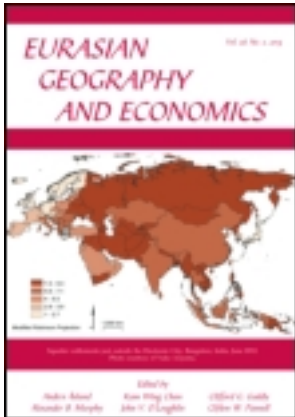


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# Turkey's "New" Foreign Policy toward Eurasia

Pinar Bilgin and Ali Bilgiç<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Two geographers specializing in Turkey's international relations examine the reframing of foreign policy issues under the country's Justice and Development Party (JDP; also known by its Turkish acronym AKP), in power since 2002. After first locating the JDP within Turkey's current political landscape, the authors investigate how notions of civilizational geopolitics have led to a "new geographic imagination" under JDP that has influenced foreign policy thinking. The authors argue that JDP foreign policy exhibits some continuity with that of earlier governments in terms of activist policies toward Central Eurasia (comprising the Middle East, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia), but are based on a new conceptual foundation that views Turkey not as part of Western civilization but as the emerging leader of its own "civilizational basin" (consisting of the former Ottoman territories plus adjoining regions inhabited by Muslim and Turkic peoples). They then explore the implications for Turkey's future relations with the Central Eurasian region (of which Turkey is assumed to be the leader) and countries of the West (viewed now as "neighbors" but no longer "one of us"). *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: F500, F530, O180. 4 tables, 63 references. Key words: Turkey, Eurasia, civilizational geopolitics, Justice and Development Party, Central Asia, Middle East, Transcaucasia, foreign policy, oil pipelines, natural gas pipelines.

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Since 2002, Turkey has been governed by the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which has pursued a policy of activism in relations with Eurasia.<sup>2</sup> This policy has produced a fair number of admirers as well as detractors. Notwithstanding their significant differences, these groups share two common views. Both perceive JDP's foreign policy as characterized by change, and both express their views through a geopolitical prism. As to the first point, whereas its admirers praise JDP for having initiated a "paradigm shift" in Turkey's foreign policy (e.g., Sözen, 2010), its critics warn that these changes amount to no less than "dismantling Turkey" (Criss, 2010). Second, JDP's admirers portray the party as having introduced a "new geographic imagination" to foreign policy (Aras, 2009) while party officials view themselves as reclaiming the "Ottoman geopolitical space" (Kınıklioğlu, 2007). Critics, on the other hand, have characterized JDP policymaking as initiating a "shift of axis" from the Euro-Atlantic to Eurasia (Loğoğlu, 2009).

The present paper offers a critical assessment of the JDP's foreign policy performance thus far, focusing on its policy discourse and other practices concerning Central Eurasia.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup>In this paper, we refer to the party by its English-language title and acronym, to facilitate comparison with the foreign policy positions of Turkey's numerous other political parties (e.g., in Tables 1–3). Its Turkish acronym AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) is also widely known and used (e.g., in Secor, 2011 and Dostál et al., 2011 in this issue).

<sup>3</sup>For the purposes of this study, Central Eurasia is defined as an area limited to Transcaucasia (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), and the Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Palestinian Authority, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates).

the next section of the paper, we begin by locating JDP in Turkey's current political landscape. A second section explores how notions of civilizational geopolitics have influenced the JDP's "new geographic imagination." Three subsequent sections delve more deeply, addressing respectively the tenets of the "old" geographic imagination, how much is different about the "new," and the implications of this new imagination for Turkish policy toward Central Eurasia.

### TURKEY'S 2011 POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The Turkish political landscape has undergone significant change over the past decade. A generation of politicians who have shaped Turkey's politics since the 1960s has either passed away<sup>4</sup> or retired from party leadership and/or active politics.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, a group of politicians ascending through the ranks of the Islamist conservative National Outlook tradition parted ways with the leadership, refashioned their identity as "Muslim Democrat," and positioned themselves on the center-right of Turkey's political spectrum.<sup>6</sup> In one fell swoop, JDP was founded in 2001, entered the 2002 parliamentary elections, and became the country's governing majority party (gaining 34 percent of the vote). JDP increased its share of the vote in 2007 (garnering 46.5 percent), and has since elected one of its own as President (former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül). By 2011, the JDP has become the second-longest serving governing party in Turkey's post-1946 history of multi-party politics.<sup>7</sup> In the following paragraphs, we briefly survey Turkey's current political landscape in order to better locate the JDP within the entire spectrum of Turkish political views.

Foreign policy advocacy by political parties has a relatively short history in Turkey. Well until the 1960s foreign policy was considered as a realm only for the elite. Members of the public as well as politicians refrained from engaging in public debates on foreign policy. In the early years of the Republic, Turkey's first President and founder of the Republican People's Party (RPP) Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) steered foreign policy singlehandedly, which left the Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to implement decisions already made. The remainder of the policymaking elite, including the Prime Minister, were informed of decisions, but only occasionally consulted beforehand. In the absence of public debate and/or questioning of governmental policymaking, there was little need for politicians to engage in foreign policy advocacy, a situation that persisted following the transition to multi-party democracy in 1946. During the 1950s when the Democratic Party (DP) was in power, foreign policy was opened to the input of the Foreign Ministry, but not the other political parties—let alone non-state actors. Accordingly, foreign policy retained its top-down and nonpartisan character well until the 1960s.

Consequently, the foreign policy agendas of centrist parties remained almost identical: pro-Western, in favor of European Community membership (albeit with certain qualifications), skeptical of foreign policy entanglements in the Middle East, and wary of being perceived as

<sup>4</sup>These include Bülent Ecevit of the centrist Republican People's Party and Democratic Left Party; Necmettin Erbakan, the founding leader of the National Outlook tradition, the National Salvation Party, and its successor Welfare Party; and Alparslan Türkeş, the ultra-nationalist founding leader of the Nationalist Action Party.

<sup>5</sup>These include Süleyman Demirel of the center-right Justice Party and its successor the True Path Party; Deniz Baykal of the centrist Republican People's Party; Mesut Yılmaz of the Motherland Party; and Tansu Çiller of the True Path Party.

<sup>6</sup>On the transformation experienced by the founders of the JDP, see White (2003); on the transformation of Turkish politics more generally, see Özbudun and Hale (2010).

<sup>7</sup>Turkey's Democratic Party has served the longest as a single governing party (1950–1960).

**Table 1.** Foreign Policy Positions of Turkey's Main Political Groups during the Cold War

	Political blocs and constituent parties			
	Right	Center Right	Center Left	Left
Policy toward region	National Order Party (NOP), National Salvation Party (NSP), Nationalist Action Party (NAP)	Democratic Party (DP), Justice Party (JP), Motherland Party (MP), True Path Party (TPP)	Republican People's Party (RPP), Social Democrat Party (SoDeP)	Turkey's Workers Party (TWP)
West	NOP, NSP: Anti-Western, seeking to suspend relations with the EC NAP: Anticommunist, pro-Western	DP: Pro-Western, pro-EC JP: Pro-Western, pro-EC MP: Pro-Western, pro-EC TPP: Pro-Western, pro-EC	RPP: Pro-Western, pro-EC, cautious on the Customs Union SoDeP: Pro-Western, pro-EC	Western institutions, including EC, are imperialist tools
Middle East	NOP, NSP: Closer cooperation with the countries which share "historical and cultural ties" with Turkey NAP: Relatively little interest	DP: Interested as an extension of the Euro-Atlantic orientation JP: interested as an extension of the Euro-Atlantic orientation; attempts during the 1960s and 1970s to develop multidimensional policy TPP: Interested as an extension of Euro-Atlantic orientation MP: Seeking to open up to the Middle East	RPP: Interested as an extension of Euro-Atlantic orientation; attempts during the 1960s and 1970s to develop multidimensional foreign policy SoDeP: little interest	Eurasianist as an extension of its anti-imperialist outlook
Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia	NOP, NSP: Relatively little interest MHP: Eurasianist as an extension of its anti-communist outlook and Turancılık ideology, solidarity with the Turkic peoples	DP: Little interest JP: Little interest MP: Interested but cautious TPP: Interested but cautious	RPP, SoDeP: Cautiously interested in the post-1989 period	Eurasianist as extension of its anti-imperialist outlook

engaging in irredentism in Central Asia and the Caucasus. From the 1960s onward, parties on the far right and far left expanded the spectrum of debate by introducing pan-Turkist, pan-Islamist, and anti-Western foreign policy advocacy (see Table 1).

The end of the Cold War afforded increased room for maneuver for Turkey's policymakers. While consensus on major policy issues was sustained among the centrist parties, the most controversial emerging foreign policy issue proved to be Turkey's progress toward European integration. Only the Islamist conservative Welfare Party and far-left Workers' Party openly objected to Turkey's European Union accession. Others (such as the far-right Nationalist

**Table 2.** Foreign Policy Positions of Turkey's Main Political Groups after the Cold War

	Political blocs and constituent parties			
	Right	Center right	Center left	Left
Policy toward region	Welfare Party (WP), Virtue Party (VP), Nationalist Action Party (NAP)	Motherland Party (MP), True Path Party (TPP)	Republican People's Party (RPP), Democratic Leftist Party (DLP)	Freedom and Solidarity Party (FSP), Labour Party (LP)
West	WP and VP: Against EU membership NAP: Not against EU membership, but cautious on certain 'critical' issues	MP: Joining the EU as a primary objective TPP: Joining the EU as a primary objective	RPP: Highly Euro-sceptic but favors joining "in principle" DLP: Joining the EU as a primary objective	FSP: Supporting Turkey's participation in agreements protecting human rights LP: Against EU membership
Middle East	WP and VP: More institutionalized relations with the Middle East states; regional leadership role for Turkey NAP: Relatively little interest	MP: Seeking to expand relations TPP: Interested as an extension of the Euro-Atlantic orientation	RPP: Interested as an extension of the Euro-Atlantic orientation DLP: Closer cooperation due to geographical and historical reasons	FSP: Little interest LP: Against Turkey becoming an imperialist tool in the region
Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia	WP and VP: Closer economic cooperation, otherwise little interest NAP: Eurasianist, closer political, economic, and social cooperation; Turkey as a big brother	MP: Interested but cautious TPP: Interested but cautious, seeking to develop relations; "energy hub" role for Turkey	RPP: Supportive of the newly independent states DLP: Closer cooperation due to geographical and historical reasons	FSP: Little interest LP: Against Turkey becoming an imperialist tool in the region

Action Party and centrist Republican People's Party) publicly supported membership while favoring slow progress in practice (see Table 2). Given the general consensus and continuity in foreign policy, the Welfare Party, which remained in office as part of a two-party coalition government during 1996–1997, introduced elements of change by organizing controversial official visits to Libya and Iran and emphasizing a future role for Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world. Not long thereafter, the Welfare Party was removed from power by the "post-modern intervention" of 1997.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>This 1997 military intervention was supported by significant elements of the state and non-state elite as well as segments of civil society. It is referred to as "post-modern" because of the indirect ways through which the military intervened.

It is against this backdrop that a reformist group within the National Outlook tradition decided to break ranks with the leadership and establish the JDP. They were motivated by their belief that committing the avowedly secular state elite to uphold the rights and rules of the European Union would allow greater freedom for the practice of (Muslim) religion in Turkey. Accordingly, they embraced the project of European integration as a solution not only to Turkey's economic and political challenges but also its domestic insecurities (Bilgin, 2008). Notwithstanding the narrower concerns of the core Islamist conservative base (estimated to account for roughly 8–10 percent of the electorate), JDP was able to gain 34 percent of the votes in the 2002 elections, enabling it to form a single-party government.

Since 2002, with an eye toward meeting the EU's Copenhagen Criteria for accession, Turkey has amended its constitution several times to improve human rights, strengthen the rule of law, and restructure democratic institutions. On the economic front, the JDP has followed the reform package adopted in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, while sustaining the pro-EU activism of the previous 1990s coalition governments (DLP, NAP, MP) on the foreign policy front (see Table 3).

A salient trend of the JDP era has been a comprehensive expansion in the volume of trade with Central Eurasia (Table 4, compiled from Turkish Statistical Institute, n.d.), surpassing that during the governments led by Turguz Özal as Primer Minister (1983–1989) and later President (1989–1993), when an initial opening of trade with the Middle East was launched. As such, the JDP is pursuing the economic agenda of Turkey's new entrepreneurial class from the new industrializing parts of the country (Secor, 2011), which is seeking more accommodative policies at home toward integration into the neoliberal global economic order (Tuğal, 2007).

In summary, the JDP has come to (and remained in) power in part by capitalizing on the European aspirations of voters and in part on their disenchantment with existing political parties and their leaders. Although it is difficult to know to what degree the JDP's foreign policy activism has contributed to its popularity,<sup>9</sup> the fact that other political parties have not proposed genuine policy alternatives has enabled it to shape Turkey's foreign policy to an unrivaled degree. A critical factor in this process has been JDP's employment of "civilizational geopolitics," a conceptual framework that is examined in the following section.

<sup>9</sup>The extent to which the JDP's foreign policies have contributed to its popularity cannot be determined. A public opinion survey conducted by Ankara University in 2010 (Ankara University, 2010) found that only 50 percent of those polled considered themselves "knowledgeable" about foreign affairs. The same sample listed the following three issues as most important to survey respondents: (1) relations with the EU (28 percent); (2) the struggle with terrorism (27.7 percent); and (3) relations with Armenia (15.8 percent). Considering that the JDP has articulated a new position only with respect to the third issue, and that the items at the top of its agenda (e.g., relations with the Muslim world) garnered relatively little interest (7 percent) in the survey, it is difficult to judge to what extent the JDP's foreign policy activism translates into popular support. That said, there is no denying that Erdoğan's outspoken pro-Palestinian stance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in 2010 (where he stormed out of a public discussion with Israeli President Shimon Peres) and the government's strong reaction toward Israel following the *Mavi Marmara* incident (the flotilla that attempted to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza, which encountered an Israeli military operation, resulting in the death of civilians, nine of whom were Turkish citizens) was received favorably by the Turkish public. Another public opinion survey conducted by Kadir Has University (Kadir Has University, 2010) found that over half (51.5 percent) of those polled did not consider the government's foreign policy to be successful, so again one cannot make too much of such support. When asked about specific foreign policy issues, 72 percent said they thought Turkey should play a role in shaping politics in Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia; 27.4 percent responded "no"; 54.7 percent supported Turkey's EU membership (45.3 percent responded "no").

**Table 3.** Foreign Policy Ideas of Turkey's Main Political Parties since 2002

	Political blocs and constituent parties				
	Right	JDP	Center Right	Center Left	Left
Policy toward region	Felicity Party (FP), Nationalist Action Party (NAP)	Justice and Development Party (JDP)	Democratic Party (DP)	Republican People's Party (RPP), Democratic Leftist Party (DLP)	Freedom and Solidarity Party (FSP), Turkey's Communist Party (TCP), Labor Party (LP)
West	FP: Against EU membership NAP: Not against EU membership, but very cautious on critical issues such as Cyprus	JDP: Supportive of EU membership; "one of the priorities" on the foreign policy agenda; pro-American	DP: Eurasianist	RPP: Pro-EU and pro-American in principle, but Euro-sceptic and anti-American on some policy issues DLP: pro- EU and pro-American	TCP: Against membership to all "imperialist" organizations FSP: Not against the EU perspective, but supports "Europe of labor" LP: Little interest
Middle East	FP: Closer relations with "Muslim brothers" in every possible area; regional leadership role for Turkey NAP: little interest other than refusing to play a role in the "Greater Middle East Project"	JDP: Very interested in playing a regional leadership role for Turkey, seeking more cooperation	DP: Interested in the region due to "historical role model" of Turkey	RPP: Distancing itself politically and culturally, but supportive of more economic relations DLP: Little interest	FSP, TCP, LP: Against Turkey becoming an imperialist tool in the Middle East
Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia	FP: More economic and cultural relations with the Central Asian states NAP: Eurasianist; closer cooperation with "Turkish kith and kin"	JDP: Relations to be carried to the highest level, as we have "cultural, historical, social proximity"; seeking a balance in relations with Russia	DP: Interested in the region, more political and economic relations with the Central Asian states and Russia	RPP: Supportive of the newly independent states DLP: Little interest, supportive of closer relations	TCP and FSP: Relatively little interest LP: Eurasianist; supportive of cooperation, especially with Russia

**Table 4.** Turkey's Foreign Trade Volume with Selected Eurasian Countries and Regions, 1980–2010, million current \$US<sup>a</sup>

Country	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Russian Federation	350 <sup>b</sup>	410 <sup>b</sup>	1,800 <sup>b</sup>	3,200	4,550	15,300	26,500
Central Asia and Transcaucasia							
Armenia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0	0	0.4 <sup>c</sup>	2
Azerbaijan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	183	321	800	2,400
Georgia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	118	286	573	1,050
Kazakhstan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	236	465	1,018	3,200
Kyrgyzstan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	39	22	103	160
Tajikistan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	12	20	94	427
Turkmenistan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	168	218	341	1,500
Uzbekistan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	200	168	412	1,100
Total	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	956	1,500	3,341	9,839
Middle East							
Iran	886	2,400	987	957	1,050	4,400	10,680
Iraq	1,360	2,100	1,260	124 <sup>d</sup>	0	3,200	7,400
Israel	39	46	108	405	1,155	2,270	3,500
Jordan	67	117	114	190	126	316	614
Lebanon	87	87	56	178	151	339	847
Oman	–	1	4	11	24	43	168
PA <sup>e</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	60	5	10	40
Saudi Arabia	149	660	1,061	1,854	1,350	2,850	4,460
Syria	119	72	278	530	730	823	2,500
UAE <sup>f</sup>	69	124	267	230	354	1,880	4,000
Yemen	n.a.	n.a.	26	82	69	200	330
Total	2,776	5,607	4,161	4,621	5,014	16,331	34,539

<sup>a</sup>Total of imports and exports; n.a. = category not applicable.

<sup>b</sup>Total for USSR.

<sup>c</sup>No exports to Armenia.

<sup>d</sup>No imports from Iraq.

<sup>e</sup>PA = Palestinian Authority

<sup>f</sup>UAE = United Arab Emirates.

## CIVILIZATIONAL GEOPOLITICS AND JDP FOREIGN POLICY

Geopolitical notions have been central to Turkey's foreign policy discourse for a long time. It was during WWII that geopolitics, understood at the time as the science of explaining the effects of nature on international behavior, was introduced to Turkey. During the 1950s and 1960s, geopolitics was embraced by the military, which found in it a theory that explains



how the world works and helps justify the central role it aspired to play in shaping Turkey's domestic as well as foreign policies. By the 1970s Turkey's policymakers as well had become accustomed to expressing their views on foreign policy through recourse to notions derived from geopolitics (e.g., see Bilgin, 2007). Notwithstanding their differences, Turkey's staunch secularists and current and former "Islamists" have both found in geopolitics a language for making sense of the surrounding world.<sup>10</sup> Whereas the former have lauded geopolitics for its "scientific" quality, the latter have found appealing its "God-given" authority.<sup>11</sup> Both versions of geographical determinism have allowed otherwise highly political choices to be de-politicized and presented as a *fait accompli* of geography.

This is not to invoke Turkish exceptionalism but to highlight that Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's predilection for utilizing geopolitics to justify JDP's foreign policy choices constitutes but one example of the centrality of geopolitics to Turkey's foreign policy discourses (Bilgin, forthcoming). Consequently, the intellectual framework that he is credited with contributing to Turkish foreign policy (e.g. Aras, 2009; Sözen, 2010) is not entirely new. Turkey's Eurasianists,<sup>12</sup> who have called for Turkey to de-emphasize its ties with the European Union in favor of establishing closer relations with Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia, have for a long time utilized geopolitics (e.g., Özdağ, 2001). Turkey's Europeanists, in turn, have invoked the very same notions to argue for the inevitability of Turkey's European integration (e.g., Cem, 2004). That said, while there is significant continuity in various actors' recourse to geopolitics in justifying their preferred choices for Turkey's foreign policy, Davutoğlu and other JDP policymakers' discourse is distinctive in the way in which they invoke *civilizational geopolitics*.

Civilizational geopolitics is an understanding of culture and civilization as preordained determinants of international behavior (Agnew, 1998, pp. 87–94). As such, it differs from "naturalized geopolitics," which views natural aspects of geography as determining foreign policy, and "ideological geopolitics," which accords primacy to ideology as the key driving force in the international arena. Agnew (1998) identifies these three discourses as having characterized "three ages of geopolitics"—civilizational geopolitics (1815–1875) having been succeeded by its naturalized (1875–1945) and ideological (1945–1989) variants. At the time of Agnew's writing in the late 1990s, the post-Cold War era was still waiting for its defining discourse. In the wake of September 11, 2001, Samuel P. Huntington's revamped conceptualization of civilizational geopolitics has come to prevail.<sup>13</sup>

Huntington's version is revamped in the sense that whereas the discourse of the earlier era rested on an evaluative-normative notion of civilization, with the world divided into "civilized" and "less-than-civilized" categories, the current framework is based on an ethnographic

<sup>10</sup>E.g., see the writings of General (Ret.) Suat İlhan (1989), whose books are used as textbooks at the Military Academy; the late Colonel Muzaffer Özdağ, (2001), the foremost geopolitician of Turkey's Eurasianists; and current Foreign Minister Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu (2001), with Muslim Democrat leanings.

<sup>11</sup>Turkey's geopoliticians are not alone in this regard. Father Edmund Walsh, who founded the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, taught geopolitics as part of his "anti-communist crusade" (Ó Tuathail, 1996, pp. 48–50).

<sup>12</sup>In the Turkish context, "Eurasianism" is an umbrella term whose very ambiguity seems to have allowed for coalitions to be formed among otherwise unlikely collaborators. İlhan, Özdağ, and Davutoğlu, despite differences in emphasis (İlhan and Özdağ on geography and national identity, and Davutoğlu on Muslim identity and geography), share the conviction that Turkey should (re)orient eastward if it is to fulfill its destiny.

<sup>13</sup>Huntington's (1993) article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Clash of Civilizations?" was followed three years later by a book-length version (Huntington, 1996). Although the book's style was more nuanced than the article regarding the inevitability of a clash, the disappearance of the question mark in the title suggested that the author was no less confident of his conclusions.

notion of *civilizations* (plural). The revamped version focuses upon inter-civilizational dynamics, be it characterized by clash (as with Huntington) or dialogue (as with the United Nations).<sup>14</sup> What is common to these otherwise divergent understandings of the relations between civilizations is the assumption that civilizations are self-contained entities with *sui generis* characteristics. This, however, conflicts with arguments that such understandings of civilization/s are inherently ideological, insofar as they obscure centuries of give and take and co-constitution among civilizations (Hobson, 2004). The point here is that both the early and revamped versions of civilizational geopolitics are ideological insofar as they shape dynamics within as well as between civilizations.

The early version of civilizational geopolitics that prevailed during most of the 19th century was also characterized by

a commitment to European uniqueness as a civilisation, a belief that the roots of European distinctiveness were found in its past, a sense that though other cultures might have noble pasts with high achievements they have been eclipsed by Europe, and an increasing identification with a particular nation-state as representing the most perfected version of the European difference. (Agnew, 1998, p. 88–89)

While Huntington's revised version defines civilization in the plural, he nevertheless holds to assumptions regarding the uniqueness of Europe/the West. As with Huntington, Davutoğlu (1994, 1997) too subscribes to a notion of civilizations as self-contained entities with distinctive characteristics determined by their history and culture. He deviates from Huntington in his rejection of assumptions regarding European/Western exceptionalism, even as he puts in its place assumptions about Turkish/Islamic/Ottoman exceptionalism. Indeed, Davutoğlu (2008) frames JDP's foreign policy choices as embracing what is *expected* of Turkey as an outcome of its distinctive character—that is, assuming the leadership of its “own civilizational basin.”

In his 2001 book, *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position*, Davutoğlu offered an appraisal of Turkey's foreign policy framed in terms of civilizational geopolitics. The book became an academic best-seller following the JDP's 2002 election success, once Davutoğlu began to serve as chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, holding the title of Ambassador-without-Portfolio. In May 2009 he assumed the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>15</sup> Davutoğlu is hailed as the architect of JDP foreign policies, having made full use of the opportunity to turn into reality the ideas advanced in his book.

In *Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu maintains that Turkey's past foreign policies, designed to make the most of its geographical location for the purposes of Euro-Atlantic policymaking, denied the country its “natural sphere of influence.” By selecting a Western orientation, he writes:

Turkey made a serious and radical decision in terms of its international position; choosing to become a regional power under the umbrella of the hegemonic Western civilizational basin over being the weak leader of its own civilizational basin. (Davutoğlu, 2001, p. 70)

<sup>14</sup>On the distinction between the two notions of civilizational dynamics, see Bowden (2010).

<sup>15</sup>In his former life, Davutoğlu was a Professor of International Relations at universities in Malaysia and Turkey, specializing in civilizational politics and geopolitics (Davutoğlu, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2001).

Rather, Davutoğlu (2001, p. 71) argues, Turkey's character requires making full use of its "natural sphere of influence" and opening up to former Ottoman territories and adjoining regions inhabited by Turkic and Muslim peoples.

It is not entirely clear whether Davutoğlu thinks Turkey could have utilized this sphere of influence during the inter-war years or the Cold War. It is post-Cold War policymaking of which he is particularly critical, arguing that "the foreign policy impasse" of the post-Cold War era should be addressed by adoption of a "new strategic theory" that would enable Turkey to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the post-Cold War "geopolitical and geoeconomic vacuum" in its sphere of "strategic depth" (Davutoğlu, 2001, pp. 71 and 115). According to Davutoğlu, "Turkey's national interest lies in the proper utilisation of its geography" (Davutoğlu, 2008, p. 92), which would make it possible for Turkey to become the "central country" it is destined to be (Davutoğlu, 2001, 2008).

To summarize, JDP foreign policy discourse rests on the assumption that Turkey's civilizational affiliation is preordained (i.e., Islamic). While Davutoğlu's writings do not specifically identify Turkey's civilizational basin, the country is categorized as "Muslim" in the "Alliance of Civilizations" project that it co-sponsors.<sup>16</sup> It follows from this assumption that policies that do not meet the requirements of such an affiliation (i.e., acting as the leader of the Islamic civilization) constitute self-denial (Bıçakçı, 2010). JDP's use of such rhetoric, in turn, is perfectly aligned with the tenets of civilizational geopolitics (in its early and revamped forms), including the "centrality of God" in understanding how the world works, considering geography and culture as determinants of world politics, understanding civilizations as self-contained units, and the lack of self-reflection as to the constitutive role played by the individual analyst when interpreting the world. Indeed, Davutoğlu does not recognize his own agency in (re)inscribing Turkey's identity. Nor does his discourse allow Turkey to engage with Central Eurasia as any other state but the "leader" of the Islamic "civilization."

Be that as it may, what Davutoğlu and other enthusiasts of the "new geographic imagination" have neglected to highlight is that Turkey's "old" geographic imagination, which is criticized for having reduced it to a regional power within the Western civilization, was the country's response to the early era of civilizational geopolitics, when a multiplicity of civilizations was not acknowledged by the great powers of the time. Consequently, if Turkey had eschewed strong links with Central Eurasia until well into the 1980s, this choice should be understood in its proper historical context. This context is the subject of the following section.

### TURKEY'S OLD GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

Turkey's "old" geographic imagination was characterized by its Western orientation. Contrary to widely held beliefs about Turkey's foreign policy having turned to the West in response to the Soviet threat to its security in the wake of World War II, the choice of a Western orientation predates post-war progress in its relations with the Euro-Atlantic alliance. While Turkey's founding leaders' pragmatism in the inter-war era meant they refrained from pursuing policies that would have tied the country to any single allegiance, there was no ambiguity regarding Turkey's Western orientation at the time of its founding in 1923 (Bilgin, 2009).

<sup>16</sup>The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative of the UN Secretary General that seeks to improve cooperation and understanding among nations, particularly but not exclusively between Muslim and Western societies (UNAOC, 2011). The Alliance was formed in 2005 at the initiative of the governments of Spain and Turkey. This is in contrast to İsmail Cem's view of a similar project, the EU-OIC forum, where he portrayed Turkey as straddling civilizational divides (Cem, 2004).

The aforementioned notion of the old civilizational geopolitics that divided the world's peoples into "civilized" and "less-than-civilized" had definite ramifications for the new Turkish state:

A clear distinction was drawn between the possibility of ... new statehood in Europe and its impossibility elsewhere ... Outside [Europe] was an unlimited space of primitive or decadent political forms that were candidates for conquest rather than recognition. The boundary example of the Ottoman Empire provides a case in point. It was not recognised as a "member" of the Concert of Europe until 1856 and even then the long-run disputes between it and Russia were never given the attention they deserved. The Otherness of the Turks was a fundamental barrier to their participation in a civilisational geopolitics ... (Agnew, 1998, p. 94)

Turkey thus inherited the concerns of the Ottoman elite by virtue of the fact that its founding leaders' formative years were shaped by the Ottoman ordeal. The newly established Republic needed to be recognized as an equal by the great powers of Europe, thereby removing grounds for intervention and providing space (breathing room) for sovereign development. The choice to adopt a Western as opposed to any other orientation was thus partly a response to insecurities. In a world where only the civilized were considered to possess the right to self-determination and sovereign statehood, joining their ranks by adopting their ways (i.e., meeting the "standards of civilization") was a survival strategy utilized in other parts of the world as well (see Suzuki, 2009). The argument presented here does not reduce Turkey's or any other modernization project to security concerns. Nor does it reduce security policy-making to modernization. Rather the objective here is to highlight the ways in which these efforts were justified by Turkey's founding leaders as responses to civilizational geopolitics.

Recognizing not only the fragility of formal recognition by European great powers, but also potential insecurities that were likely to follow in the event of a withdrawal of such recognition, Turkey's first President Mustafa Kemal set the goal of lifting Turkey up to "the level of contemporary civilization" and set in motion a plan that involved organizing a conference on the national economy (to express the new regime's commitment to the liberal economic order), convening of a committee for legal reforms (to signal its intention to adopt European law in civil matters), and going on an Anatolian tour to publicly make the case for Turkey's modernization and secularization. In terms of foreign policy, efforts involved assuming Western modes of behavior in the international arena. Turkey's founding leaders justified their policy choices as befitting a member of the Western civilization. Consider this excerpt from an interview Mustafa Kemal gave in 1923:

The world will not have to wait for long to see the difference between the Ottoman Empire and the new Turkey which has ceded ... the routes passing from Suez and the Straits and Caucasia and the economic lines between India and Europe—only which the Ottoman Empire surmised would preserve its ability to live. Indeed, the new Turkey declared that it does not need these to demonstrate and prove its ability to live (cited in Kürçüoğlu, 1980–1981, p. 152).

As such, Mustafa Kemal avoided justifying his policy choices by referring to the naturalized geopolitics of his era. Instead, he framed Republican policymaking as a response to the early era of civilizational geopolitics, with Turkey portrayed as having joined the ranks of the civilized.

Even during the Cold War (the era of ideological geopolitics), Turkey's policymakers continued to represent their policy choices as responses to the earlier era of civilizational geopolitics. At the time of the signing of the Ankara Agreement (1963)<sup>17</sup> the RPP government of (former President) İsmet İnönü portrayed relations with European institutions in the following terms:

Turkey as a member of the Council of Europe which contributes to developing common Western civilization and to the development of closer relations between nations will not hesitate to engage with constructive actions in accordance with our honourable place in Western society. (Cihan, 1993, p. 10)

Turkey's founding leaders' remembrances of the early era of civilizational geopolitics was not the only factor that helped block calls for Turkey's (re)turn to the Eurasian fold. Other factors included delicate domestic balances that had to be maintained (e.g., pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist societal elements), the fear of attracting the wrath of the Soviet Union by perceived engagement in Turkic/Muslim irredentism, and a prevailing view among the policymaking elite of the desirability of avoiding Middle Eastern entanglements.

Turkey's old geopolitical imagination shaped its foreign policy until the early 1980s. Even when aspects of Turkey's elite began to call for (re)emphasising Central Eurasia in Turkey's foreign policy, either as a consequence of their disillusionment with Euro-Atlantic allies or in an attempt to revive relations with Turkic/Muslim peoples, they were confined to the margins. The efforts of two visionary politicians, namely Prime Minister (1983–1989) and President (1989–1993) Turgut Özal and Foreign Minister (1997–2002) İsmail Cem, reversed this trend. Since 1983, Turkey has viewed the Middle East as an “area of opportunity,” and after 1991 established a presence in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The following section outlines these officials' efforts, highlighting continuities in the policies of the two men, as well as between their policies and those of the JDP.

### TURKEY'S NEW GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

Turkey's regional policy had traditionally been conceived as subordinate to its Western orientation. Therefore, for such regions as the Middle East, even when experimental initiatives toward opening to the region were undertaken,<sup>18</sup> Turkey's policymakers considered themselves as responding to the travails of Turkey's relations with various Euro-Atlantic allies (as with the Cyprus conflict). Özal is widely credited with opening Turkey to the Middle East on a realistic basis: as a source of energy imports and an emerging market for exports. He followed a three-pronged strategy vis-à-vis the Middle East: (1) expanding economic relations in an attempt to attract capital flows from the region and boost Turkey's exports; (2) creating links of interdependence through diversifying relations beyond the mere political into cultural, environmental, and economic; and (3) raising Turkey's profile in regional multi-lateral fora such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Kirişçi, 1997).

Özal's efforts were rewarded primarily in the economic realm (Table 4), although initiatives designed to increase interdependence and raise Turkey's international profile warrant

<sup>17</sup>This agreement created an association between Turkey and the European Economic Community (EEC) as an interim measure establishing a process for Turkey's accession to the EEC.

<sup>18</sup>For brief periods and with limited success during the 1960s and the 1970s. See Akdevelioğlu and Kürkçüoğlu (2002).

attention as well. With respect to forging links of interdependence, Özal proposed the Peace Pipeline Initiative, a project designed not only to transfer water to neighboring countries, but also alleviate downstream neighbors' water supply concerns over Turkey's colossal network of dams (the Southeast Anatolia Project). The Peace Pipeline Initiative was also intended to weaken Syria's resolve in hosting the PKK<sup>19</sup> in its territories, by offering the southern neighbor a new incentive for maintaining better bilateral relations. At regional multilateral fora, Özal upgraded Turkey's contribution to the Organization of the Islamic Conference in financial and political terms, with Turkey assuming the presidency of its Standing Committee on Economic and Commercial Cooperation (Aykan, 1994).

Notwithstanding such efforts, Turkey's unilateral decision to block the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline<sup>20</sup> following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and close collaboration with the United States in the Gulf War without due consultation with its neighbors signaled that the Middle East at that time remained subordinate to Turkey's Western orientation (Altunışık, 2009). Consequently, Özal's contribution to changing Turkey's geographic imagination remained one of portraying the Middle East as "an area of opportunity" while retaining the old representation as "a zone of risks and dangers." The latter representation was used, in particular, in depicting relations with Syria and Iran and the evolving complexity of Northern Iraq. While Özal launched policymaking initiatives toward the region, Turkey's struggle with PKK terrorism imposed limits on progress on all three fronts.

It was only after 1998, when Syria agreed to expel PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan that Turkey began to fully normalize its policies toward its Middle Eastern neighbors. The period of normalization was steered by Cem, the Foreign Minister of two successive coalition governments during 1997–2002. Many firsts were registered during his tenure, including Bahrain's appointment of an Ambassador to Turkey (1998), the upgrading of relations with Qatar and Oman from purely formal to relatively substantive, the creation of the Neighbourhood Forum Initiative (1998) to introduce regional confidence-building measures, the establishment of a Turkish-Greek Mideast Initiative to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians, and the convening of the OIC-EU Joint Forum on Civilization and Harmony (2002).<sup>21</sup>

Cem proceeded further than Özal in efforts to turn the Middle East into an area of opportunity. Although it can be argued that improved relations with Syria were helped by its expulsion of Öcalan, this does not do justice to the role played by Cem personally in bringing about a change in Syria's position (Altunışık, 2009). Cem played an equally crucial role in invigorating relations with Iran. While the two countries had cooperated in the areas of energy transportation and stability in Northern Iraq during the 1990s, it was from 2001 onward that bilateral relations assumed a different quality. Ambassadorial posts on both sides, which had been vacant since 1997, were filled. Turkey initiated institutionalized "security meetings" with Iran (*ibid.*) and welcomed the signing of the Iran-Greece natural gas pipeline agreement (2002).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish acronym PKK) was founded in 1984 in Syria's Bekaa Valley. Since 1984, it has targeted Turkey's security forces (including village guards), governmental personnel, and civilians mainly in the Southeast but also in major cities elsewhere in Turkey.

<sup>20</sup>Dual oil pipelines connecting Northern Iraq's Kirkuk oil fields with the Turkish port of Yumurtalık were a major export route through which Iraqi oil reached Western markets.

<sup>21</sup>The Forum, held in Istanbul at Cem's invitation on February 12–13, 2002, was attended by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Observer Countries and EU Member and Candidate Countries to share assessments of the world political situation and promote international understanding and harmony in the aftermath of 9/11 (OIC-EU, 2002). The initiative was particularly revealing of Cem's (2004, p. 59) vision for Turkey as a "world state" that straddles civilizational divides (see the Conclusion for further discussion).

<sup>22</sup>This agreement involves extending the Iran-Turkey pipeline into northern Greece in order to export Iranian natural gas to Europe. The current status of the project is ambiguous.

Turkey's relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus, after an initial period of hesitation during 1989–1991 when Turkey developed its relations with Russia and the former Soviet Republics in tandem, were pursued more assertively after the disintegration of the USSR. In this euphoric period, Turkey promoted the “Turkish model” in counter-distinction to the Iranian one, and flaunted the romantic notion of a “Turkish world from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China” (Aydin, 2004).

Critical to Turkey's endeavors was the establishment of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) in 1992. Although the Agency's official website states its objective as one of “providing economic, technical, social assistance to developing countries” (TİKA, n.d.), TİKA was essentially created to assist the Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan in their transformation.<sup>23</sup> This was followed by the formation, also in 1992, of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organization, which also included Russia (and later Greece).<sup>24</sup> In the same year, Turkey hosted the first Turkic-Speaking States Summit of Heads of State and Government, institutionalized with the Ankara Declaration of 1992.<sup>25</sup> The summits have been held regularly since then (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

As Turkey prioritized the promotion of cultural-ethnic ties with these countries, Russia responded with its Near Abroad doctrine.<sup>26</sup> During 1992–1996, even as Turkey's political relations with Russia cooled (partly due to frictions on the difficult issues of Armenia and Chechnya), economic relations prospered with the signing of several agreements in the areas of economic, scientific, and technical cooperation and exchange of military personnel (Aktürk, 2006).

Following the early 1990s' rapprochement and subsequent renewal of tensions with Russia, Turkey engaged in a delicate balancing act (Tanrıseven, 2003). The latter period of levelheadedness in relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus was secured by Foreign Minister Cem. During this period, energy became the focus of bilateral relations with Russia. It was Tansu Çiller's government (1993–1995) that had initially enunciated Turkey's intention to become an “energy hub,”<sup>27</sup> and during the second half of the 1990s, this idea began to become more of a reality. In November 1999, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline agreement was signed, followed in March 2001 by the signing of a protocol whereby Turkey agreed to purchase natural gas from Phase I of Shah Deniz Project in Azerbaijan.

Relations with Russia and the former Soviet Republics were developed in other fields as well. In 1999, Turkey and Russia signed the Joint Declaration on the Fight against Terrorism, and in 2001 announced their Joint Action Plan for Cooperation in Eurasia. This was followed in January 2002 by important security agreements concluded with Russia and a trilateral security agreement with Azerbaijan and Georgia.

<sup>23</sup>Since 2005, African states have also received development aid through TİKA.

<sup>24</sup>BSEC was created as a political and economic forum in order to ensure peace, stability, and good relations in the Black Sea region by enhancing prosperity (BSEC, 2010).

<sup>25</sup>The languages involved all belong to the Turkic group, of which Turkish is the most prominent.

<sup>26</sup>The dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991 left most of the 14 non-Russian former Soviet republics with sizable Russian minority populations. These countries, collectively referred to by Russian policymakers as the Near Abroad, remain an area of special foreign policy interest for the Russian Federation government. In part this reflects a desire to protect Russian co-nationals in countries undergoing ethnic re-stratification and political instability and in part to maintain shared economic and commercial interests as well as infrastructure networks in the former Soviet space.

<sup>27</sup>During a visit to Azerbaijan in 1995, Prime Minister Çiller proposed the construction of an Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Georgia–Turkey gas pipeline, a project that subsequently failed to materialize (<http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/ayintarihi/1995/temmuz1995.htm>, accessed February 25, 2011).

Finally, important headway was made in relations with Armenia. Although Turkey had recognized Armenia's independence in 1991, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan hampered progress in relations. While Armenia was invited to join BSEC in 1992, when the war re-started in 1993, Turkey closed its borders and has not since re-opened them. Following Robert Kocharyan's victory in the 1998 Armenian presidential elections and his conciliatory gestures, Turkey responded by sending a high-level group headed by State Minister Mehmet Ali İrtemçelik to Armenia to attend the funeral of the former Premier Vazgen Sargisian. Beyond such symbolism, an important step was taken with the establishment of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Committee (TARC) in 2001 to discuss the 1915 massacres (Görgülü, 2008, 19–20).<sup>28</sup>

To summarize, the groundwork for Turkey's "new geographic imagination" was laid by Özal and Cem, whose efforts were made possible by the transformations in Central Eurasia and, in turn, helped transform the region. By the time the JDP came to power in November 2002, the old geographic imagination had already given way to a new one.

### JDP'S NEW GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION AND CENTRAL EURASIA

Although JDP foreign policies since 2002 have re-emphasized Central Eurasia, not necessarily at the expense of the Euro-Atlantic (Öniş, 2009; c.f. Criss, 2010), JDP is not the first government party in Turkey's history to have done so. However, such evidence of continuity need not detract our attention from a significant difference—the way in which JDP foreign policies have been justified by invoking civilizational geopolitics in a heretofore unseen manner.

#### Central Asia, Russia, and the Caucasus

Focusing first on policies toward Central Asia, Russia, and the Caucasus, the program of the first JDP government formed by Abdullah Gül (2002–2003) enunciated its Central Eurasia policy as follows:

We will pursue cooperative relations that do not harm either party's interests in line with good-neighborly practices with the Russian Federation, and in line with our cultural affinities with the Central Asian and Caucasian Republics.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, the government expressed its commitment to the existing policy of pursuing a delicate balance in relations with Russia and the Turkic-language-speaking republics. There was, however, one important difference. Whereas the government program represented Russia as a neighbor, relations with the Turkic states were portrayed as shaped by "our cultural affinities."

In foreign policy toward Russia, Gül and his successor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2003–present) have pursued policies that advance the project of transforming Turkey into an energy hub. Efforts in this direction involved concluding previously started projects that do not include

<sup>28</sup>The Committee consisted of six members (mostly academics) from Turkey and four from Armenia. The International Center for Transitional Justice based in New York was asked by the Committee to prepare a report on the 1915 events. The ICTJ report was published on February 4, 2003 and recommended the preparation of a third-party report on the events by a committee consisting of historians (ICTJ, 2003).

<sup>29</sup>From the 2002 JDP Government Program (<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP58.htm>, accessed December 1, 2010).



the Russians (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline in 2006 and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline in 2007) as well as unveiling new ones that do (Blue Stream natural gas pipeline project, 2005). Good relations with Russia also were promoted by the signing of the 2004–2005 Consultations Program that stipulated cooperation in the areas of counterterrorism, security, economy, and consular work. In 2004, President Vladimir Putin visited Turkey and The Joint Declaration on the Intensification of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership was signed, followed in 2008 by an agreement to simplify customs procedures. In 2010, during a visit by President Dmitriy Medvedev, The Council of High Level of Cooperation between Russian Federation and Turkey was founded, and two critical agreements were concluded—on reciprocal visa-free travel and the construction by Russian contractors of a nuclear power station in Akkuyu (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).

Turkey similarly pursued relations of “good neighborliness” with Georgia, framed in terms of maintaining stability and defending mutual interests (Gül, 2008). The proposal to establish the (now still-born) Caucasian Cooperation and Stability Platform in 2008, for instance, was portrayed as an attempt to maintain security and stability in the South Caucasus region.

During the same period, relatively little progress was made in relations with the Turkic-language states beyond maintaining what was already achieved. Indeed it was not until 2007 that these countries received special mention in the JDP government program.<sup>30</sup> As with the 2002 Gül government program, in 2007 relations with Russia, Georgia, and Armenia were framed in terms of “good neighborliness” in contrast to the Turkic-language-speaking states that were represented as Turkey’s “siblings,” toward whom it has a “historical responsibility.”

Such differentiation on the part of JDP policymakers between those who are “us” and others who are not became acutely apparent in policies toward Armenia. Prime Minister Erdoğan, in a speech delivered at the the Eleventh Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation Congress of Turkic States and Communities held in Baku in 2007, highlighted the common cultural and ethnic ties between the participants, while pointing to characteristics that set Armenia apart:

As a result of this unfair aggression, over a million of our brothers and sisters became internally displaced in their own country ... Armenia must put an end to the unfair aggression and this unacceptable situation, which is incompatible with international values, human rights, neighboring relations and legal norms. In this issue, Turkey has always been side by side with its brother Azerbaijan.<sup>31</sup>

As such, the framing of relations with Armenia versus Azerbaijan was marked by the former’s distance and the latter’s proximity stemming from kinship.

This does not negate the significance of steps JDP governments have taken toward improved relations with Armenia, including the de-freezing of bilateral relations in 2005, President Gül’s visit to Armenia in 2008 (to watch a soccer match between the two countries’ national teams), and the 2009 protocols on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations and the Development of Bilateral Relations. While the protocols have yet to be ratified, their symbolic significance cannot be underestimated.

<sup>30</sup>“It is one of our foreign policy’s priorities to fulfill our historical responsibility and to look after the Turkish and kin states and communities” (excerpt from the 2007 JDP government program at <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP60.htm>, accessed December 5, 2010).

<sup>31</sup>Speech by Turkey’s Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan during a working visit to Azerbaijan (<http://www.azconsulateistanbul.org.tr/az/?name=view&id=224>, accessed December 13, 2010).

To recap, notwithstanding progress in relations with Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus in trade expansion (see Table 4) JDP policymakers' employment of the discourse of civilizational geopolitics introduced divides between "us" and "them" in an unprecedented manner.<sup>32</sup> Whereas those who fall within Turkey's civilizational basin are represented as its "historical responsibility," requiring Turkey to stand "side by side" with them as befitting the role of an elder sibling (e.g., Azerbaijan), others would have to make do with good-neighborly treatment (e.g., Russia, Georgia), or even experience a breakdown in relations (e.g., Armenia) if they harm the interests of one of Turkey's siblings. As shall be demonstrated below, a similar representation has marred relations with Israel.

### Middle East

In policy toward the Middle East, JDP policymakers have advanced Özal and Cem's efforts. With Iran, continuities in policy disguise a difference in the underlying discourse. Whereas relations with Iran were previously portrayed in terms of geographic proximity and good neighborliness,<sup>33</sup> during the JDP period, cultural affinities with Iran were emphasized. During his visit to Iran in 2009, Erdoğan noted:

The border between Iran and Turkey plays a role integrating and uniting two countries, rather than separating them. We are people who have lived together in peace and built a common culture together. Our relations cover our daily lives, our religion and beliefs.<sup>34</sup>

Agreements concluded by the two countries during the JDP era have included those on education, exploration and production of natural gas by Turkish companies in Iran, and transportation of Iranian natural gas to Europe via Turkey. The year 2010 was marked by the Joint Declaration of Brazil, Turkey, and Iran on May 17 regarding the nuclear activities of Iran (Joint Declaration, 2010). The core of this plan is to store in Turkey, under the auspices of International Atomic Energy Agency 1200 kg of uranium enriched by Iran. In justifying Turkey's involvement, Erdoğan contested the international consensus on Iranian nuclear ambitions and expressed his limited concern about Iran's potential for developing nuclear weapons: "There is no doubt he [President Ahmedinejad] is our friend. As a friend so far we have very good relations and have had no difficulty at all" (Tait, 2009). As such, Turkey's Premier portrayed Iran's nuclear ambitions as non-threatening based not on evidence but on Iran's cultural proximity to Turkey.

JDP policies toward the Arab World have involved developing relations with Syria, including the signing of multiple agreements on free trade (2007), transportation (2004, 2005), cooperation in health (2003), the prevention of double taxation (2004), and mutual promotion

<sup>32</sup>Our survey of the programs of previous governments revealed that they either treated all the former Soviet republics as neighbors or defined them as partners in specific issue areas such as energy cooperation ([www.tbmm.gov.tr](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr), accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>33</sup>In 2002 Turkey's President Ahmet Necdet Sezer observed: "When you look at the map it is obvious that Iran and Turkey have to collaborate in every field. Iran is Turkey's door to the East; Turkey is Iran's door to the West" (<http://www.tccb.gov.tr/ahmet-necdet-sezer-konusmalari/495/56783/turkiyeiran-is-konseyi-toplantisinin-acilisinda-yaptiklari-konusma.html>, accessed March 2, 2011).

<sup>34</sup>Speech by Turkey's Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan during a working visit to Iran (<http://www.stargazete.com/dunya/basbakan-erdogan-dan-iran-da-ekonomik-mesajlar-haber-221614.htm>, accessed March 1, 2011).

and protection of investment (2004). Energy deals with Middle Eastern states also increased during this period. In 2009, Turkey concluded agreements with Syria to construct the Arab Natural Gas Pipeline (Ministry of Energy, 2010, p. 44) and with Qatar on liquefied natural gas imports and improved cooperation in the field of energy development. Finally, a high-level committee has been formed to establish a zone of free trade and movement between Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Relations with the Arab League reached an unprecedented high during the period of JDP governance in Turkey. In 2004, for the first time Gül attended the Foreign Ministers meeting of the Arab League as an observer. In 2006, the Turkey-Arab Forum was created, and in 2010 Turkey was accorded observer status in the Arab Parliament. Considering that Turkey in the post-World War I era had opted to join the British-led Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO), which ruled out closer relations with the Arab League, the symbolic significance of these recent moves (on both sides) cannot be underestimated. Turkey also has sustained its activism at the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which led to Professor Ekmeliddin İhsanoğlu's election as OIC General Secretary in 2004 (he was re-elected in 2009).

Also significant is that JDP policymakers have utilized Turkey's increasing visibility at regional multilateral fora to disseminate new messages promoting democratic values and human rights. In 2004, amidst U.S. representations of Turkey as a "model" for the Muslim world, Foreign Minister Gül addressed the foreign ministers of the OIC member states and encouraged political reform (Gül, 2007, p. 548). What was new in Gül's discourse was not only that Turkey offered itself as a "model" for the Muslim world, but that it did so through introducing an "us" versus "them" divide. In an interview with the Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, Gül elaborated why he thought such reform is necessary:

If we don't take the reins ... and prefer to cover up and ignore them [our problems], then others will try to solve them their way and interfere in our affairs. And this interference will take place in the wrong way because they don't understand our sensitivities, our habits, our cultures, and our social structure (quoted in Murinson, 2006, p. 953).

As such, Gül reminded the Muslim leaders present that in a previous era of civilizational geopolitics such interventions were rampant. As a solution, he offered political reform while conserving cultural (read: Islamic) characteristics. Nonetheless, Gül's discourse typified the revamped (rather than old) civilizational geopolitics that builds upon the assumption that civilizations are *sui generis* entities that either engage with one another in dialogue or clash.

Potential ramifications of JDP policy-makers' resort to the language of civilizational geopolitics is manifest more vividly in the downward turn in Turkey-Israel relations. Initially the JDP had continued mediation efforts in Israel/Palestine and Syria that had started during the Cem era. Indeed, these efforts had progressed notwithstanding a controversial visit by the Hamas political chief Khaled Mashal to Ankara in 2005. In the same year, Turkish, Palestinian, and Israeli business circles founded the Ankara Forum to improve economic relations. In 2007, Israeli President Shimon Peres and the Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas visited Ankara, and the three leaders (Abbas, Erdoğan, and Peres) initiated the Industry for Peace project, involving the establishment of an industrial area in Tarqumia, a West Bank Village.

However, as Israeli-Palestinian relations grew more tense following the Gaza War in late 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan's flare-up at the session with Peres at the Davos World Economic Forum, and especially over the *Mavi Marmara* incident of 2010, Israel became a major subject in Erdoğan's speeches. The Turkish Prime Minister spoke of Jerusalem in terms

of Turkey performing its “historical duty stemming from our values.”<sup>35</sup> Insofar as the JDP portrayed itself as a leader of its own civilizational basin, its relationship with the Palestinians was cast as one of the older sibling’s “responsibility” toward the younger. In framing relations with Palestinian peoples in historical and cultural terms, Turkey stripped itself of the role of impartial broker and assumed that of protector of the Palestinians. Consequently, the difference between JDP discourses and those of previous governments has crystallized in the realm of its relations with Israel. Whereas Foreign Minister Cem had played the role of an impartial broker, portraying Turkey as “straddling civilizational divides,” JDP has positioned itself as the leader of the Islamic civilization, thereby assuming the role of the protector of the Palestinians and Jerusalem’s holy sites.

To summarize, in terms of policy practice the JDP era has exhibited continuity in maintaining balanced relations with Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus; strengthening relations with the Middle East; and increasing its presence at regional multilateral fora. What is new about JDP policy is where it locates Turkey—as the leader of its own civilizational basin. This constitutes a significant shift from the old geographic imagination that located Turkey within Western civilization, or that of Cem, who portrayed Turkey as straddling civilizational divides. Ramifications of such discursive shifts and the “us/them” divides they produce can already be observed in relations with Israel.

## CONCLUSION

JDP’s admirers praise its new geographic imagination for having changed: (1) Turkish policymakers’ view of Central Eurasia in general and the Middle East in particular, from “a geography of chaos and source of instability” to a “new sense of neighborhood”; and (2) Turkey’s relations with the surrounding regions, from hesitant engagement to “zero-problem policy” (Aras and Polat, 2007; Aras and Fidan, 2009; Sözen, 2010). Nonetheless, what such appraisals fail to highlight is that: (1) Turkish policymakers’ view of the surrounding region had already begun to change during Özal’s term in office; and (2) a new geographic imagination was first introduced by Cem, who also laid the groundwork for zero-problem policy.

Indeed, well before Davutoğlu’s term in office as Foreign Minister, Cem had located Turkey at the center of a “geography of civilizations” and called for making use of this potential to turn Turkey into a “world state” (Cem, 2004, pp. 33 and 59). Hence our argument regarding the continuity between JDP’s foreign policy toward Central Eurasia with that of Özal and Cem. Indeed, we are not alone in highlighting this continuity (e.g., see Altunışık, 2009; Öniş, 2011). Yet we depart from the literature in pointing to how the not-so-new policies of the JDP government have differed from those of previous eras. In particular, we differ from Ziya Öniş (2011), who has emphasized JDP’s difference in terms of “the nature and style” of foreign policy, and Meliha Altunışık (2009), who has underscored the importance of Davutoğlu’s worldview in shaping JDP foreign policies. What we highlight in this paper goes beyond a matter of foreign policy style and Davutoğlu’s worldview to the heart of the politics of identity that the JDP has introduced by framing Turkey’s international relations in civilizational terms.

It is significant to note here that the JDP is not the first political party in Turkey’s history to have located Turkey outside Western civilization. Previously, the Özal governments had

<sup>35</sup>Erdogan is not the first Turkish Premier to have reacted to Israeli actions in strong words. Previously, Cem’s Prime Minister Ecevit had characterized the actions of Israeli military forces against Palestinian civilians as “genocide” (<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=33996>, accessed January 16, 2011).

placed Turkey outside Western civilization in cultural terms, while nonetheless locating it in the West in terms of political values.<sup>36</sup> At the time, Özal had labeled his approach as “neo-Ottomanism” (Tayyar, 1992). JDP policymakers, too, view themselves as owning up to the Ottoman geopolitical space (e.g., see Kınıklıoğlu, 2007). Cem distanced himself from Özal’s neo-Ottomanism, while underscoring the need to inject elements of “history and memory” into Turkey’s foreign policy. He gave Turkey’s foreign policy discourse a new twist when he represented Turkey as straddling civilizational divides. In doing so, Cem underscored Turkey’s uniqueness without writing it out of either the Western or Islamic civilizations (Cem, 2000).

What is different about Davutoğlu and JDP’s approach is that they have cast Turkey as the leader of its own civilization, with the implication that Western civilization is not Turkey’s own. Turkey may engage in dialogue with states that belong to Western civilization, but such states are not “us.” Toward the realm of states that constitute “us,” Turkey has responsibilities, which may in turn cause strains in relations with those who are not “us” (e.g., Israel and Armenia), because behind the discourse of civilizational geopolitics is the idea of immutable differences between peoples/communities/societies/states that belong to different civilizations. From this follows our broader argument that the JDP’s post-2002 framing of foreign policy issues in terms of civilizational geopolitics has (re)shaped the boundaries that unite/divide Turkey and Central Eurasia, with as yet not fully known implications for Turkey’s international relations.

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<sup>36</sup>In addressing the Grand National Assembly (Turkey’s unicameral parliament) on the occasion of Turkey’s application for membership to the European Community in 1987, the Özal government’s Foreign Minister Vahit Halefoğlu stated: “We will enter the European Community while protecting our national and cultural values. Therefore Turkey will enrich Europe’s political and cultural life. The most important commonality between Europe and us is our acceptance of pluralistic democracy and human rights as an indispensable characteristic of our lifestyle” (Çayhan, 1997, p. 294).

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