

المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
ARAB CENTER FOR RESEARCH & POLICY STUDIES
(Doha Institute)



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Book Reviews

Turkey and Arab strategic options:

a book review of The Arab-Turkish Dialogue between Past and Present

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Doha, Jun - 2011

Series (Book Reviews)

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In November 2010, the Center for Arab Unity Studies published the book *Arab-Turkish Dialogue between Past and Present*, a collection of papers delivered and discussions held at a symposium organized by the center in collaboration with the Arab Institute for Democracy and the Global Political Trends Center in Istanbul.

In introducing “Turkey and the Arab Strategic Options: a reading in *The Arab-Turkish Dialogue Between Past and Present*,” Mohammad Abd al-Safee Issa says that many changes have taken place since the November 1993 symposium “Arab-Turkish Relations: a Futuristic Dialogue,” which was organized by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in collaboration with the Turkey-based Middle East and Balkan Studies Institute.

In the sixteen years separating the two symposia, radical shifts took place, notably the change in the structure of the international system following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which used to counter-balance the United States; this collapse took place in a relatively gradual manner, stretching from 1985 until 1990, and ended with the official declaration of the death of the USSR.

On the Turkish side, the fall of the Soviet Union ended – to an extent – the obligations of the old Turkish alliance with the Western coalition led by the United States, especially in its NATO component. Wider horizons were opened for Turkish aspirations in all directions, east and west, north and south. Turkey sought to rebuild its zone of influence in Central Asia, specifically in Turkic-speaking countries. It also tried to improve its relations with Iran, India, China, and the Arab world. To the north and west, Turkey maintained its march towards joining the European Union.

One of the most important political junctures for Arab-Turkish relations came with the rise to power of the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party in Turkey in 2002. The ensuing radical change in Turkish foreign policy had deep imprints, especially on relations between Turkey and the Arab world, with foreign trade between the two sides increasing from \$4.7 billion in 1992 to \$22.5 billion in 2007. On both the official and the popular levels, Arab-Turkish relations have improved markedly in recent years, reaching their apex on important aspects of the Palestinian cause, especially with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s positions regarding the Israeli attack on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009, and following the deadly assault against the Freedom Flotilla, which sought to break the siege of Gaza in June 2010.

In his preface, Mohammad Shafi Issa opines that these notable developments are part of a new strategic approach aimed at opening up to Turkey’s surroundings in all directions, and, thereby, exploiting the geopolitical advantages of Turkey’s location and the legacy of its history. In the Arab and Middle Eastern contexts, recent Turkish policy has been based on reassessing the limits

of this regional space, a process in which the most important effects have included warmer relations with Iran and cooler ones with Israel.

The symposium, which was the basis for the book, was clearly shaped by this new environment, and included twelve papers, six by Arab scholars and six by Turkish ones, in addition to broad discussions among the participants in the symposium, who numbered more than 40 and included figures of considerable intellectual weight.

Opening words

In the opening address, the secretary general of the Arab Institute for Democracy, Muhsin Marzuq, stressed the need for the Arabs to learn from the experience of modern Turkey with regard to democratic transition.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Khairiddine Haseeb, general director of the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), declared that the symposium was an opportunity for dialogue between Arab and Turkish intellectual and political elites. He said the event had the potential to raise these elites' interest in Arab-Turkish relations and increase their efforts to strengthen these ties. Haseeb also expressed hope that this interest would spread throughout the popular level through the various media.

Haseeb also pointed to the significant progress in Arab-Turkish cooperation in recent years, with Turkey re-engaging with the Islamic world and developing positive relationships with Arab countries. He noted the importance of Turkey's being aware of the vital interests of Syria and Iraq in shared water resources, and the need to reach solutions that address mutual interests and conform to international treaties. He added that many Arabs are looking forward to a new Turkey that opens up to the Arabs, and not to the emergence of modern-day "Ottoman Turkey".

Arab-Turkish relations: strategic perspective

Turkey's deputy minister of foreign affairs, Ambassador Angin Soysal, spoke of the interest of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Arab-Turkish dialogue throughout the Middle East. He recounted that the ministry had sponsored his attendance of a training program at the European School during the 1980s in the context of Turkey's grooming of young technocrats in preparation for joining the European Union. Soysal's presentation focused on the European dimension in Turkey's foreign policy and the possible ways of achieving integration with the European Union. He also reiterated Minister Oglu's words to the effect that Turkey wishes to reduce its disputes with its neighbors to zero, in keeping with the late Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's adage: "peace in the homeland and peace in the world."

Soysal said that Turkey uses four major principles as a roadmap towards dispute resolution: security for everyone, dialogue with everyone, the creation of mutual economic dependencies, and mutual respect. Together, these are aimed at the establishment of a regional cooperation dynamic, one seen as a responsibility stemming from history and geography, as well as one that transmits positive energy. As examples, he mentioned several bilateral and multilateral processes, including economic cooperation in the Black Sea region, the Organization of Economic Cooperation, Turkey's position in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, giving a new push to the Bosnia-Herzegovina Group, and trilateral cooperation among Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Soysal also emphasized that the Foreign Ministry is the only Turkish ministry that makes foreign policy, and that Turkey has assumed this change of direction with a self-confidence deriving from its position as increasingly influential state, being a member of the G-20, having entered into the negotiations stage with the European Union, and being a participant in most regional initiatives.

Ambassador Soysal said that following the end of the Cold War and since the September 11 attacks, the problems of the Middle East have become more closely interconnected, which also applies to the area where Asia intersects geographically with the Middle East, a prime example being Pakistan. Turkey played a leading role in the Friends of a Democratic Pakistan Group, seeing it as a worthy effort aimed at shoring up the country's stability.

Soysal added that Turkey's geographical advantages, and its sharing of long borders with Syria and Iraq, should not be ignored. Turkey's vision, he said, is not based on security, but on history, with an eye to improving various bilateral relationships in order to make these ties less dependent on current conditions by basing them on a conceptual framework that carries this permanent vision of the region. Turkey has found this to be an effective diplomatic concept, one that helped the leadership shoulder its responsibilities when it came to ending conflicts with Syria and Iraq.

Such actions can only have meaning, he argued, if they are linked to a sense of responsibility emanating from notions of "regional ownership," mutual solidarity, and comprehensive dialogue. As a result, these elements have come to the fore of Turkey's foreign policy agenda as it relates to the Middle East. The difference between Syrian-Turkish relations in 1988 and Syrian-Turkish relations today, for example, is extremely dazzling. In Intab (Aleppo), Turkish and Syrian delegations included 10 ministers from each side, and no fewer than 48 protocols were signed. Relations with Iraq have witnessed a similar rate of improvement.

On Turkey's ambition to join the European Union, Ambassador Soysal predicted eventual success. He argued that Turkey should look at the post-EU phase with self-confidence, noting that his country already plays a role in defining the European Question. Therefore, he argued, Europe needs Turkey. In this context, he said:

“If we believe in the main dynamics of the European project, we should view these dynamics in the philosophical sense as representing a better, more prosperous future, and further economic and cultural rapprochement between people. When we examine the phase of European integration, we notice the absence of the concepts of the nation-state and national identity in the beginnings. But as you look at the current basic and foundational treaties, you will find that each accord includes the theme of respect for national identity. When the process of integration in the 1980s was designed in a manner that bothered European nationalisms, the concept of national identity began appearing in the treaties, becoming more prominent in Maastricht 1992, and then Amsterdam ... but when we observe the main mechanism set up by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, we find a phase of integration that is protected by the nation-state, with the nations and their parliaments forming part of the European Union dynamic, even if this phase had a supra-national content.”

Turkey's strategic options

The second chapter of *Arab-Turkish Dialogue Between Past and Present* includes the words of Meliha Altunisik, chairman of the International Relations Department at the Middle East Technical University in Turkey. Altunisik claims that the Cold War largely determined Turkey's strategic perspective on the Middle East in general and the Arab world in particular. Turkey's strategic outlook was built around the limiting of Soviet influence in the Middle East, and viewed the Arab nationalist current as a tool for the increase of Soviet influence in the region. This view was built according to the Western perspective that sought to secure the flow of oil from the region to international markets. In that phase, Turkey adopted the view of the Western camp, of which it was a member, regarding the Middle East.

Turkey began designing its policy toward the region in the mid-1960s, and this policy had several notable characteristics, including the notion of the “status quo” (i.e., the guarding of the status quo, as in the principle of rejecting revisions of borders). Ankara also supported the presence of a multi-polar regional balance of powers since Turkey was uncomfortable with the idea of a single state playing a hegemonic role in the region. Turkey also followed a policy of remaining outside regional conflicts as much as possible.

Changes began to appear in Turkey's policy in the 1980s, overlapping with changes in the international and regional systems which affected Turkey's view of the Middle East and offered Ankara the possibility of engaging with regional issues. Two political earthquakes caused an acceleration of these changes: the fall of the Soviet Union and the 1990-91 Gulf crisis. Turkey

was affected deeply by both tremors, especially the Gulf War, which significantly increased its interest in the Middle East. The importance of the region and Iraq require no elucidation, and the internal Turkish scene started featuring debates on the necessity of developing a new perspective on how to determine the necessary degree of interest in the Middle East.

Two main opinions emerged. First, a policy that viewed Iraq's north as its center, with the old policy being recycled to fit the new circumstances, and with an emphasis on military solutions. The second current tended to offer alternative perspectives since the end of the Cold War, which represented a critique of the old policies, and posited that Turkey's engagement with the Middle East was overdue, and that its outlook on the region should not be solely determined by Iraq and its north.

Altunisik pointed out that this latter current has included a range of different opinions stressing historic and cultural links, with a focus on developing policies that go beyond Iraq, as well as on basing these policies on opportunities, not challenges and threats. From this perspective, the region is to be viewed not from the perspective of military solutions alone, but within a larger security framework. Turkey's relations with the region were discussed according to a new security definition that included political, economic, and social issues. Following the end of the Cold War, then-Prime Minister Turgut Ozal labored to develop new foreign policy visions, as did then-Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, between 1997 and 2002. The same has been done, in a more effective way since 2002, by the Justice and Development Party and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

The appearance of new problems in the region, such as the Iraq crisis, coupled with the failure of the United States to establish a new system in the Middle East and end the Arab-Israeli conflict, led to the showcasing of Turkey's effectiveness, opening the door for it to play a growing role in the region. Ankara's policy focused on eliminating conflicts with neighbors, and a project that sought to resolve past problems through dialogue rather than military means, and to achieve cooperation with neighbors by focusing on mutually beneficial initiatives.

Turkey and Syria came to the brink of war in 1998, but relations improved tremendously afterwards. Turkey also developed a policy of dialoguing with all players in Iraq and of abstaining from placing obstacles in Iraq's way because of the problem of Iraq's north, in addition to furthering relations with Iran.

In his follow-up to Dr. Altunisik's presentation, Gencer Ozcan, professor of political science at Istanbul Bilgi University, said that since the 1980s, Turkish policy towards the Middle East had gone from being reactive to proactive, a shift that no longer allowed remaining on the sidelines of the Middle East and its conflicts. This policy began to be enacted under the Justice and

Development Party and was spearheaded by Ahmet Davutoglu, first as adviser to the Foreign Ministry and later as foreign minister.

The strategic options of the Arab homeland

In the book's third chapter, Mohammad al-Sayyid Saleem, professor of political science at Kuwait University, presents a paper titled "The Strategic Options of the Arab homeland, and Turkey's Relation to Them". The paper discusses the debates that took place among Arab intellectuals and within Arab governments after the end of international bipolarity in 1991; the debates were centered on Arab strategic alternatives under the unipolar world system. Despite the fact that most Arab countries were allied with the United States, which controlled this new world system, there remained concerns over the long-reaching effects of unipolarity, especially in regards to the ability of Arab countries to act independently of American diktats. Some Arab intellectuals and governments called for a search for strategic alternatives to the Western camp without cutting all ties with it. Many were advocating an East Asian alternative with the ascendancy of new economic powers there, seen by some as a counterbalance to Western power. And some Arab governments actually began a policy of turning eastward.

Turkey was largely absent from this debate. Its skeptical position regarding the Second Gulf War had allowed it to emerge from the crisis unscathed and, therefore, even better-equipped to seize the opportunities opened up by the end of bipolarity. This abetted its pursuit of policies to augment its regional role in the context of European Union integration, on the one hand, and in that of its new strategic sphere of Central Asia – within the concept of "New Ottomanism" – on the other, in addition to deepening links with the United States. Strategic cooperation with Israel was one of the ways to strengthen relations with the United States.

All this was happening while Arab states were still preoccupied with the negative fallout of the Gulf War and the rise of non-Arab regional powers in the Middle East. Things were made worse with Turkey's signing of a military cooperation agreement with Israel in 1996.

However, with the rise of the Justice and Development Party to power in 2002, Turkey began adopting a new policy towards the Arab homeland consisting of looking south and building more extensive relations with the Arabs. This development reached its dramatic apogee when Erdogan withdrew from the Davos conference in protest over not being given the chance to respond to the allegations of Israeli President Shimon Peres.

This led to the emergence of a debate in Arab strategic thought over the Turkish role in the Middle East and the Arab homeland, and whether Turkey could be considered a reliable strategic alternative for the Arabs. From this debate, three currents emerged.

The first affirmed that Turkey was not a strategic alternative for the Arabs, and that it was following a policy of “deceiving and exploiting Arabs,” thus imposing a new guardianship over them. It also held that Turkey exploited its relations with the Arabs in order to improve its position in its negotiations with Europe, and to reinforce its strategic relationship with the United States; they also claimed that pressuring Israel was intended to garner new concessions for Turkish interests in the region, not to serve the Palestinian cause.

The second current maintained that Turkey was undergoing deep strategic shifts caused by multiple happenings, including the transformation of its economy, the political shift towards the primacy of the law and the constitution, the weakening of the role of the military, and the neutralization of the Kurdish problem. This group argued that Turkey was engaging the Arab world as a strategic partner, not only in terms of investment, but also from the perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Advocates of this position added that these transformations required a strategic vision in order to deal with Turkey as one of three pillars in the region (next to Iran and Egypt), and that cooperation between these three states could change the region’s balance of power, redrawing its maps and adding a new element to the international equation.

The third current conceded that there was heavy Turkish involvement in the Arab world with the aim of acquiring additional room for maneuver, not only to garner both economic and political influence, but also to face the growing roles of competing powers, especially Iran. This camp viewed this strategy as benefiting from US and European support. It also noted that the way was open for the Arabs to benefit from this opportunity, and called for Arab-Turkish dialogue in order to increase cooperation and for investments in common interests in order to support stability in the region.

In his paper, researcher Mohammad al-Sayyid Saleem studies the option of “Turkey as a Strategic Alternative,” explicating other alternatives and analyzing them, whether on the global (the US, Europe, Russia, and China) or regional level (Iran and Israel), in order to assess the availability of the conditions for a strategic alternative for the Arabs in Turkey. Saleem argues that the Turkish alternative is a valid one if it is based on comprehensive Arab-Turkish strategic accord over mutual interests. After defining the term “strategic alternative” and explaining the global and regional conditions for potential strategic alternatives, as well as Turkey’s relation to those, Saleem puts forth the necessary conditions for the building of an Arab-Turkish strategic understanding.

The conceptual framework of the strategic alternative

What is meant by a “strategic alternative” for a certain state is a partner who is endowed with similar characteristics in terms of values and political leanings, and who has the capacity and the desire to build common relations in the long term in a manner that serves the interests of all

parties involved. Four conditions need to be met in the strategic alternative. First, the availability of economic, military, political, and cultural influences that allow the state attempting to ally with it to achieve all of its goals or a number of them. Second, the desire of the strategic partner to build relations of partnership because of the presence of a network of interests with the potential ally. Third, the existence of similarities in values and political direction between the strategic alternative and the potential ally in terms of their objectives in the regional and international arenas. Fourth, the presence of a national consensus in the strategic alternative over the question of partnership, which permits the creation of relations of partnership over the long run.

The more strategic alternatives are available, the more capable the state becomes in achieving its goals and furthering its interests, and the freer it becomes in terms of independent action in foreign relations, which is especially true for small- and mid-sized countries.

The objectives Arabs seek by partnering with a strategic alternative are: a) security tasks, specifically the Arab-Israeli conflict and the security of the Gulf; b) economic tasks, including development through trade, investment, technology, and aid; and c) cultural tasks relating to the preservation of national and religious identity(ies).

Mohammad al-Sayyid Saleem argues that the United States is not a strategic alternative for the Arabs because it is biased in favor of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, it pressures Arabs to make concessions to Israel, such as recognition of the state and normalization, without pressuring Israel to carry out its commitments in the peace process, such as putting a stop to settlement building and withdrawing from occupied Arab land.

However, the US is also the guarantor of the security of the Gulf Arab states, and is an important strategic partner to the Arabs in trade, investment, and even economic aid to some countries, like Egypt. The United States is also the main supplier of defense equipment to the Gulf Arab states, but the United States it is no partner in terms of the preservation of national and religious identity(ies).

The European alternative, on the other hand, overlaps with the American one over security policies and the main economic direction in the region, despite the existence of competition between the US and Europe over the markets of the region. The two sides are in agreement over the maintenance of the regional strategic imbalance in favor of Israel, and over not applying pressures on Israel over issues like the peace process or nuclear disarmament, while Europe, like America, labors intensively to prevent Arab states and Iran from acquiring any programs for the production of weapons of mass destruction.

There is a harmony between US and European policies in the region and a division of tasks between the two sides. The European Union takes charge of “soft” security matters, while the United States deals with the “hard” ones. In many respects the European role prepares the ground for the American one, as the former prepares the suitable conditions for cooperation and understanding through economic and cultural ties, supporting civil society, human rights, and good governance, while the latter engages in political restructurings, road maps, and armed invasions. There are three dimensions to the European role in its relation to the American one: facilitating American influence, absorbing the shocks caused by US actions, and supporting the US outright in critical crises.

From a realistic perspective, the European Union does not represent an independent alternative to the American one because they are complementary on questions of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the security of the Gulf. But this common US-European alternative is hegemonic in the international scene, and it is also a common denominator between Arabs and Turks, given Turkey’s NATO membership and its attempts to join the European Union; therefore, it would be impossible to build an Arab-Turkish partnership outside an accord with the European-American strategic alternative.

Russia is back to playing a global role, especially in Central Asia and the Middle East; they do so, for instance, through the Iranian nuclear program, the concluding of arms deals with Syria, and an agreement to prospect for natural gas in Saudi Arabia’s Empty Quarter. However, Russia does not seek confrontation with the West, nor the flaring of a new Cold War. Russian ascension is in the interest of the Arab world, for the more multilateral international relations become, the more Arab interests are realized in the form of limiting successive military campaigns against Arab and Muslim countries, at the very least, which could only take place under the unipolar system (such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq). Russia, however, is not currently in a state to effectively influence Arab security issues, and it is still in the process of rebuilding its economic capabilities, which makes it a limited economic alternative.

In recent years, the Chinese alternative also grew prominent. China is one of the world’s ascending economic powers, and already the largest economy in the world in terms of purchasing power parity. It also possesses nuclear and ballistic capabilities, but with limited military power, both of which are the most commonly employed functions in international relations. Its society also features a coherent majority group and a rich culture that is distinguished by a feeling of civilizational superiority.

China is, however, also facing major obstacles caused by this very economic ascendancy. These include social problems engendered by brisk economic development, such as rural-to-urban migration, the spread of organized crime, and political corruption, in addition to problematic

population growth and secessionist tendencies in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang. Additionally, China faces the dilemma of accommodating the new capitalist classes in a system based on closed, one-party rule. The Chinese leadership has no global political strategy except for its economic project to assure the flow of oil and access to foreign markets. China affirms its desire to transform the world system into a multipolar one, but seems to have no plan to put that into practice. China generally agrees in the Security Council with the decisions of Western powers on most issues, abstains from challenging American influence, and avoids any political or military confrontation with the United States.

The fact is that China is still not considered an influential power in the global balance for various reasons, starting with its geographic remoteness from the Eurasian heartland. This location has enshrined a notion, in the Chinese political mind and on the peripheral status of China, which in turn dovetails with a cultural assumption of the specificity of Chinese civilization and its superiority over other civilizations. These factors, in addition to the limited spread of the Chinese language, limit China's global role. Therefore, China represents a limited strategic alternative in security and economics at the current stage though is a potential alternative in the long term.

There is also the Iranian alternative, with Iran being a partner of the Arabs because of historic links, geographical proximity, and the overlap of communities across borders. Iran has more than 3,200 kilometers of coastline along the Gulf, the rest of it bordered by Arab states. Since the Gulf is the exit point for 80% of Iran's oil exports, Arab-Iranian relations acquire a special importance.

Because of the US-Iranian conflict over the Iranian nuclear program, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, and because of the Gulf states' support for the United States and their fear of Iran's expanding regional influence, Iran cannot currently be a strategic alternative for the Arabs in security matters, especially if the Arab strategy involved the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Iran could be an important alternative if the Arab strategy were based on resistance. Therefore, in the view of Sayyid Saleem, Iran remains a strategic alternative in the long run. Some scholars have proposed a different alternative, a "triad power" based on Arab-Iranian-Turkish strategic agreement, but the viability of this model seems limited at the moment.

It might be a flight of fantasy to speak of Israel as a potential alternative for the Arab homeland, simply being the main enemy which the Arabs seek to counter by acquiring a partner. However, the United States has proposed this option and demanded that it be transformed into reality. Sayyid Saleem argues that the contradictions between the Arabs and Iran is a secondary one compared to their shared conflict with Israel, noting that the largest obstacle to Arab-Turkish relations balances on one question: to what extent is Turkey willing to balance its relations with the Arabs and Israel?

In summation, the Arab strategic alternatives seem extremely limited, especially in the security sphere, which leads to a discussion of the Turkish alternative. It is without doubt that Turkey is an important state in the Middle East and Asia, and Western scholars refer to Turkey as one of the vital allies of the United States. With its location making it a link between East and West, North and South, and Islam and Christianity, Turkey is capable of affecting countries thousands of miles away from the Bosphorus. Turkey is also endowed with stable economic growth and a thriving middle class, but it suffers numerous difficulties, such as demographic, environmental, and ethnic minority pressures, in addition to the bitter competition with Greece over Cyprus and various other contested islands, disagreements with Syria and Iraq over the sharing of the Euphrates water, and the tense relations with Muslim-majority Central Asia.

When US President Barak Obama visited Turkey in April 2009, he expressed interest in building a strategic partnership with Turkey, and lauded the Turkish roles in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and in the Islamic world at large. If Turkey is a central country for US strategy, to what extent is it so for an Arab strategy? In the search for an answer to that question, Sayyid Saleem attempts to test the four conditions of a strategic alternative and their expected functions in the Turkish case.

Turkey's strategic capabilities

In a notable 1996 article, Heinz Kramer determined three Turkish points of strength: political stability, economic capabilities, and military power. After the publishing of the article, Turkey experienced several developments in support of this thesis, such as the deepening of democracy and stability, the pacification of the Kurdish problem, the reduction of the power of the military establishment, and improved relations with neighboring countries.

Turkey surpasses all its neighbors in economic achievements; it is endowed with a diverse industrial base that relies on local raw materials, except for energy. It is also self-sufficient on the agricultural level, and boasts a rich pool of human resources, but it remains unable to recast itself – at least for the foreseeable future – as an economic and financial pole for surrounding countries. Turkey is one of the most powerful emerging economies, with its GDP increasing from \$300 billion in 2002 to \$750 billion in 2008, with an average growth rate of 7.3% a year. GDP per capita simultaneously increased from \$3,300 to \$10,000 a year; during the same period, annual exports rose from \$30 billion to \$130 billion.

On the military level, Turkey is considered to be the mightiest of its neighbors according to Kramer (1996), with the regional power balance tipping in its favor; it also manufactures a significant portion of its own weaponry, specifically fighter planes and warships. Turkey's military capabilities may be enough to protect the integrity of its national borders, but not to offer the sufficient support for a long-term regional power though Turkey is aspiring to a role

that surpasses its abilities by stressing its status as a founding state of the regional system, to use the terms of Davutoglu.

Since the late 1990s, Turkey has adopted a policy of compromise with its European, Asian, and Arab neighbors. In other words, the “Zero Problems With Neighbors” policy, quoting Davutoglu’s terms. He stated, a day after being appointed foreign minister, that he wanted his country to play a greater role in the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. It would be accurate to state that Turkey desires to build strategic partnerships with the Arabs and with all the regions in which it is involved, a desire that enjoys consensus on the Turkish domestic level, in addition to Arab-Turkish agreement on cultural, religious, and political directions. Therefore, Turkey is one of the most credible strategic alternatives for the Arabs, provided Arab agreement over this alternative, and the absence of US, European, or Iranian opposition.

As for the extent to which Turkey is capable of playing an effective role in realizing Arab goals through such a strategic partnership, it should be noted that Turkey already plays a role in resolving regional disputes by engaging and interacting with all sides to reach agreements that benefit all parties. This includes the call for the creation of a mechanism for meetings between countries neighboring Iraq, and the founding of the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation between Palestine, Israel, and Turkey, as well as its role of mediation between Arabs and Israelis during peace negotiations.

Turkey also claims a central role in building collective security in the Middle East through multilateral initiatives, such as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, which is within the context of NATO. Turkey tries to play a system-building role in the Middle East by suggesting security structures in the region and then participating in their operation. It can also play multiple roles, as, for instance, a regional economic center, a locus of dialogue between civilizations, and a bridge between the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Union.

Fields of Arab-Turkish cooperation

The second part of the book includes two chapters, one by researcher Mohammad Nureddine, showcasing an Arab perspective on Arab-Turkish cooperation and coordination, and another, presenting a Turkish viewpoint, written by Nursin Atesoglu Guney.

In his study, Nureddine discusses fields of Arab-Turkish cooperation in the economy, politics, culture, and society. He sees an urgent need to form an Arab-Turkish assessment committee that surveys the realities of each side and its capacities, so that the realities of the other party can be used to further economic integration. He points out that out of Turkey’s \$300 billion in foreign trade in 2008, only \$17 billion was with the Arab world, an acceptable number, but well below potential, exhibiting the need to pursue and improve economic relations.

Turkey satisfies a portion of its oil and gas needs from the Arab world, but the largest share of Turkish consumption is imported from Russia and Iran. Turkey hopes that Iraqi oil will be one of the main sources to feed the NABUCCO pipeline that is to be built in the few coming years, adding to flows from the existing Kirkuk-Yumurtalik line. Arabs and Turks could cooperate on exporting oil and gas, hydraulic, industrial, and agricultural projects, in addition to direct investment, especially Arab investments in Turkish real estate, tourism, industry and agriculture, and the creation of a common economic market between the two sides.

On the political level, solidarity between the two sides has increased due to emerging shared threats and risks. Had it not been for cultural, civilizational, and affective links between the two sides and the belief in a shared destiny, this solidarity would not have evolved into strategic cooperation and unprecedented agreements between Turkey, on the one hand, and Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, on the other.

Nureddine claims that Arabs and Turks have a historic opportunity as a result of the emergence of an authentic common desire to cooperate and coordinate at the highest possible levels, benefiting from a juncture of change on the regional and global levels which could assure the success of this cooperation. He also noted the existence of shared cultural, civilizational, and geographic constituents between Turkey and the Arab world, which represent on the main motivations to construct robust cooperation in all fields. Nureddine argues that this cooperation must take into account its civilizational and strategic depth, meaning Iran, which could afford it further robustness and protection. Also, the extent of this partnership should expand to all arenas and regional and international organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the United Nations, and other groupings.

Nursin Atesoglu Guney, on the other hand, explains in his paper that Turkey has no choices regarding its relationships with neighbors and Western allies. Behind Turkey's choice of adopting a policy of proactive balancing and multilateralism (which started maturing after the end of the Cold War) lies a rationality that seems to comprehend the problems of the region better than the region's other nations.

Turkey has built upon its strategic advantages – dubbed by Western scholars as “soft power” – especially in the context of Turkish-Arab dialogue. The vitality of the economic and cultural relations subsumed under soft power cannot be underestimated. Atesoglu Guney presents several examples, including: the election of Akamelddin Ehsan Oglu as general secretary of the Jeddah-based Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2005, which led to stronger relations between Turkey and the Gulf Arab states; an agreement was also signed to create a Turkish-Saudi labor market in Riyadh in 2003; a decision was made to start a fund operated by an international

institution to encourage investment in Turkey; and the signing of the Framework Agreement for Economic Cooperation with the GCC states.

The scholar points out two important points regarding regional political/strategic cooperation which have had an influence on Arab-Turkish dialogue. First, the common realization of the Western threat after the 9/11 attacks were associated with Muslims, and Islam was cast a security issue, which caused discomfort to both Arab states and Turkey. Dialogue could be an effective way to engender understanding in the region, such as the initiative of countries bordering Iraq on the future of that country. The second point relates to the unilateral American intervention in Iraq in 2003. Concern over Iraq's future has led to the hastening of strategic dialogue among regional states. Iraq's future has the potential to influence Arab-Turkish and US-Turkish-Arab relations, as well as regional cooperation.

The third part of the book deals with the state of Arab-Turkish relations and their horizons with a paper – representing the Turkish perspective – by Guvin Saq, who avoids discussing energy and water and focuses instead on commercial-industrial relations. Saq considers that the period of economic transformation has led to social and political results that quickly changed foreign policy. The main reason for Turkey's heightened interest in Central Asia and the Balkans, and not the Middle East and North Africa, is Turkey's economic transformation. He stresses that while the reform era was heralded by President Ozal in the 1980s, when industry was concentrated in specific parts of Anatolia – mainly Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, and Bursa – exports only became vital for Turkey after it hastily entered the free-market era after the full revamp of economic policy. Therefore, the Turkish leadership believed in the necessity of freeing trade and increasing its efficiency in order to gain hard currency for the country. This liberalization was not limited to increasing exports, but also to the spread of Turkish industry to small cities, such as Denizli, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Konya, and Ankara.

After describing the social and economic shifts in Turkey, the researcher explicates Turkey's perspective on the region. Between 1999 and 2009, the structure of Turkish exports changed. In 1996, the European Union's share of Turkish exports stood at 54%, rising to 56% in 2000, only to decrease later to 44%. Simultaneously, Turkey's exports to Arab countries as a share of total exports rose from 9% to 19% in the same period. If we observed the trade balance with Arab countries, we would find that – with the exception of a few states like Qatar – it has shifted in Turkey's favor despite the high oil prices during that period.

Munir al-Hamash presents an Arab perspective on the state of economic relations between the two sides. Al-Hamash indicates that these relations are dependent upon a number of variables that determine their course. These variables are represented by several historical, political, cultural, economic, and social factors, in addition to strategic factors relating to the respective

geopolitical statures of Turkey and the Arab countries. Among the most notable variables enumerated by the researcher is the historic legacy of Arab-Turkish relations, which did not begin with the Ottoman conquest of Arab lands, but with the conversion of Turkish tribes to Islam, and the Turks acquiring an effective place in the Arab-Islamic state. The Seljuk Turks also participated in countering the Crusader invasions, while Nureddine Zengi had a role in unifying Egypt and Syria and in creating an effective state in all aspects. Also among the important variables is Turkey's relationship with the West. Since its rise, the modern Republic of Turkey has taken a number of pro-Western political and economic decisions in the hope that Turkey's separation from its Arab and Islamic surroundings would be its passport to the West. Other determinants of economic relations between Turkey and the Arabs include the Turkish-Israeli relationship, the shifts occurring in the Turkish economic system, the question of water resources, the issue of Alexandretta, Turkey's view of the Arabs, and the Arabs' views of Turkey.

The fourth part of the book deals with the issue of identity between Turkey and the Arab homeland from both perspectives. The Arab perspective is presented by Sayyar al-Jameel, who argues that we are currently in need of a deeper understanding of identity and its historical roots, especially during the critical stage that witnessed the separation of Arabs from Turks due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which gathered them – along with many other peoples – on a massive geographic expanse in the center of the world. Identity was Ottoman for many centuries, and nationalities existed due to language, culture, education, and feelings, but this awareness did not surpass, at the time, the strength of Ottoman identity, which was the real glue for those who lived under the Ottoman umbrella for a long period of history. Al-Jameel believes that it is necessary to rethink the question of identity, especially within the three large societies in the Middle East – Arabs, Turks, and Iranians – who have had a deep effect over the course of modern history.

Scholar Etian Mahjubian presents the Turkish perspective on the matter of identity. He considers the ongoing transformation that Turkey is witnessing in its Arab relations to be “happening faster than the evolution in Turkey's relations in any other arena. If we want to propose a vision for the future, we must know and understand what will be taking place and where Turkey will be heading in the coming 10 to 15 years. Generally, Turkey has two paths: the first has Turkey with a strong international role, while Turkish identity is waning, the second has a strong, self-maintaining Turkish identity, but with Turkey as a secondary or mid-sized player on the international scene.”

Many may be baffled by this contradiction, because – in normal circumstances – a country’s identity grows with its strength. Turkey will become an influential country as much as it weakens Turkish identity, and this situation will become dynamically clearer in the coming years.

In the fifth section, the book treats the political/religious currents in the Arab homeland and Turkey. Mohammad Jamal Barout writes on these movements in the Arab context, arguing that the birth of the modern Islamist movement in the Arab homeland was closely related to the radical shifts in Kemalist Turkey, which separated the Caliphate from the Sultanate in November 1922, leading to the abolition of the Caliphate itself in 1924, completely separating religion from state according to the radical Jacobin notion of laicism founded by the French Third Republic. As such, Kemalist Turkey had – in relative terms – achieved in less than a year and half the extent of change that took French secularism far longer, beginning with the French Revolution’s “nationalization” of the French Catholic Church through administrative, not dogmatic or ritualistic, separation between the state and Rome’s Catholic Church, until the radical separation between religion and state, which was enshrined in the constitution of the Third Republic in 1905.

On Islamist currents in Turkey, scholar Hatim Eiti describes the ascension of the Justice and Development Party to power, and the evolution of the Turkish Islamist movement in light of this experience.

The sixth part of the book discusses the army and authority in Turkey and the Arab world. Ali Bayram Oglu describes Turkey’s case, while Munzir Suleiman expounds on the Arab situation.

In the conclusion, the book relays the debates that took place during the roundtable that served as culmination of the symposium. A future action plan was formulated with the participation of a number of researchers. The book closes with two presentations, one by the director of the Center for Arab Unity Studies, Khaireddine Haseeb, and another by Turkish researcher Mansur Akghun.