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# Middle East Brief

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## What Is Driving Turkey's Reengagement with the Arab World?

Prof. Nader Habibi and Dr. Joshua W. Walker

Turkey's involvement in the Gaza flotilla affair and its attempt (along with Brazil) to mediate the Iran nuclear crisis in the summer of 2010 have put a spotlight on Turkey and its active diplomacy throughout the Middle East. While the political activity has been receiving all of the headlines, there has been growing international interest—but, to date, little in the way of detailed analysis—concerning Ankara's economic relations with the Arab world.

The strong growth of the Middle East's oil revenues since 2000 has increased the significance of the region as an export market and intensified the competition among exporters for access to this market. During the past decade, the volume of trade between Turkey and Arab countries has sharply increased, and the traditional exporters to the region are carefully watching the arrival of this new competitor (and of others, such as China). The United States and the European Union are also wondering how the growing economic interdependency between Turkey and Arab countries will influence Turkey's diplomatic and military relations with the West.

In this Brief, we will analyze the evolution of Turkish-Arab relations since 2002—the year that marked the victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkish parliamentary elections. Successive AKP governments have ruled Turkey ever since. The AKP as a conservative Muslim party has a different worldview than previous governments, which has influenced its policy choices; it is reasonable, therefore, to expect to see some shifts in Turkish foreign policy since 2002. Our analysis will cover both the diplomatic and the economic relations of Turkey with the Arab world. We will begin with an overview of recent trends in the flow of trade between the two regions. This will be followed by an analysis of the

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frequency of high-level visits by Turkish officials to the region. Most of these visits were of a bilateral nature—and in our view, they played a crucial role in facilitating the expansion of economic ties between Turkey and the Arab world. We will then discuss the political, institutional, and commercial forces that help explain these trends.

## Trade Relations

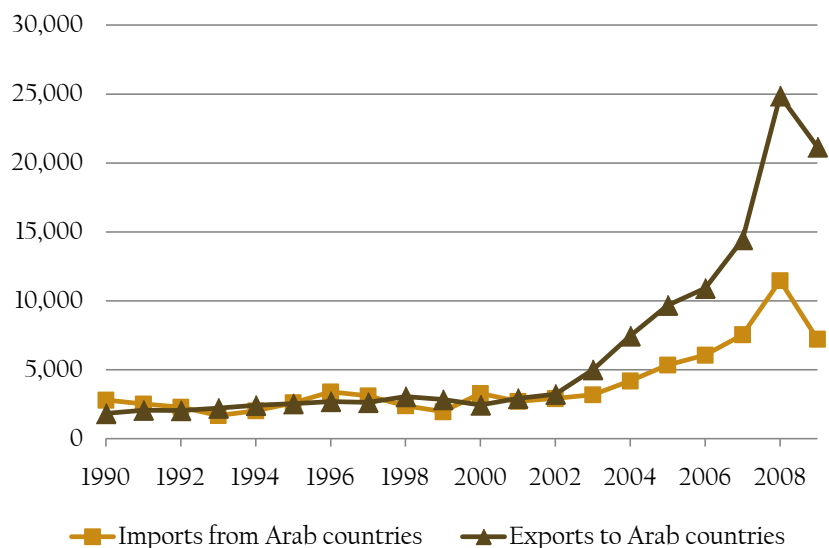
Up until a few years ago, the volume of Turkey's trade with its Arab neighbors was very limited. During the 1990s, Turkish exports to Arab countries rarely exceeded \$3 billion per year, while Turkish imports from the region remained under \$3.4 billion per year. As shown in figure 1, both imports and exports remained stable up until 2002—after which the volume of Turkish exports enjoyed a strong and sustained growth. Imports also grew nicely between 2002 and 2008, but at a relatively slower pace than exports. This rapid growth in Turkish-Arab trade occurred in a period during which Turkish external trade with the entire world was steadily increasing—while at the same time the record high oil revenues of Arab oil-exporting countries had enabled those countries to sharply increase their imports from the rest of the world.

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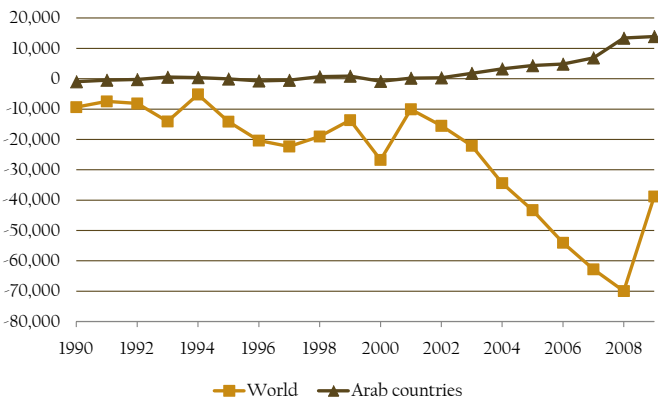
*The opinions and findings expressed in this Brief belong to the authors exclusively and do not reflect those of the Crown Center or Brandeis University.*

**Figure 1. Turkey: Trade with Arab Countries**  
(in million USD)



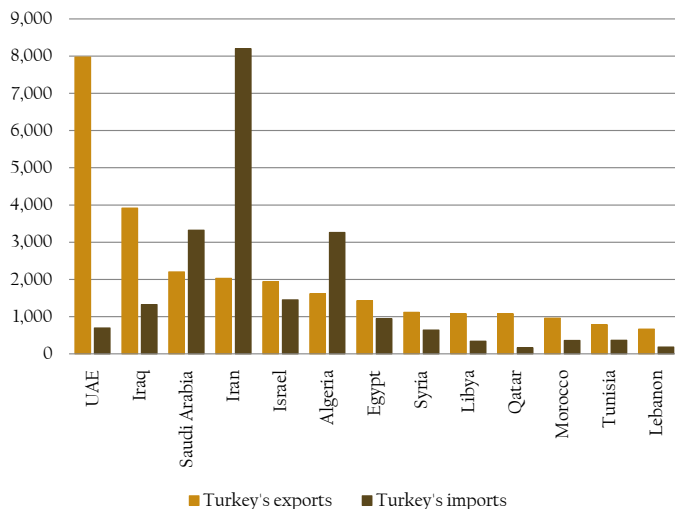
Turkey's overall balance of trade (the value of its exports minus the cost of its imports) sharply deteriorated after 2002, with the country's import bill exceeding its export revenues by large amounts each year. (See figure 2.) Yet during this period, Turkey enjoyed a healthy trade surplus vis-à-vis the Arab world. The value of this surplus exceeded \$10 billion in 2008, when Turkey's overall balance of trade suffered from a \$70 billion deficit. Even in 2009, when the global financial crisis led to a sharp decline in Turkish-Arab trade, Turkey was able to maintain its trade surplus vis-à-vis Arab countries. In addition to the sharp increase in Turkish exports to Arab countries, another reason for this continuing surplus is that Turkey buys only a small amount of its oil and gas imports from Arab countries; it relies instead more on Iran and Central Asian energy supplies. As a result, however, Turkish trade with Iran results in large deficits for Turkey, which vary with the price of oil and natural gas.

**Figure 2. Turkey: Trade Balance with Arab Countries and with the Entire World**  
(in million USD)



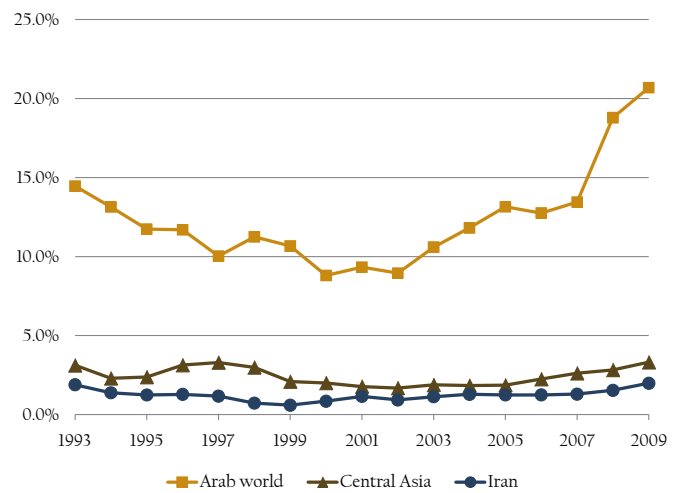
Among Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) emerged as Turkey's largest export market in 2008, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (See figure 3.) Over the past decade, the UAE has evolved into a re-export hub for the region—so a portion of Turkish exports to the UAE is re-exported from there to other countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. The largest share of Turkish exports to the UAE, however, has been used in the country's massive construction boom (which suffered a major setback in 2009). Industrial supplies such as steel and other metal products made up the largest components of Turkish exports to the UAE in 2008. The 2009 real estate and financial crisis in Dubai caused a large drop in Turkish-UAE trade, however, and the UAE lost its position as the leading Arab importer of Turkish products to Iraq. Among Middle Eastern countries, Iran had the largest volume of exports to Turkey, followed by two Arab oil exporters: Saudi Arabia and Algeria.

**Figure 3. Turkey's Trade with the Middle East (2008)**  
(in million USD)



The growing significance of Arab countries as export markets for the Turkish economy is further demonstrated in figures 4 and 5. The share of Turkey's total exports accounted for by the region was declining in the 1990s before it stabilized in 2000–2001. This downtrend was reversed in 2003, and the Arab region's share of Turkey's exports subsequently enjoyed strong growth, from 9% in 2002 to 20.7% in 2009. Iran's share of Turkish exports rose only moderately during roughly the same period, as did that of the Central Asian countries: Iran's share rose from 1.1% in 2003 to 1.9% in 2009, while the share of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) rose from 1.9% to 3.3% over the same interval. (See figure 4.)

**Figure 4. Regional Shares of Turkey's Total Exports to its Muslim Neighbors\***



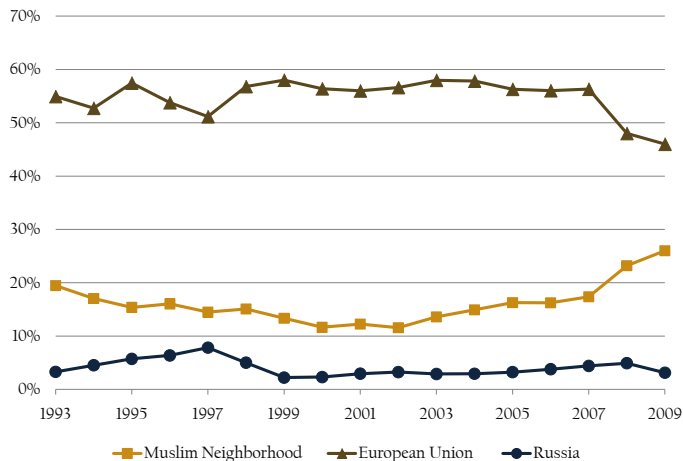
\*Muslim Neighborhood: Arab countries + Central Asia + Iran

Looking at a broader picture of Turkish exports (figure 5), we observe some trends that further demonstrate the growing significance for Turkey of new regional markets. It is important to note that the European Union has been and remains Turkey's dominant trade partner. As shown in figure 5, however, the EU's share of Turkey's exports has steadily declined since 2003. After experiencing a slow decline during 2003–7, the EU's share suffered a large drop in 2008 and 2009 as a result of the global financial crisis. Yet at the same time, the share of predominantly Muslim regions to the south and east of Turkey—namely, Iran, the Central Asian Republics, and the Arab countries—gradually increased. In 2009, this “Muslim Neighborhood's” share of Turkish exports rose to 26%, while for the first time, the European Union's share fell below 50%. One reason for this development was that the severe 2008 recession in Europe had an adverse impact on the European demand for imports in comparison with that of the Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries. The oil-exporting countries in this region had accumulated large oil revenue reserves during 2002 and the first half of 2007; these reserves enabled them to maintain their level of imports



despite a sharp decline in oil revenues in the second half of 2008 and the first half of 2009. Furthermore, the Middle East and Central Asian economies did not suffer as much as the Western industrial economies as a result of the 2008 global economic crisis.<sup>1</sup>

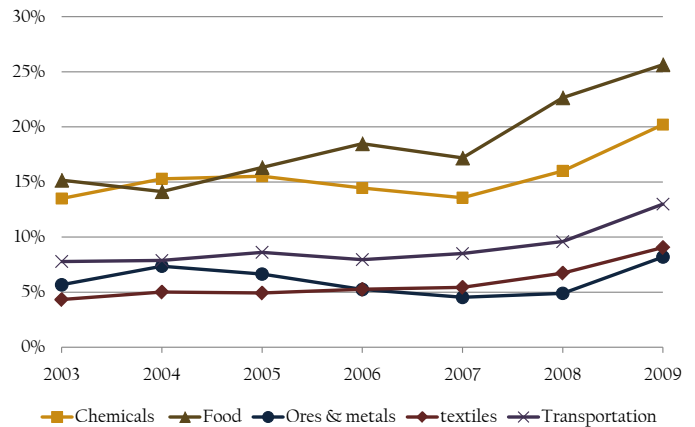
**Figure 5. Regional Shares of Turkey's Total Exports to EU and Muslim Neighbors**



Before we begin our analysis of what has contributed to this rapid expansion of Turkish-Arab trade, it is useful to look at the composition of Turkish exports to the Arab countries. The available disaggregated data on Turkish exports of various categories of goods will allow us to identify the product categories that make up a large share of Turkey's total exports and those that have enjoyed the fastest growth in recent years. Identification of these categories is important because it allows us to identify the Turkish business and industrial sectors that have benefited most from the expansion of Turkish-Arab economic relations. (In turn, the commercial interests of these sectors might have played a role in the AKP government's desire to promote and expand Turkish-Arab relations in the future.)

We have looked at two different methods of classification of traded commodities that are currently used by the United Nations. The first classification, called Broad Economic Categories (BEC), groups commodities based on their end use. The second classification, called Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), classifies commodities according to their stage of production.<sup>2</sup> Turkish export data based on the BEC classification (figure 6) show that for most categories other than transportation equipment, Arab countries' share of Turkish exports has enjoyed strong growth since 2003. The Arab countries accounted for 29% of Turkey's exports of industrial supplies in 2009, up from 15% in 2003. The comparable figures for the second and third largest categories—namely, food items and capital goods—were 26% and 25%, respectively, compared with 17% and 13%, respectively, in 2003.

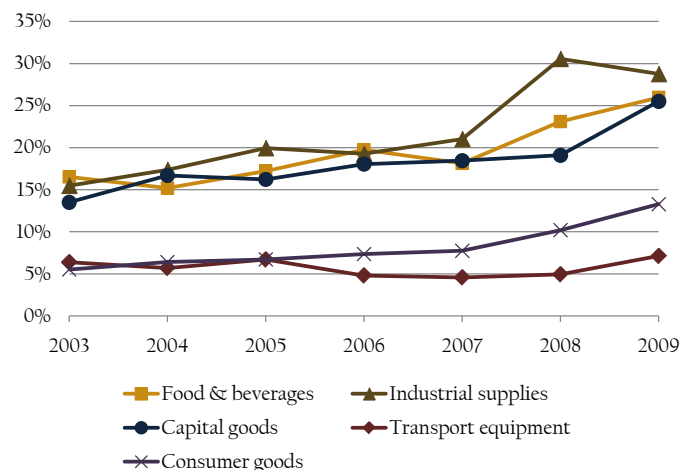
**Figure 6. Arab World's Share of Turkey's Goods Exports**



Source: Comtrade Data, BEC

Turkey's export data based on the SITC classification (figure 7) show that the Arab countries' share of those exports is largest in food and chemicals—and that both these shares have grown between 2003 and 2009. The Arab share of food exports rose from 15% to 26% in that period, while the share of chemicals exports increased from 13% to 20%.

**Figure 7. Arab World's Share of Turkey's Goods Exports**



Source: Comtrade Data, SITC

## Importance of Diplomatic Visits for Trade Promotion

During the past ten years, the rapid increase in economic relations between Turkey and the Middle East has been paralleled by a similar rise in the frequency of high-ranking diplomatic visits from Turkey to the region with a particular focus on Arab neighbors. These official visits have played a key role in promoting economic cooperation agreements and facilitating trade relations between the two sides. The

high priority of economic and trade objectives in these high-level visits is best reflected by the large number of business and commercial representatives who routinely accompany diplomats on these visits.<sup>3</sup> The activities and travel schedules of Turkish leaders further establish that Turkey's once Western-only diplomatic initiatives are now more widely directed. Although it is an imperfect indicator, and indeed has rarely even been systematically notated or recorded, the pattern of foreign visits by Abdullah Gul, as foreign minister from 2003 to 2007 and then as president from 2007 to 2011; by Ahmet Davutoğlu as foreign minister from 2009 to 2011; and by Recep Erdoğan as prime minister from 2003 to 2011 is revealing:

**Table 1. Travels of Turkish Leaders on Official State Visits**

Total Trips	FM Abdullah Gul	% of foreign trips, 2003–7	FM Ahmet Davutoğlu	% of foreign trips, 2009–11	President Abdullah Gul	% of foreign trips, 2007–11	PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	% of foreign trips, 2003–11
Central Asia	5	8.77	12	9.76	13	18.57	13	9.09
Middle East	14	24.56	29	23.58	17	24.29	45	31.47
EU	21	36.84	38	30.89	17	24.29	41	28.67
Non-EU Europe	11	19.30	25	20.33	8	11.43	21	14.69
Other	6	10.53	19	15.45	15	21.43	23	16.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>		<b>123</b>		<b>70</b>		<b>143</b>	

Note: Compiled from open sources at the [Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#).

The most interesting finding from these statistics is that Prime Minister Erdoğan has visited the Middle East more than any other region of the world since 2003. More than 31 percent of his foreign trips were made to Middle Eastern destinations, compared with only 29 percent to European Union capitals. The general parity between the percentages of foreign trips that all of these leaders made to the Middle East region (27%) and to the EU (30%) further reinforces the priority placed on the Middle East by the AKP.

Perhaps an even more significant fact than the relatively higher frequency of official visits to the Middle East in comparison with those to the EU is the difference in the purposes of these visits. If we distinguish between bilateral state visits, on the one hand, and international meetings in which the destination country is simply hosting organizations like the EU, or summits such as the G-20 or the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the picture becomes even clearer. (See table 2.) While more than 42 percent of visits to EU countries have been for international meetings, only 16 percent of visits to the Middle East have been for comparable purposes. A significantly larger proportion of visits to the Middle East were of a bilateral nature, and hence of greater importance.

It is telling, as well, that the most traveled foreign destination for Prime Minister Erdoğan so far has been not a European capital but rather Damascus (Syria), with eight official visits, which have resulted in the formation of the Turkey-Syria High Level Strategic Cooperation Council. Presided over by the two heads of state and extending to regular ministerial meetings, the Council aims at wide-ranging cooperation in such areas as economics and trade, education and culture, defense and security, and health and the environment.

In addition to trying to improve Turkish-Syrian relations, Turkey has also worked toward the creation of a free trade agreement with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. After several rounds of negotiations and high-level visits, this agreement was finally signed by all four parties in June 2010, during the Fifth Turkish-Arab Economic Forum in Istanbul.<sup>4</sup> According to AKP leaders, this four-party agreement is only a first step toward the more ambitious goal of creating a Middle East Union.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2. Travels of Turkish Leaders to Participate in Gatherings of International Organizations**

Total Trips	FM Abdullah Gul	% of foreign trips, 2003–7	FM Ahmet Davutoğlu	% of foreign trips, 2009–11	President Abdullah Gul	% of foreign trips, 2007–11	PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan	% of foreign trips, 2003–11
Central Asia	2	7.69	1	3.03	1	7.14	1	3.03
Middle East	5	19.23	4	12.12	3	21.43	5	15.15
EU	13	50.00	13	39.39	5	35.71	13	39.39
Non-EU Europe	4	15.38	5	15.15	0	0.00	4	12.12
Other	2	7.69	10	30.30	5	35.71	10	30.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>		<b>33</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>33</b>	

Note: Compiled from open sources at the [Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#).

## The Underlying Logic of Turkey’s Rapprochement with the Arab World

The rapid growth of diplomatic and economic relations between Turkey and the Arab world cannot be attributed to a single factor; rather, a number of domestic and international considerations have propelled this phenomenon. Moreover, the recent reorientation of Turkish foreign relations toward the Arab world is not the first attempt in this direction: On at least two occasions in the past, Turkey has undertaken similar initiatives. After Turkey’s first multi-party elections in 1950, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes brought Turkey into the Baghdad Pact (1955) along with its Middle Eastern neighbors. Similarly, after the presidential elections of 1989, President Turgüt Özal reached out to the newly established Caucasian and Central Asian countries as he sought to liberalize and diversify the Turkish economy (Turkey was the first country to recognize most of the Turkic post-Soviet Republics and was the first major aid donor through an initiative established in this year called the Turkish Development Assistance Agency).

The AKP’s objectives in the Arab world can be characterized as being driven by a pragmatic reckoning of Turkey’s national interest, particularly with regard to securing new investments and markets for the country’s growing economy, as well as by the strong Islamic sentiment of AKP’s support base, which identifies more closely with the Muslim Arab world than with the West. As the largest economic and military power in the Middle East since the United States pulled its combat forces out of Iraq, Turkey has quickly become a major geopolitical player in the region, a development that the AKP leadership clearly seems to appreciate and thrive upon.

Turkey’s domestic political transformation, and its democratization in particular, has played an important role in the expansion of Turkish-Arab relations. Despite the traditional hostility of Turkey’s secular Kemalist elites toward the Arab world, the popular sentiment of most Turks has generally been more favorable. Consequently, in periods of democratically elected civilian governments, Turkey has pursued closer relations with the Arab world. This is most clearly demonstrated by the previously mentioned foreign policy initiatives of Prime Ministers Menderes, Özal, and Erdoğan.<sup>6</sup> During these periods of civilian rule, Turkey’s democratically elected leaders could not easily ignore the positive public sentiment supporting closer relations with its Arab neighbors.

With the victory of the AKP in the 2002 elections, a new set of interest groups were empowered that had previously had no say in Turkish foreign policy, which had previously been the exclusive domain of the military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the course of the last decade, not only have these institutions been transformed, but several others have acquired a growing role in foreign policy formation. These include state bodies such as the ministries of energy, environment, interior, and transportation and the undersecretariat for foreign trade. In addition, civil society—in particular, business associations such as the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), the Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (TUSIAD), and the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON) now actively lobby the government on foreign policy questions.

In a reflection of the expanding economic interests and regional dynamism represented by these groups, new rural Anatolian businesses led by devout Muslims competed for the first time with traditional metropolitan Aegean businesses. These Anatolian businesses have emerged as strong advocates for further Turkish expansion into emerging Middle Eastern rather than European markets. It would be hard to make sense of Turkish foreign policy toward countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria without taking into consideration these new business interest groups. The main export commodities of these Anatolian businesses are food products and industrial supplies, which have grown more dependent on Arab markets than have other commodities. As demonstrated in figures 6 and 7 above, the Arab share of Turkish exports in these product categories has increased faster than that of any other categories since 2003.

The economic interests of these groups have consequently played an important role in the AKP government's efforts to promote greater trade and economic cooperation with the Middle East in the context of Turkey's new foreign policy agenda. These business associations have also actively participated in trade negotiations, and in the promotion of other contacts with their Arab counterparts. For example, TUSKON has sponsored and facilitated several business forums designed to bring together Turkish and Arab business leaders. The most recent of these forums was held in December 2010 in Istanbul, with substantial participation from Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.<sup>7</sup>

Another important factor that has encouraged Turkey to expand its ties with the Arab world is the Islamic orientation of the AKP ruling party. The AKP has turned Turkish foreign policy on its head by drawing strength from its common heritage and history vis-à-vis its Muslim neighbors rather than perceiving that as a handicap. The AKP's desire for closer relations with these neighbors has rekindled a domestic debate over Turkey's historical roots and its legacy as a successor state to the Ottoman Empire, putting these topics on the political agenda again. Based on its Islamic roots and values, the AKP has focused on the unifying character of the Ottoman Empire, and of the Muslim values inherited by the Turkish Republic.

The rise of the AKP has meant a de-emphasis on the "Islamic threat" that, propagated by the Kemalist elites and the military, had previously dominated Turkey's view of the Middle East. Consequently, Turkey has been able to develop a new vision of its long-term geopolitical objectives, which has played a critical role in reorienting its foreign policy vis-à-vis the Arab world. These objectives are undergirded by the concepts of "zero problems with neighbors" and "strategic depth," as elaborated by the current minister of foreign affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu.<sup>8</sup> "Strategic depth" seeks to reposition

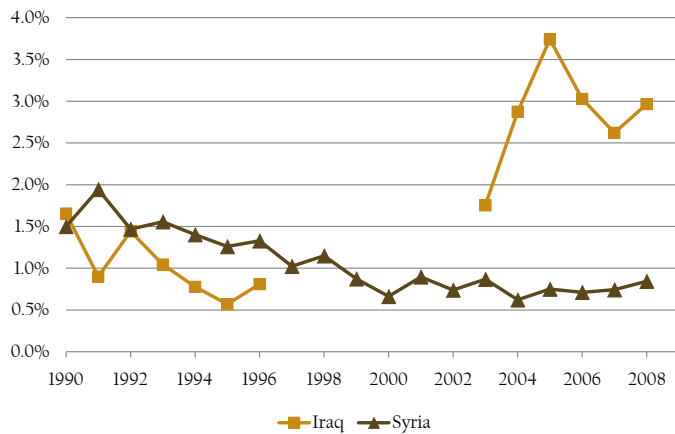
Turkey from a marginal actor in international relations to a more significant player that sits at the intersection of multiple regions, just as the Ottomans did for six centuries. Turkey tries to achieve this goal by courting different alliances, in order to avoid overdependence on any single alliance; by specifically taking on a larger role in its former Ottoman territories; and by prioritizing "dialogue and cooperation" over "coercion and confrontation." In other words, the doctrine of strategic depth provides a coherent framework in which the development of stronger ties with its Arab neighbors serves Turkey's broader international objectives. This new foreign policy vision has been in the making since the days of former Turkish prime minister and president Turgut Özal in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Another key development that played an important role in Turkey's reorientation toward the Middle East was the failure of its efforts to secure European Union membership. When the AKP came to power in 2002 as the historical successor of Turkey's right-leaning Islamic conservative movement, it had many domestic hurdles to overcome. Erdoğan and the AKP began using their foreign policy agenda to placate their domestic opposition and to expand areas of possible cooperation with Turkey's liberal elites. In particular, the AKP focused on the EU accession process to broaden its domestic support and weaken its opponents between 2002 and 2005. By late 2004, the process had come to a standstill, and the AKP instead focused on the Middle East, which has had a clear impact on Turkish-EU trade. As shown in figure 5, Turkey's Muslim neighbors' share of the country's total exports has gradually increased at the expense of the EU since 2004.

The changing dynamics of the Kurdish separatist movement after the U.S. invasion of Iraq have served as another motivating factor with respect to Turkey's interest in developing closer ties with its Arab neighbors and with Iran. Turkey's desire to prevent the creation of an independent Kurdish state has brought it closer to Syria, Iran, and the Central Government of Iraq. As a part of this strategy, Turkey has tried to create greater economic interdependency vis-à-vis these neighbors and to expand its trade relations with them. The 2009 High Level Strategic Cooperation Council agreements between Turkey and Syria and Turkey and Iraq are two important steps that Turkey has taken in this direction. Even prior to its 2009 agreement with Iraq, Turkey was able to expand its trade with Iraq substantially after 2003.



**Figure 8. Iraq's and Syria's Shares of Turkey's Goods Exports**



Note: No data is available for Turkey's exports to Iraq during 1997-2002

The political instability and lack of security in Iraq after the 2003 occupation drove out most of that country's traditional trade partners—and as Iraq's northern neighbor, Turkey was able to take advantage of this situation. The Turkish government facilitated trade relations with Iraq by maintaining good relations with all ethnic groups in that country. As demonstrated in Figure 8, Iraq's share of Turkey's exports sharply increased after 2003.

Turkey has also increased its investments in Iraq. Turkey's relations with the KRG government of Iraqi Kurdistan have improved substantially since 2007, and most of its investments are concentrated in the Kurdish regions of Northern Iraq—though it has been careful to expand trade relations in all regions of the country. Developing closer trade ties with the Arab regions of Iraq is a deliberate Turkish strategy that is intended to prevent the creation of a separate Kurdish state in Northern Iraq.

## Conclusion

In this Brief, we have demonstrated that over the past ten years, Turkey's relations with the Arab world have undergone a fundamental transformation. Turkey has now become more interdependent vis-à-vis the Arab world, both economically and geopolitically. Moreover, we believe that this reorientation will be sustained, because it is supported by a broad base of domestic interest groups which are influential in the AKP. Even if the AKP loses its grip on power in Turkey, or should it disintegrate in future elections, domestic economic interests will assure that any other party that takes charge will have to cultivate improved Turkish-Arab relations. Turkey's rapprochement with the Arab world suggests a new chapter in its foreign policy that the rest of the world will have to grow accustomed to in the coming decades.

As Turkey deepens its links with the Arab world, it will have a higher stake in the overall stability and prosperity of the region. Consequently we are likely to see Turkey play a more active role in trying to mediate regional tensions. It is also likely that Turkey will pursue a more independent foreign policy in the region—one that might not always be compatible with U.S. and European policies and interests. While this might be cause for concern in some Western capitals, Turkey's reengagement with the region might have some indirect benefits in the long run that should not be overlooked. The transition of Turkey into a democratic Muslim-majority society, along with its economic success and growing engagement with the Arab world, has already increased its appeal as a role model for Arab countries. As a result, its reengagement with the Arab world could strengthen the moderate and pragmatic Islamic elements in the region. Another potential consequence of this reengagement is that Turkey might serve as a counterbalance to Iran's influence, both as a role model and as a regional power.

Turkish-Arab reengagement has already cast a shadow over Turkish-Israeli relations, one that is likely to continue. Up until recently, Turkish-Israeli relations were not conditional on Turkish-Arab relations. Under its secular leadership, Turkey was the first Muslim-majority nation to recognize Israel, in 1949. Nevertheless, Turkey's strategic relationship with Israel has always been a delicate matter domestically. With the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000 and the reduction in tensions between Turkey and the Arab world (and Syria in particular) since 1998, Turkey's relationship with Israel has become increasingly conditional on the status of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The harsh rhetoric and tone of Turkish leadership since Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in December 2008–January 2009 was indicative of the growing significance of the Arab world in Turkish foreign policy thinking—and even harsher and more sustained criticism of the Israeli government by the AKP followed the May 31, 2010, Israeli raid on the Turkish *Mavi Marmara* ship bound for Gaza. Improvement of Turkish-Israeli relations in the future is likely to depend on the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Although the United States and the European Union can no longer count on Turkey to passively support their regional objectives in the Arab world, they might be able to rely on Turkey as a self-confident and assertive regional partner when their interests converge. But this partnership will have to be built on mutual respect, along with sensitivity to both sides' national interest. There are many areas in which Turkish participation could be very constructive. Turkey can serve as a valuable partner in efforts to achieve regional stability in the Middle East and the security of oil-exporting Arab countries in particular, both of which are crucial for the health of the global economy. Furthermore, in light of the current pro-



democracy uprisings in many Arab countries, the West and Turkey have a common interest in facilitating these countries' peaceful transition to democracy. The unprecedentedly high level of Turkish influence and popularity in the Arab world<sup>9</sup> may allow Turkey to effectively assist these countries in developing democratic institutions.

## Endnotes

- 1 For an analysis of how the Middle Eastern economies fared during the 2008–9 global economic crisis, see Nader Habibi, "The Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Arab Countries: A Year-End Assessment," Middle East Brief No. 40 (December 2009), Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University.
- 2 For more details on these commodity classifications, see [UN Comtrade \(United Nations Statistics Division\), United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database](#).\*
- 3 For example, during his most recent visit to GCC capitals in January 2011, Prime Minister Erdogan brought a delegation of 500 officials and businessmen from a broad range of trade and investment groups. Source: [Mehmet Efe Bireselioğlu, "Turkey's Transforming Relations with the Arab World: The Impact of Recent Turkish High-Level Visits to the Gulf Region," Balkanalysis.com, January 27, 2011](#).\*
- 4 In addition to prioritizing bilateral visits, the AKP government has also sponsored the Turkish-Arab Economic Forums as an effective tool for the promotion of economic ties with the Arab world. These annual forums began in 2005; the sixth annual gathering is scheduled for April 2011.
- 5 See [Thomas Seibert, "Turkey Turns East to Form Free Trade Zone" \(The National, Abu Dhabi\), bilaterals.org, June 16, 2010](#).\*
- 6 In many ways, Prime Minister Erdoğan today represents the culmination and synthesis of Özal's unfulfilled legacy of opening to the East. Özal was the first Turkish president to attend Friday prayers and perform the *haj* pilgrimage to Mecca while simultaneously having a penchant for fine scotch and being a proud secular nationalist—much as Erdoğan tries to combine his Muslim piousness with his Turkishness. For more on this comparison, see Malik Mufti's *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: Republic at Sea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2009).
- 7 ["TUSKON is Promoting Arab-Turkish Trade," yalibnan.com, December 13, 2010](#).\*
- 8 For more on these concepts, see [Joshua Walker's co-authored report "Getting to Zero: Turkey, Its Neighbors, and the West" \(Transatlantic Academy, 2010\)](#),\* and [Walker's "Architect of Power" in the Journal of International Security Affairs, no. 18 \(Spring 2010\)](#).\*
- 9 See [Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey: Arab Perspectives" \(Foreign Policy Analysis Series II, May 2010\)](#) (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation [TESEV]), which reports all-time high popularity for Turkey and the Turkish prime minister according to polling data gathered from 2,267 people in seven Arab populations (Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia)\*.

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