sovereign states as a behavior oriented toward the outside world. However, by problematizing the concepts of state, sovereignty, anarchy, and foreign policy that dominate international relations, poststructuralist thinkers have tried to analyze how hegemony over dissidents or rather exclusion work within the discipline of international relations, through the emphasis on identity, difference, and power. On the other hand, within poststructuralism, these exclusionary practices attributed to a nation-state are also examined within the scope of competing power blocks within any single state, where foreign policy emerges with its two functions as double exclusion and double resistance. Accordingly, double exclusion is a discursive strategy in the hands of the ruling power bloc that helps to normalize the exclusion operating at the domestic level.¹⁴ Foreign policy thus serves to normalize the process operating at the level of society, where oppositional power blocks are excluded, marginalized, and silenced.¹⁵ However, oppositional power blocks also use foreign policy this time as double resistance:

When these (oppositional) blocks attempt to speak on foreign affairs, foreign policy works as a double approval of their resistance, identity, and difference. By doing so, oppositional blocks (re)consolidate their differences and oppositional positions vis-à-vis the ruling power's dominant discourse.¹⁶

In this sense, while the AKP's pro-Western EU orientation along with its neo-Ottomanism during the Davutoğlu era can be regarded as double resistance, since the AKP either felt insecure in or had not completely taken hold of Kemalist tutelage mechanisms, the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism, combined with establishing hegemony over state apparatus by 2011, can be regarded as a strategy of double exclusion vis-à-vis Kemalism.

Kemalism and the AKP's conservative democratic identity and delegitimizing Kemalism under its initial pro-EU/West orientation

Although Kemalism was opposed to Western imperialism, it did not refer to any distinction between culture and civilization, as Ziya Gökalp¹⁷ had done, proposing the preservation of authentic Turkish culture while feeding from a larger civilizational bowl, be it Eastern or Western. For the Kemalists, the West should be taken as a whole system. Hence, the Kemalists 'scientifically' theorized a mythical Turkish identity referring to the period when Turks had

not yet adopted Islam and also restricted Islam's expression to the private sphere by isolating it from the public sphere. Şerif Mardin goes even further, claiming that during the single-party period when the Kemalist CHP ruled, it replaced Islam with science almost as a contemporary civil religion.¹⁸ Consequently, Kemalist rationality manifested itself through the homogenizing supra-Turkish identity and the strict secularism in nation-building, in which Kurdish and Islamic identities suffered the most. In brief, Kemalism manifested itself as authoritarianism with a social engineering effort undertaken through the top-down methodology of positivism. It is this ideology of positivism that determined the Kemalists' perception of the West as the contemporary, universal civilization to which Turkey should aspire.

In terms of foreign policy, Kemalism evolved over time, moving from neutral constructiveness with the West during the single-party period (1923–1945), to clear focus on the West during the Cold War, and, while the West remained the priority, to a multi-directional foreign policy in the 1990s, when the first seeds of neo-Ottomanism could be seen. Despite the role Kemalism played for the development of the modern state in Turkey, the AKP emphasizes Kemalism's failures, not its successes. It portrays Kemalism as 'submissive to the West,' given Kemalism's cultural Westernism rooted within its anti-democratic practices and its unidimensional Western foreign policy orientation during the Cold War period. In this sense, the AKP defines Kemalism, which is, in fact, a plural spectrum of interpretations, as a purely pro-Western phenomenon by ignoring its nationalist and Western-skeptical vein, because, by doing so, the AKP also reveals more clearly its difference from Kemalism in its struggle for power.

In this context, Erdoğan's notion of conservative democracy not only established the AKP's difference from the previous Islamist parties—while remaining an interpretation rather than a reinvention¹⁹—but also from Kemalism. Conservative democracy for the AKP meant conservatism in the continuous relationship established with the Ottoman past, as opposed to the Kemalist historiography of breaking with the Ottomans, and an attachment to Islam as the core value system. Therefore, in contrast to the Kemalists, who adopted Westernization within a holistic understanding, for the AKP, and especially Erdoğan, only the state should be laic/secular.²⁰ Under AKP nationalism, the secular/rational Turkish identity that Kemalism tried to inculcate as an ideal was, therefore, exchanged for a Turkish-Islamic identity in which Islam was proposed as a priority.

It is worth noting that at this time the AKP did not have difficulty presenting itself as democratic to the extent that, by rejecting the Kemalist establishment, it was seen as the antithesis of the exclusionary politics that Kemalism represents, such as the monolithic national identity, the assimilation of differences, authoritarian or assertive secularism, and excessive political

control over democratic politics.²¹ Against these more hardline Kemalist principles, religious conservatives, Kurdish nationalists, and liberals came together under the AKP umbrella because they all felt excluded from the center by the Kemalist state.²²

It is in this context that only 15 months after its formation, the AKP won the 2002 elections. The rhetorical strategies of the Erdoğan focused on the idea of change, contrasting the old and new and rejecting of the status quo, which he translated into objection to Kemalist tutelage.²³ This point especially concerned the role the military played within the Kemalist paradigm and its role in the four breakdowns of Turkish democracy in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. In all those interventions, the threat perception towards Islam as an ideology was either the major or side factor in the military's discourse. But although the AKP, within its initial pro-Western orientation, denied being an Islamist party and defined itself as conservative democratic, it is the AKP that would pose the most prominent challenge to Kemalism, most notably through its foreign policy.

In this sense, it is by now largely established that when the AKP came to power, its EU orientation paradoxically legitimized the AKP's Islamic identity, in contrast to the Kemalists, who saw in Turkey's EU prospect the confirmation of Turkey's Western identity. In this context, the *AKP's pro-Western/EU orientation served to delegitimize Kemalism*. In this period, the AKP government did not feel safe vis-à-vis the Kemalist establishment, which still occupied a dominant position. In this context, although many Kemalists were skeptical of the EU, because aligning with the EU was in line with the longstanding Western orientation of Kemalism, the AKP's EU orientation helped to reassure Kemalists who still suspected and feared a hidden Islamist agenda in the AKP's political identity. However, this did not prevent the AKP from turning EU policy into an indirect field of struggle against Kemalism, by bringing Kemalism to the forefront with its anti-democratic character through the perspective of democratization centered around EU conditionality. In this way, the AKP found a position of strength against Kemalism, delegitimizing it *through the discourse of democracy and thereby creating an opportunity space for Islam*. This point foremost concerned the partial democratization of civil-military relations, especially regarding Islam's integration into politics and public life without prohibitions or the intervention of the military in politics. Consequently, Kemalism's inculcating a Western identity as a precondition of nation-building was also problematized. Yet, the foreign policy field still provided some support for this ideology as long as it followed a direction that confirmed Kemalism's Western-oriented essence. Starting in the AKP's second term in power (2007–2011), however, this support ended with the AKP's embrace of neo-Ottomanism, through which Kemalism would further find itself marginalized.

The AKP's neo-Ottomanism, sidelining the west, and marginalization of kemalism

When Abdullah Gül became president in 2007, the AKP finally possessed the presidency in the power structure, providing it with an effective tool in its struggle with Kemalism and allowing it to carry its identity politics to the domestic arena. In the period between 2007 and 2011, Turkey's EU accession process was seriously perturbed, which would lead to Turkey's de-Europeanization, partly because the AKP no longer needed the legitimacy provided by the EU during its first term in power in its battle with the Kemalist establishment. In parallel with its attempts to emphasize the Islamic aspects of Turkish identity, the AKP entered its second period of power by carrying out a strong campaign against the Islamic headscarf ban in public universities.²⁴ In 2008, a law was passed that abolished this ban. This was a clear challenge to the Kemalist project. The Constitutional Court annulled this legislation, and the party escaped closure by one vote in 2008 in a case filed before the Constitutional Court that accused the party of anti-secular actions.

Consequently, the AKP's understanding of democracy would be reduced to Islam, epitomized by the freedom to wear the headscarf in public institutions. Women were thus pushed to the forefront of a socio-political project under the AKP, similar to how women were conceived by the Kemalists as vestiges of their version of modern Turkey. The gendered aspect in the masculine state, imposing its ideology onto the female nation, thus remained.²⁵ Furthermore, the AKP's approach to secularism contained the same homogeneous vision as in Kemalism in terms of the non-recognition of Turkey's Alevi (Alawite) identity, given the AKP's unwillingness to challenge the Diyanet's role in imposing a Sunni-Islam version of religion.

In this framework, the AKP's neo-Ottomanist foreign policy manifested itself as the most obvious reflection of an Islamic belonging for Turkey. Hakan Yavuz in his book *Nostalgia for the Empire* summarizes neo-Ottomanism, which had become a concrete foreign policy doctrine under Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's stewardship by 2009, saying:

Although it is difficult to obtain an accurate definition [of neo-Ottomanism] upon which everyone can agree, there is a generic and working definition that means rooting present notions of Turkish national identity within their Ottoman Islamic heritage. ... The Ottoman (Osmanlı) becomes a form of counter-identity ... , where the goal is to form a historically rooted political consciousness that employs ideas and practices from the Ottoman era to redefine the political community and to become active in post-Ottoman spaces."²⁶

However, to better grasp what neo-Ottomanism means, one can also refer to the following affirmation by Darko Tanasković:

Neo-Ottomanism is more than ideology. It is a philosophy of history, a civilizational paradigm ... and is the rationalization of the lingering imperial nostalgia of a great historic nation dissatisfied with its place and role in the world.²⁷

In this vein, Davutoğlu's formulation of Turkey's 'strategic depth' for Turkey's new foreign policy activism and assertiveness meant the mobilization of Turkey's geographical identity components, once covered by the Ottoman Empire and derived from its history.²⁸ To this end, just as in the Ottoman Empire, Islam was to serve as umbrella identity over multiple territories and peoples. It became the foundational philosophy of the AKP's connection with the outside world. Such perspective has found particular expression in the AKP's overtures to the Middle East, but also to the Balkans. In this context, Kemalism was seen by the AKP as a barrier to the goal to create a 'new imagination' based on Islamic values, suggesting that 'from Bosnia to the whole of China,' they would embrace related communities.²⁹

The foreign policy of Kemalism during the Cold War years saw the Balkans as the backyard of Soviet communism, therefore a region not to get involved in. Kemalism also treated the Middle East with caution, identified the region with (Islamic) backwardness, and isolated Turkey from it. Although neo-Ottomanist tendencies emerged under Turgut Özal's presidency (1989–1993), they did not pose a challenge to Kemalism's fundamental tenets. Özal's neo-Ottomanism, especially regarding the quest for influence in the Middle East, was intended to support Turkey's pro-Western orientation. In contrast, the AKP offered something very new. It sought leadership in the Middle East. The meaning of the AKP's neo-Ottomanism was about sidelining the West in a worldview that puts Turkey in the center. In the AKP's neo-Ottomanist perspective, Turkey was now in the position of a central country, facilitating active participation in world politics. The policy of 'zero problems with the neighbors' was the result of these more activist orientation in which the economy was the driving force.

Although neo-Ottomanism's emphasis was on Islam as a civilizational approach, Turkey's Western connection was not completely excluded. Turkey was presented as 'a spokesman for the West of the East's rising civilization basin' and 'a ground-breaking country that blends the cultural values of the East' with 'the modern political values of the West.'³⁰ But neo-Ottomanism can also be described as the antithesis of Kemalism in the sense that the East–West rhetoric operating under Kemalism is reversed. To be more precise, Kemalism defined itself as Western and therefore 'civilized' vis-à-vis the East. The AKP's neo-Ottomanism perceived the West as external to the problem of civilization and, therefore, simply as a foreign policy vector, but even as a foreign policy vector, the West was taken as an extension of the East and therefore sidelined, placing Turkey in the center. In this

context, neo-Ottomanism also implied an alternative perception of identity and historiography to that of Kemalist nation-building. All these factors would also bring into question the ideological effectiveness of Kemalism and Kemalism would therefore be marginalized, as reflected by the diverse arguments of the period about an 'axis shift' away from Turkey's traditional Western identity.

The AKP's neo-Ottomanism reached its peak during the Arab Spring, but the AKP was unable to perceive the demands for democratization behind the Arab Spring due to the same perception that reduced democracy to the expression of Sunni Islam, as this was the case in domestic politics. To the extent that the AKP perceived the Arab Spring as the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East, it has been far from developing an inclusive, balanced, and permanent vision for the region. With the AKP's one-sided and unequivocal support for the Muslim Brotherhood, combined with over-involvement in the domestic politics of key Arab states at the expense of national sovereignty, Turkey's image as a benign regional power was damaged.³¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanism could not, therefore, prove its success. It especially failed in Syria as Turkey was drawn into sectarian conflicts stemming from Sunni-Shiite rivalry.³² Simultaneously, Kemalism was located in the anti-democratic as it was linked to the military regimes in the region that were previously backed by the West. This paved the way for the complete alienation of Kemalism, within the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism, which is largely a reflection of the political environment of AKP hegemony.

Political environment of AKP hegemony and the alienation of Kemalism within the AKP's current neo-ottomanism

To understand under which conditions (de-democratization) and through which counter ideology (Islamism) and populist policy orientation (anti-Westernism) Kemalism was alienated, one needs to grasp the political environment of the AKP's hegemony. It is observed that by these three factors, the AKP's current neo-Ottomanist foreign policy, in contrast with the neo-Ottomanism of the previous decade, has also acquired increasingly revisionist, anti-Western, and undemocratic tendencies preferring hard power instruments to soft power ones. The party's current neo-Ottomanist foreign policy operates so as to alienate Kemalism through foreign policy means; this is within the AKP's representation of the Kemalist CHP as replaced within the Western phenomenon. It is ironic then that the CHP also selectively adheres to those policies. Furthermore, the AKP's de-democratization, Islamism, and anti-Westernism are processes that are all inter-linked, as Menderes Çınar argues. At least since 2010–2011, the AKP's de-democratization operated within 'a civilizational discourse that aimed to

redefine Turkey as a ‘Muslim nation’ through which ‘the AKP has portrayed itself ... as the one and only ‘native and national political force’ versus the rest and which meant a nation ‘freed from the contaminating [*sic*] effects of the hundreds of years of Westernization,’ with implications for the domestic and foreign policy fields.³³

De-democratization, islamism, and anti-westernism

As argued in the previous section, the AKP’s reducing democracy to Islam produced a democratic deficit that became gradually more relevant as the AKP became settled in the establishment, starting, in particular, with its third term in power (2011) when the AKP became the dominant party. In the previous decade, the AKP already held the majority in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, providing it with an important space in appointments and notifications and giving it strong bargaining opportunities with the elements of the Kemalist status quo.³⁴ Most importantly, the AKP managed to remove the Kemalist military tutelage as a positive indication of civilization, thus showing democratic potential, but this did not mean democracy in practice. In this sense, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases—which started with coup-plotting charges against certain high-ranking military officers—helped increase the autonomy of civilian actors away from military supervision, but also ‘strengthened the AKP’s hand.’³⁵ From the beginning, the AKP successfully associated all those who opposed them with military tutelage, within the opposite poles of ‘civilian politics/people/democracy/periphery/elected’ versus ‘military/elite/authoritarianism/center/appointed,’ but in time this became a way to ‘deflect the AKP’s responsibilities from exclusions, suppressions, and authoritarian resonances in the political system.’³⁶ In this sense, ‘Erdoganism, just like Kemalism, is driven by the authoritarian logic of a top-down imposition of power.’³⁷ In this process, ironically, ‘the cult of personality attached to Erdoğan closely resembles the cult of personality long-established with respect to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.’³⁸

In this context, Erdoğan’s authoritarian response to the Gezi Park protests in mid-2013, and the authoritarian purges of the judiciary and civil service in the face of allegations of corruption in December 2013, and finally Turkey’s switch from a parliamentary to a presidential system (following the April 2017 constitutional referendum) played all a role as part of the process of ‘concentrating power in the hands of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, even as he increasingly identified himself with the state.’³⁹ In the aftermath of the traumatic struggle with the Gülen Movement, now dubbed the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO), following the failed coup on 15 July 2016, the Erdoğan-led AKP established hegemony over the state apparatus,⁴⁰ completely freezing out the Kemalist

establishment but also any rival – in this case, the Gülenists – in the distribution of power.

Furthermore, de-democratization went hand-in-hand with the AKP's Islamism. In this sense, particularly 'after it consolidated its power and captured the state in 2011, the AKP launched an ambitious project to Islamize Turkish society and politics'⁴¹ and 'Sunni-Muslim values ... have become the core element defining what the 'nation' is' in the AKP era.⁴² With the 2012 convention on 'New Turkey,' the AKP's proposition of a Muslim nation for Turkey became clearer than ever. The regime turned into if not a theological one—given the subordination of religion to politics—an increasingly Islamist one, especially with the role of the Diyanet, which contributed to the process through its fatwas and declarations.

In this context, starting in 2011 with the elimination of the risk of being overthrown and within a convenient international environment conducive for maneuver, the AKP also adopted an Islamist ideological orientation in its foreign policy, representing an anti-Western turn.⁴³ The AKP's anti-Westernism could already be read within the process of evolving from Europeanization (2002–2005) to selective Europeanization (2005–2011) and from there to de-Europeanization (2011–2016) and Transactionalism (2016, starting with the refugee deal-present).⁴⁴ This last category 'favors bilateral over multilateral relations, focuses on short-term wins rather than longer-term strategic foresight, adheres to a zero-sum worldview ... , rejects value-based policymaking, and does not follow a grand strategy,' taking 'Turkey (not as a candidate country, but) as a separate actor that competes with the EU in international politics.'⁴⁵

The breakdown of relations with Israel, particularly after the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* incident further exacerbated the AKP's anti-Westernism. But the major blow to the AKP's relationship with the West was the Gezi protests in 2013, which the AKP interpreted as being driven by a 'mastermind,' namely, the United States, Israel, and the West in general. Meanwhile, in the turbulent dynamics of the Middle-East, US support to the Syrian Kurds in their common fight against ISIS became a source of conflict with the West as Turkey considered the Syrian Kurds to be allies of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which Ankara designates a terrorist organization. But the AKP took a particularly anti-Western turn after the 15 July 2016 coup, the plotters of which, according to the AKP, would have been supported by the West if the coup had been successful.⁴⁶

The consequence of this is that today, Kemalism's alienation of the East has been replaced by the AKP's alienation of the West. In this process, the AKP is the subject, the external object of alienation is the West, and its internal object is Kemalism. In this framework, the AKP's struggle with Kemalism, operates through the main opposition party, the CHP, the party Atatürk founded. This is especially true within the AKP's current

neo-Ottomanism, although the CHP also selectively adheres to these politics.

Alienating Kemalism through the CHP

According to Janko Bekić, the first signs of the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism appeared with the Syrian revolution during the Arab Spring and transformed neo-Ottomanism into a typical hard-power foreign policy because the AKP backed the Syrian opposition forces in their fight against the al-Assad regime.⁴⁷ The AKP's current neo-Ottomanism manifested itself even concretely after the failed coup on 15 July 2016 when the AKP's anti-Westernism became even more pronounced amid revisionist claims in international politics. Notably, Ahmet Davutoğlu resigned as Prime Minister in 2016, and the current neo-Ottomanism differs from that of his era, essentially as it has transformed from using soft power to hard power, including the threat to use force, an increasingly revisionist agenda, and a turn to repressive authoritarian regimes as China and Russia. Also, the AKP 'began to utilize religion in foreign policy more frequently after 2013,' but 'more so after 2016, particularly to weaken the Gülen movement.'⁴⁸ In this context, the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism is intrinsically based on a security-based rhetoric of potential enemies both inside and outside (while for Davutoğlu it was about zero problems with the 'neighbors'), where the enemies inside including the CHP are the extension of the enemies outside who work to prevent Turkey from becoming a 'great' power. Within the rhetoric of a 'great Turkey,' the AKP has also called into question the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which establishes the current borders of Turkey. By discussing problems with the Lausanne Treaty, especially as regards the current Turkish-Greek disputes in the Aegean Sea and East Mediterranean, the AKP further contributes to the questioning of the legacy of the historical figures of Kemalism. This is clearly something new and revisionist as, 'in principle, this should also lead to a reconfiguration of the current borders, (and this) has not been heard before.'⁴⁹ The AKP's military interventions in northern Syria to fight Syrian Kurds also implied a re-bordering of the in-between spaces in northern Syria⁵⁰ and therefore that 'the 'sacrosanct' borders of Kemalist Turkey could be challenged by a 'neo-Ottoman' agenda.'⁵¹

In this sense, the AKP's signing of the MDA (Maritime Delimitation Agreement) with the Tripoli government in Libya in November 2019, followed by its military intervention in Libya in 2020 and Turkey's involvement in the struggle for Mediterranean offshore resources, something that amounts to a redrawing of maritime borders in the Mediterranean according to the concept of Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*),⁵² is also reminiscent of the Ottoman domination of Levant that now the AKP desires to achieve. These

policies have been embraced by ultra-nationalist Eurasianists, ironically some of whom are culturally Kemalists.⁵³ The July 2020 transformation of Hagia Sofia into a mosque by the party makes sense also within the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism, reinforcing the party's ethno-religious domestic base while Kemalism is rejected both in its status quo-oriented policies and laicism.

The CHP opposed both the Turkish military presence in Libya and the AKP decision on Hagia Sofia. However, the CHP's opposition to the AKP's foreign policy was limited. The CHP at times seemed rather supportive of this neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. One example in the sense of increasing pride over Turkey's growing defense industry, initiated essentially in response to Western reluctance to provide Turkey with military equipment. When Turkish drones proved their success in 2020 clashes in Nagorno Karabakh with Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia, this was interpreted as the growing power and prestige of Ankara toward the outside world. The depiction of Turkey and Azerbaijan as the two allied 'winners' of the war and as related by brotherhood was an extension of the AKP's Ottoman-Islamic narrative to cover Turkey's hinterland, as autonomous from the West, and the CHP has adhered to this notion of hinterland as regards the Turkic republics and the Balkans.

Furthermore, the AKP's foreign policy enjoyed support from the CHP at the global level as well, including the AKP's objection to the West-centered global order (a continuation of the Davutoğlu era) and more recently formulated by Erdoğan's famous motto that 'the world is bigger than five'. In this sense, stating that 'the sufferings, cruelties, massacres, and crimes against humanity in the lands where the Ottomans retreated are always the result of injustice',⁵⁴ the AKP's emphasis on presumed Ottoman-Islamic justice as part of the ethical dimension of the party's neo-Ottomanism constructs a critical, normative narrative against the West's past colonialism, present-day imperialism, and politics of interest. This narrative has gained a sense of being intrinsic to the AKP's anti-Westernism under its current neo-Ottomanism. In this vein, İbrahim Kalın, spokesman for the Presidency of Turkish Republic states.

First, they started the Gezi events, then the 17–25 December events, and finally, when the PKK failed, the July 15 military coup. Why is that? It is because Turkey is now in a position where it questions the international system and argues that this system does not produce justice.⁵⁵

Therefore, whether with the support of the CHP's selective approach to AKP politics or not, the AKP continued to put into practice neo-Ottomanism. However, unlike in the Davutoğlu era, this time it prefers hard power to soft power instruments, has overarching anti-Western tones embedded in its revisionism, and neo-Ottomanism operates alongside the authoritarian

restructuring of the regime. İhsan Yılmaz, Mehmet Efe Caman, and Galib Bashirov's affirmation on the 'new Turkey' confirms such an observation, in that the 'new Turkey' mission helped justify the AKP's authoritarian restructuring of the political regime in the eyes of not only the citizens but also the opposition elites within the *IYI Party* (Good Party) and the CHP.⁵⁶ In this sense, behind the 'new Turkey' mission, as the AKP regime's legitimizing strategy, the CHP subconsciously legitimized the AKP's authoritarianism because ultimately it did not want to appear as supporting either the July 15 failed coup or the idea of Turkey being a submissive entity before the West. This is in view of the anti-Western, nationalist, and pro-Eurasianist narratives that dominate the CHP.

In fact, as the Eurasianist current in the CHP gained weight, especially since the end of the 1990s (with the EU's critical attitude demanding the democratization of civil–military relations and within the content of the West's involvement with the Kurdish question in Turkey), an external factor, namely, the AKP's relationship with Beijing as a challenge to the West, consolidated the AKP's authoritarian presidential regime.⁵⁷ The same applies to Turkey's relations with Russia, as these two regimes are known for their repressive authoritarianism. Moreover, both China and Russia defy Western-centered globalization, defending a multipolar world order. In this context, the conflict with the United States over the S-400 missiles bought by Turkey from the Russian Federation, while represented as essential for Turkey's security, also provided the AKP with a discourse able to defy the United States, therefore confirming the AKP's dissident global identity for a multipolar world order. The CHP did not object to this rapprochement with China and Russia, believing that it was in the interest of Turkey to develop relations with those two powers.

However, all this did not prevent the AKP from turning against the CHP, placing it in the framework of the West, as the continuation of the AKP strategy to completely exclude the CHP. To be more precise, now that the CHP had been weakened by the authoritarian restructuring of the regime, it became easier for the AKP to replace the CHP with(in) the Western politics by double exclusion. 'For the populists (AKP) of the new Turkey, the opposition as the domestic collaborator of the hostile powers abroad, most notably the West or Europe, is not part of the self, but of the other.'⁵⁸

In this sense, it is observed that it has become possible for the AKP to position the CHP in the 'unwelcomed' Western bloc, especially through the issues of foreign policy on terror, Islam, and refugees. The pejorative meanings that Western identity gained in the AKP's perception make the Western bloc the opposite reference point for this party in counter-terrorism, in treating Islam in a fair manner, and in embracing refugees. In all those subject matters, the AKP's populist discourse portrays the CHP as representing the opposite meanings, on the same side as the West, and all the opponents

of Turkey in general.⁵⁹ This is especially true in the AKP's discourse when it associates the CHP's liberal approach to Kurdish identity with PKK terrorism, which it also claims is supported by the West⁶⁰; the CHP's 'loose' connection with Islam as it relates to the Western attitude downgrading Islam⁶¹; and the CHP's discourse on the Syrian refugees that Turkey is hosting to be repatriated as it relates to the strict measures the West takes against illegal immigration along its borders. Although this connection between the CHP and Western politics is sometimes implicit, especially given Kemalism's ontological insecurity vis a vis the West—as shared by all the political parties in Turkey, except the Kurdish-oriented Peoples' Democratic Party—the AKP also alienates Kemalism in the representation of the CHP and such alienation operates as much through the issues of foreign policy as it does through domestic politics. Accordingly, from the Syrian question to the Mediterranean policies of the CHP, the AKP criticizes this party and claims that the CHP works against the national interests of the Turkish nation.⁶² Through the conceptualization of national interest in foreign policy, Kemalism, therefore, is also targeted.

In fact, to the extent that the CHP is deemed responsible for all the current trouble⁶³ and is detached from Atatürk, it is only left bound to Kemalist politics. To be more precise, although united in the personality of Mustafa Kemal, in the eyes of the AKP, Kemalism and Atatürkism are two different things. While Atatürk as the surname given to Mustafa Kemal by the Turkish Grand National Assembly represents the Turkish nation as a whole, the AKP associates Kemalism with the unique party politics of the CHP between 1923 and 1945, in particular Kemalist tutelage mechanisms. In this context, AKP rhetoric that the CHP does not in fact 'deserve' Atatürk perturbs the CHP identity of Atatürkism and, by implication, frames the CHP as limited by Kemalist politics. In this context, Erdoğan emphasizes, 'We will not allow an amorphous party like the CHP to kidnap Atatürk from our nation!'⁶⁴ He adds.

According to Gazi Mustafa Kemal, no power can contend with the country and the nation, no matter what happens on the front, unless the domestic front is resolved. Again, to quote Gazi, our enemies are trying to destroy us from within ... Today, (current CHP Chairman Kemal) Kılıçdaroğlu and his team are that domestic front in our country.⁶⁵

While the AKP's embrace of 'Atatürk' is a guarantee for the continuation of the Republic, in as much as Atatürk represents the Turkish nation united under the Republic, the AKP's struggle with 'Kemalism' never seems to end.

Conclusion

Since 2002, from the AKP's confrontation with Kemalism to winning against this ideology, Kemalism, for this party, has represented the strict ideological force of the single-party period, later seized by the Kemalist tutelage

mechanisms. Within this context, this article contends that foreign policy is not just an external discourse but is also effective in the struggle for power, identity, and difference at the domestic level, as suits post-structuralism. Accordingly, in the AKP's struggle with Kemalism, foreign policy proved itself an efficient means for it to delegitimize, delimit, marginalize, and alienate Kemalism. In this context, despite the change in the AKP's position vis-a-vis the West from being pro-Western at first then gradually side-lining the West to being overtly anti-Western, the AKP has combatted behind the concept of national interest, which currently could be formulated as becoming a 'great nation' or a grand country just like Ottoman Empire.⁶⁶

The analysis of the AKP's foreign policy impact on domestic policy could also be associated with the problem of (de)democratization versus Islamization. In this regard, this article has revealed that within the AKP's pro-Western orientation, democratization was associated with a liberal affirmation of Islam, but as the party dissociated from the West, de-democratization and Islamization settled in and it moved towards an authoritarian, Islamist regime. However, within that same problem, although the content in nation-building changed, the AKP adopted the same goals and methodological habits of capturing the state as seen under Kemalism. From the viewpoint of the developments within both the domestic and foreign policy fields, a linear perspective could be observed with Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanism standing mid-way as regards the accelerated prevention of Kemalist and Western influences in Turkish politics and the continuous tendency of downgrading democracy along with growing Islamization.

Furthermore, while de-democratization, Islamization, and anti-Westernism have shaped the political environment of the AKP hegemony starting from 2011, these features also give an idea about the AKP's current neo-Ottomanism. Concretely put into practice by 2016, this current foreign policy orientation differs from the neo-Ottomanism of the Davutoğlu era, especially with its anti-Westernism embedded in its revisionism, preference for hard power to soft power instruments, and is based on a security-based rhetoric creating enemies both inside and outside where the enemies inside are the extension of the enemies outside, starting with the West. The CHP is one of those domestic enemies through which the AKP also alienates Kemalism as much as the AKP's effort to detach the CHP from Atatürk.

It might be concluded that even in the actual situation in which Kemalism has lost its ideological appeal of the Kemalist single-party period and the Ottoman-Islamic narrative with strong tones of Islamism is constructing the current nation-state and the state structures have become an obedient tool of AKP rule, the AKP's struggle with Kemalism never seems to end. Why is this? One explanation as regards the party's Islamism, Ottoman-Islamic civilizational identity, and the concept of alternative modernization might be that the party's *raison d'être* has been constructed in its opposition

to Kemalism from the outset, although a certain section of Kemalism has currently evolved into Eurasianism as a foreign policy orientation. Yet, such a problem over the question as to why the AKP always perceives Kemalism as a threat opens the venue to other more elaborate research, such as the pressures of the Turkish economy, the weakening of the AKP power base, and the transformative potential of civil society as associated with the AKP and Kemalist movements in the age of globalization. Given those factors, it remains to be seen whether Kemalism, currently rendered passive by the AKP, can maybe regain its dynamism, and transform into a promising force in the eyes of large sections of the Turkish population, maybe in the formulation of a neo-Kemalism. Yet, Atatürkism would not be enough on its own to clarify its objectives vis-a-vis the nation.

Notes

1. Christofis, 'The AKP's "Yeni Türkiye"'.
2. Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire*. Uzer, 'Conservative Narrative'.
3. Yavuz, 'Understanding Turkish Secularism,' and Arısan, 'From "Clients" to "Magnates"'.
4. Akkoyunlu and Öktem, 'Existential Insecurity'.
5. Tombuş and Aygünç, '(Post-)Kemalist Secularism', and Pinar, 'Religion-State Relations'.
6. Öztürk, 'Turkey's Diyanet'. Gürpınar and Kenar, 'The Nation and its Sermons'.
7. Saatçioğlu, 'AKP's 'Europeanization''.
8. Hintz, *Identity Politics Inside Out*.
9. Sezal and Sezal, 'Dark Taints'.
10. Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 'Nationalism and Foreign Policy'.
11. Günay, 'Foreign Policy'.
12. Bayulgen, Arbatli and Canbolat, 'Elite Survival'.
13. Here, in the context of the problematic of (de)democratization versus Islamization, what is meant is not a relation of opposites, but rather how the processes of Islamization, on the one hand, and (de)democratization, on the other, are positioned in relation to each other.
14. Campbell, *Writing Security*, 63.
15. Ibid.
16. Balcı, 'Foreign Policy,' 73.
17. Gökalp, *Hars ve Medeniyet*.
18. Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset*, 232.
19. İçener, 'The Justice and,'.
20. 'Erdoğan: Kişi Laik Olamaz!'.
21. Tombuş, 'Reluctant Democratization,' 9.
22. Öniş, 'Turkey's Democratization,' 116–117.
23. Çaşın, 'Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın,' 141–142.
24. Saatçioğlu and Elbasani, 'The AKP's Shifting,' 149–150.
25. Nagel, 'Masculinity and Nationalism'.
26. Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire*, xii, 9.
27. Tanasković, *Neo-Ottomanism*, 105.

28. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*.
29. Gül, 'Moral Değerleri,' 124–125.
30. Duran, 'Türk Dış Politikasının,' 25.
31. Öniş, 'Turkey and the Arab,' 212–216.
32. Ibid., 205.
33. Çınar, 'Turkey's 'Western',' 177.
34. Toros, *Türkiye'de Siyasal*, 191.
35. Somer and Liaras, 'Turkey's new Kurdish,' 156; in Uzer, "Glorification of the Past," 345–346.
36. Tombuş, 'Reluctant Democratization,' 8, 14.
37. Yılmaz, Barton and Barry, 'The Decline and Resurrection,' 60.
38. Ibid.
39. Uzer, 'Glorification of the Past,' 350.
40. Öztürk, 'An Alternative Reading,' 93–94.
41. Yılmaz and Bashirov, 'The JDP after,' 822.
42. Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 'Nationalism and Foreign Policy,' 307.
43. Kılınç, 'İdeoloji ve Dış,' 83–84.
44. Bashirov and Yılmaz, 'The Rise of Transactionalism'.
45. Ibid. 179–180.
46. 'İbrahim Kalın: FETÖ'cüler!'.
47. Bekić, 'Revisionism as a Characteristic,' 136–137.
48. Ozturk, 'Islam and Foreign,' 13–14.
49. Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire*, 153, and Seeberg, 'Neo-Ottoman Expansionism,' 113.
50. Seeberg, 'Neo-Ottoman Expansionism,' 120.
51. Aydıntaşbaş, 'A New Gaza,' and Ozturk, 'Islam and Foreign,' 13.
52. Seeberg, 'Neo-Ottoman Expansionism,' 119–120.
53. Kutlay and Öniş, 'Turkish foreign policy,' 1101.
54. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 'Adalet Şurasında.'
55. 'İbrahim Kalın: FETÖ'cüler!'.
56. Yılmaz, Caman and Bashirov, 'How an Islamist'.
57. Kutlay and Öniş, 'Turkish foreign policy,' 1093.
58. Kaliber and Kaliber, 'From De-Europeanisation,' 11.
59. 'Erdoğan: AB Ülkelerini'.
60. 'Erdoğan'dan CHP'ye'. Also see 'Erdoğan: CHP ve PKK'nın'.
61. 'Erdoğan'dan, Kılıçdaroğlu'na'.
62. 'Erdoğan: AB Ülkelerini'.
63. Palabiyik, 'Politicization of Recent,' 240.
64. 'Erdoğan: CHP gibi Amorf'.
65. 'Erdoğan: AB Ülkelerini'.
66. Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 'Nationalism and Foreign Policy,' 315.

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