

# Barak Obama's Policy Towards Turkey, Change or Continuity

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## Abstract

The main aim of this research is to understand the change in Obamas' foreign policy towards Turkey and to show the most important factors of that policy. The research question is to clarify whether there has been change or continuity in US foreign policy towards Turkey during Trumps era. In answering this question, the researcher conducts that there are some changes within the continuity in this regard. This research has two main purposes. First, to understand the process of how the US constructs its foreign policy. To that end, this thesis takes into consideration issues of state identity, American self-perception, and the perception of others. The second is to investigate the most important actors and factors behind US foreign policy towards Turkey during the era of Trumps presidency. A qualitative research approach was adopted and data were collected from various primary and secondary sources. The information collected was analyzed thematically and the themes identified were discussed using findings that were presented by previous studies. Hence, the dissertation pursues, to some not insignificant degree, critical analysis.

**Keywords: U.S, Turkey, Change in Foreign Policy, Trump.**

## BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Although the study of US foreign policy towards Turkey has been the focus of many studies in many languages, the dynamics and the issues which have a direct impact on the bilateral relations of the two countries have not been addressed sufficiently. We contend that this academic gap could be adequately addressed by analysing and explaining Turkish-US relations during the Trumps era in the context of neoclassical realism theory. In addition, US foreign policy towards Turkish during the period covered in this study has a direct bearing on the Kurdish issue in general and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in particular. Therefore, the decision makers and academia in the KRG need to pay the needed attention to the matter.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Is the Obama's foreign policy towards Turkey one of change or continuity?

## **OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH**

First, the study seeks to build a structure that allows for a comprehensive review of the foreign policy decision making and US foreign policy in general. Then, explains the terms of the relations between the two parties in terms of cooperation and points of disagreement and tension in Obamas presidential period and then considers the future of US–Turkish relations in respect of their future prospect. In conclusion the study provides a summary of the whole research, in addition to the contributions of the findings, limitations that affected the outcome of the research, and implications for future research.

### **1. The role of domestic politics in US foreign policy decision-making**

The president of the United States creates foreign policies with the goal of achieving complex domestic and international goals. It usually entails a complex series of processes, with domestic politics playing an essential role. The significance of a country's head of government in foreign policy decision-making and how that individual is influenced by domestic politics will be critically examined in this chapter. The majority of American foreign policies are shaped by coalitions of domestic and international actors, institutions and other groups. Many driving elements can be recognized when evaluating the head of government or, in other words, the executor of foreign policies, to explain the rationale behind decisions that are made (Souva, Mark & Rohde, David, 2007). The leader's own personality and cognition, degree of rationality, internal politics, and international and domestic interest groups are all aspects to consider. However, it is the domestic political environment, not the other variables mentioned, that affects every single framework of decision-making in a country, even in an international context (Herman, 1994).

#### **1.1 Personalities and US foreign policy**

It has long been suggested in the field of FPA that foreign policy crises and wars are characterized by conditions that favour the influence of personality, and that individuals' distinct policy preferences, decision-making styles, and relationships with advisers are critical factors in determining outcomes. Using this as a starting point, this chapter attempts to explore the impact of several US presidents' personalities on American foreign policy towards Turkey.

#### **2. President Barak Obama's policy towards Turkey 2009–2017**

##### **2.1 "New Vision", "New Challenges"**

Despite a bright start under the new US presidency, given the problems of the time, bilateral relations between the US and Turkey did not improve quickly. On the one hand, there was the US policy discussion over the Armenian issue and, on the other hand, Turkey's vote against the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Iran. At a time when Arab protests were at their peak, Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel also became a concern.

##### **2.2 US–Turkish relations, from "Strong Military ally" to "Model Partnership"**

On 9 December 2009, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's two-day working visit to Washington, DC and meeting with President Barack Obama were utilized by the two leaders to reaffirm their shared commitment to deepening what had been considered a 'model partnership' between the two countries. According to statements made at a press conference following their meeting on 7 December, President Obama and Prime Minister Erdoğan had discussed critical issues such as strategic cooperation between the two allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, regional issues such as Iran's nuclear programme, and bilateral relations between the two countries (TCA, 2021).

President Obama also congratulated Prime Minister Erdoğan and the Turkish people for their "great contributions to the stabilization of Afghanistan" and emphasized the need to work together to advance Iraq's peace and prosperity. Turkey may be a "essential player" in encouraging Iran to pursue peaceful nuclear energy

while “abiding by international rules and norms”. President Obama also pledged US assistance for Turkey in its battle against terrorism, as well as sorrow for the PKK attacks in Turkey on 7 December, which killed seven Turkish military. He also praised Turkey's Prime Minister for taking “courageous steps” towards restoring Turkish–Armenian relations. At the same time, Prime Minister Erdoğan congratulated President Obama for including Turkey in his first international trip and for developing and building a new “model partnership” approach for US–Turkey relations in his remarks. He reaffirmed his commitment to continue to strengthen Turkey's bilateral relations with the US in all sectors (Ibid, 2021).

President Obama's highly successful visit to Turkey recognized the importance of this relationship and laid the groundwork for re-establishing the trust and confidence necessary for effective collaboration on shared regional and global interests. Nonetheless, diverse political and geostrategic circumstances may often drive Turkey and the US to pursue separate and sometimes opposing policies, resulting in disruptive disagreements that could jeopardize the pursuit of these overriding goals. President Obama's idea of a model partnership would necessitate long-term commitment and careful management at the highest levels of both governments (CSIS, 2009).

The term ‘model partnership’<sup>1</sup> was coined in order to convert Turkish–American relations from Turkey as a strong military ally to Turkey as a model country. This approach, which was built on soft power aspects and Turkey's growing role as an energy hub, corresponded with President Obama's peaceful foreign policy understanding and pledges to the American public about withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2009, Obama made his first international trips to Turkey and Egypt, signalling his desire to rebuild America's ties with the Sunni Muslim world. Obama's positive view as an African American President with a Muslim father and the middle name Hussein, an Arabic name that is particularly popular in Turkey, contributed to this. Furthermore, the new administration in Washington took a multilateral strategy, emphasizing “burden sharing” with regional allies (Atmaca, 2017, p. 65). “Leading from behind” is one of these principles. According to Sidar (2013), this was due to the rising importance of the Asia-Pacific region in America's foreign policy agenda (a pivot to Asia) as a result of China's rise, as well as the depreciation of the energy-rich Middle East as a result of America's gradual transformation into an energy exporter. This meant a more assertive and powerful Turkey in the Middle East, able to control regional developments alongside the USA. This was also in perfect agreement with the Neo-Ottoman ideal of the AKP Administration and then Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's (Prime Minister at that time) ambitious personality.

As a result, Kurtbag (2015, p. 515) believed that the “model partnership” was an attempt to rescue Turkish–American relations following the Bush Administration's dismal legacy and to manage bilateral ties from the so-called “strategic partnership”. According to Yegin and Ozertem (2016), the term ‘model partnership’ was coined to expand the Turkish–American alliance beyond military cooperation to include economic and social realms. President Obama used the phrase during his first official visit to Turkey in April 2009 (Kurtbag, 2015): “Turkey and the United States can build a model cooperation in which we can create a modern international community that is respectful, secure, and prosperous; that there are no tensions, inevitable tensions, between cultures”,<sup>2</sup> Obama stated in his speech at the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 6 April 2009 (Atmaca, 2017, p. 66).

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<sup>1</sup> Most observers interpret the model of Turkey as the “coexistence of a government ruled by an Islamic party (i.e., the AKP) and secular political forces within a pluralistic democratic system”. For more information, please read *Turkey's Relations with the Middle East, Political Encounters after the Arab Spring*, a book edited by Huseyin Isiksal and Oguzhan Goksal.

<sup>2</sup> “Obama's Speaking Turkish Parliament”, date of access: 28.08.2021 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYFnJcL10ik>.

For two key reasons, the model partnership initiative was a good idea. According to Atmaca (2017, p. 67), first, the US had to be careful not to incite Turkish perceptions towards US foreign policy because during the Bush Administration anti-Americanism in Turkey have been at the highest level; and second, the AKP government's impressive reforms to become a full member of the EU helped Turkey have a very positive image in the world and democratic hopes flourished in the Islamic world. Then, according to Cook (2016), Obama's praise for Turkish democracy was not coincidental; it was in keeping with the zeitgeist of the time, as Americans believed that Turkey would “exemplify a more constructive, less belligerent course for US foreign policy” (2016, p.192) as a large, prosperous, democratizing, and predominantly Muslim country.

Furthermore, Jackson Diehl (2012) believed that Islamist-oriented governments in the Middle East were about to become the new normal in a region ruled for years by secular autocrats and pro-American generals (Diehl, 2012). However, due to differences in the Islamic world and the governing elite's mistrust of democracy, as Baba concluded (2016, p. 195), the model partnership had not been very successful. Kanat (2016) also stated that the model partnership remained primarily an intellectual endeavour and was never turned into an institutional or functional framework.

To summarize, within this framework of a model partnership, the Obama Administration aimed to repair the damage done to the relationship by the previous administration. Second, in the early 2000s, the AKP government's pro-Western, secular, and democratic policies had already pleased its Western counterparts. Although the Obama Administration took advantage of the chance to renew the relationship, it also decided to back Turkey's regional leadership, because both countries had their own national interest in the region (Atmaca, 2017).

### *2.3 The Arab Spring and the failure of the model partnership*

When the Arab rebellions initially emerged in Tunisia in early 2011, the US and Turkey saw this as a democratization wave with the potential to reshape the Islamic world. During Egypt's revolution, the same hope persisted. After that, both the Obama and Erdogan administrations supported the president of Egypt Mohamed Morsi and his Islamic political party the Muslim Brotherhood, expecting that the trend would lead to democratic rule in Egypt, similar to the one that exists in Turkey. This was perfectly in line with the concept of a model partnership. According to Oguzlu (2016), during the early stages of the Arab Spring, “in the eyes of the U.S. elites, there existed a consensus that the kind of Islam practiced in Turkey as well as Turkey’s economic and political accomplishments throughout its Republican history, most notably during the reign of the JDP [Justice and Development Party, or AKP] governments, would offer a credible road map to the Middle Eastern societies which had finally begin to oust their repressive authoritarian rulers from power” (OGUZLU, 2016, p. 5).

Turkey, on the other hand, could not fully comprehend American concerns about the Arab Spring until the transition process in Libya resulted in the deaths of American diplomats. With Morsi's missteps, the Arab Spring's upbeat spirit started to decline, and Egypt experienced a military coup in 2013. Despite Turkey's strong condemnation of the coup, the US internationally recognized General Abdel Fattah el- Sisi's leadership and continued to provide military and economic support to Cairo. This became the starting point of the clash of the interests between the US and Turkey in the region, because they had different perspectives about the Arab Spring and how to deal with it. Matters became more complicated when the Syrian transition devolved into a violent civil war in which Russia and Iran were also involved. It is worth noting that Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel as a result of events such as the “one-minute crisis” and the “Gaza Flotilla incident” (the *Mavi Marmara* crisis) had generated issues in Turkish–American relations, as Israel is the US's main ally in the region.

On the other hand, President Obama, with his high conceptual complexity of world view, demonstrated strong leadership in 2013, obtaining an official apology from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as \$20 million in compensation for the family of Turkish nationals murdered by Israeli soldiers. As a result, Obama

was also determined to return two allies because, similar to Arbel's (2014) argument, "good Turkish–Israeli relations are essential to the security and stability of the Middle East [and] U.S. leadership has come to play a central role in shaping – and often mediating – the Turkish–Israeli relationship" (Arbell, 2014, p. 2). With respect to Iran, Obama also reached a deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA<sup>3</sup>), between the P5+1 countries and Iran on the Iranian nuclear programme, with Turkey's assistance and Israel's reluctant consent. However, Turkey's activism in the Islamic world was seen in Washington as a 'axis shift' and Erdoğan was frequently criticized. (Ibid, 2014)

To summarize, between 2002 and 2012, Turkey was frequently cited as an example for the Middle East and the Muslim world as a whole. However, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, this premise has been called into question. This is attributable not just to Turkey's failure to use the Arab Uprisings of 2011 as an opportunity to expand its political influence in the area, but also to Ankara's reorientation of Middle Eastern policy, which has been marked by a less dynamic stance since 2011. This is due, in part, to the advent of serious internal sociopolitical issues (such as the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations), which have diverted Turkey's attention away from the Middle East. Furthermore, significant developments in the Arab world have influenced Turkish foreign policy, since Turkey could not have remained immune to regional upheavals pressing on its borders, the Syrian refugee crisis as an example. Obama also initially viewed Erdoğan as "the sort of moderate Muslim leader who would bridge the divide between East and West" and a role model for other Muslim leaders, but eventually came to regard him as "a failure and an authoritarian" (Marcus, 2016). Consequently, neither the model partnership nor the Arab Spring was successful in democratizing the area or improving Turkish–American relations. Anti-Americanism has also grown stronger as a result of the Arab Spring.

#### *2.4 Different perspectives and the breakdown in the US–Turkish relationship after the Syrian crisis*

Despite both Turkey and the US advocating regime change in Syria during the early stages of the civil war, the Obama Administration did not intervene militarily even after Syria's chemical weapons were used against civilians, which was widely viewed as Assad's government's actions. In contrast with other nations in which the Arab Spring gained traction (Tunisia, Egypt and Libya), Syria's civil war has lasted a long time and the regime has been able to hold out. Furthermore, the opposition was unable to act as a cohesive unit and promote itself as a democratic player (Cagaptay, S; Parris, M; Lesser, I, 2009). According to Barkey (2016), the Obama Administration eventually began to see jihadist terrorist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS as more of a threat than the Assad regime, and discontinued its aid to the Syrian opposition.

However, before ISIS began attacking Turkey's cities, Turkey's rhetoric was aimed primarily against the Assad dictatorship. Despite the fact that Ankara and Washington grew closer after the 'jet crisis' between Russia and Turkey in Syria, due to US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter's efforts, this only lasted a short period (Ersen, 2017).

During the Syrian crisis, Turkish–American relations on the one hand, and Turkish–Russian relations on the other, witnessed periods of close cooperation that were accompanied by major rifts. In November 2015, after Turkey shot down a Russian fighter, enmity and hostile rhetoric increased a lot between the two countries, but events have taken a dramatic turn since then. While Turkish–Russian relations have been recovering since the second half of 2016 and witnessed cautious cooperation in the Syrian context, Turkish–American relations have taken an opposite direction (İpek & Güler, 2021). The accumulation of new problems added to old simmering

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<sup>3</sup> The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a detailed, 159-page agreement with five annexes reached by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on 14 July 2015. For more information about the JCPOA, please visit: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>

tensions has roiled these bilateral relations. This became a dramatic change in the relationship between the two countries and the Syrian civil war badly impacted Turkish–American relations (Hale, 2019).

Given the importance of Syria in the Turkish–American context, it is necessary to adopt a broader vision of the development of the Syrian crisis and its repercussions for Turkish–American relations. Another important issue arises as a consequence of American assistance for PKK-affiliated Kurdish groups in Syria, such as the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People’s Protection Units (YPG). Since ISIS has emerged as a more serious threat, Barkey believes that the Obama Administration had no choice but to help the PYD/YPG (CFR 2018/b). Despite its deep worry at this stage, Turkey had not entirely abandoned the US in Syria. Rather, it was one of the few countries that enthusiastically welcomed Donald Trump's election as president, and attributed most of the rifts in bilateral relations, particularly those generated by the Syrian civil war, to Obama's unsuccessful Syria policy. As a result, Turkey anticipated that by characterizing the rupture in relations in this way, it would be able to start a new era in relations with the Trump Administration (Dalay, 2018). During Trump's presidency, however, this problem grew increasingly apparent as the US and PYD/YPG coordination deepened to the point where the two would plan and organize joint operations (Barkey, 2016).

US assistance to the Syrian Democratic Forces and the YPG caused great concern to Turkey. This concern increased after the failure of the local Kurdish peace process in Turkey in the second half of 2015, which caused Turkey to re-securitize the Kurdish Question at the local and regional levels. Given the PKK's association with the YPG, the failure of the peace process in Turkey immediately changed the way Turkey viewed the YPG (Dalay, 2018). Lower-ranking American officials, including Brett McGurk, were blamed by authorities for Washington's pro-Kurdish stance. Ankara, on the other hand, began to see a pro-Kurdish American approach to Syria as state policy and a direct challenge to its own unity as time went on. As a result, Turkish politicians began to target senior American policy makers. President Erdoğan, for example, accused Obama of tricking Turkey in exchange for American support for the PYD/YPG (Butler & Dolan, 2016). Erdoğan also accused the US of aiding terrorism in Syria (Reuters, 2016).

Turkey, as a neighbouring country, was severely impacted by the Syrian crisis, with almost 4 million Syrian refugees entering the country and increased security dangers, although Washington was only partially and indirectly affected by the civil war's spillover effects (WBG, 2021). The main issue in Syria was Turkey's concern over the future status of Syrian Kurds; Turkey considered Kurdish autonomy or independence in northern Syria as a direct security threat to its rule because the PYD/YPG are PKK- offshoot organizations for Ankara. As a result, Turkey saw Washington’s approach as a breach of its own red lines and a threat to its own security.

To summarize, Despite an increase in the number of disagreements in Turkish–American ties, the lack of an effective mechanism to resolve these issues has escalated tensions between the two countries. To make matters worse, the elites in both nations’ institutions that foster Turkish–American relations have lost a lot of power. As a result of all of these factors and tensions, both countries must brace themselves for a worsening stage of their relationship.

### *2.5 Authoritarian orientation in Turkey and its impact on the bilateral relationship*

Turkey is an elitist enterprise; significant elite groups have always steered Turkey towards their own societal values and foreign policy. This was true during the Ottoman Empire, the Republican era, and the current ruling AKP. The AKP symbolizes the new elite; it has a sizable corporate community behind it, coordinates domestic intelligence, and has complete control over the executive and legislative departments. Rejab Tayyip Erdoğan, a former member of the AKP, is now the Turkish president, with the authority to appoint judges to the high courts. Furthermore, pro-AKP firms own approximately 50% of the media (Cagaptay, S; Parris, M; Lesser, I, 2009).

The AKP has been reshaping Turkish society in its image as the new elite and fostering social conservatism through administrative actions. Sonar et al. (2009, p. 1) believed that “it is not religiosity that is on the rise in Turkey – i.e., the number of people attending mosque services or praying – but rather government-infused social conservatism. Indications of social conservatism, such as women wearing Islamic-style headscarves (turbans), are used as benchmarks to obtain government appointments, promotions, and contracts”.

Turkish foreign policy is also being reshaped by the AKP leadership. Turkey's foreign policy paradigm used to be concentrated on the promotion of Western-based national interests. The paradigm was built on a civilizational worldview, as evidenced by Tayyip Erdoğan's handling of the Gaza Strip and the Sudan. The government's support for Hamas and severe criticism of Israel's attack on civilians coincided with a visit to Ankara by the Sudanese vice-president, who was facing genocide charges at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. If Muslims are killed by non-Muslims, the AKP is concerned, but not if Muslims kill Muslims. The problem in the Middle East, according to the AKP, is not violence or human suffering, but Muslim suffering at the hands of non-Muslims. The new paradigm advocated by pundits, think tanks, and newspapers sympathetic to the AKP is anti-Western, anti-US, and anti-Israeli. This paradigm is influencing public view, which is becoming more anti-Western and anti-American. As Turkey is a democratic country, public opinion is important. Anti-Western sentiments will eventually destroy Turkey's foreign policy alliance with the West (Cagaptay, S; Parris, M; Lesser, I, 2009).

The authoritarian orientation in Turkey increased during Obama's presidency. After the Gezi Park protests<sup>4</sup> in 2013, the Obama Administration began to criticize Erdoğan's government, despite promoting successive AKP regimes as models of Muslim democracy in the early years. In terms of American perceptions of Erdoğan, this was a major turning point in Washington. Following the Gezi Park events, police violence, authoritarian rhetoric and government practices, as well as censorship of the Turkish and foreign media, became recurrent topics in American leaders' pronouncements regarding Turkey (Peterson, 2014). From an American perspective, the Turkish government's response to the Gezi Park events was a violation of the First Amendment (the right to freedom of speech and expression) and appeared to have dampened ties fundamentally or deeply (Isiksal & Ormeci, 2015). Washington sees Turkey's response to the Kurdish issue as a contributing factor to the situation. While Obama complimented Erdoğan in early 2013 for initiating peace negotiations with Kurdish rebels, Erdoğan's changed stance towards Kurds, as well as Turkey's increased counter-terrorism measures and military operations, earned him a cold reception from Obama in March 2016 (Peterson, 2014).

#### *2.6 Failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey – “Trust deficit and self-reliance”*

Ankara realized it could not rely solely on NATO for survival. Turkey's post-15 July self-reliance and alternative international alliances were more important than ever, since Turkey was ignored by its traditional NATO partners, especially the United States, on the night of 15 July 2016 (Sofuglu, 2021). Turkey thought that a junta within the Turkish Armed Forces was behind the attempt. The Turkish government blamed the coup attempt on Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen and his followers. Because the Turkish government had said that, a rebellious section of the Turkish Army linked to the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) attacked the country's vital institutions from the air and on the ground, even running tanks over protesting citizens. Since then, Erdoğan's government has launched a purge of Gülen supporters and political opponents in the country, dismissing tens of thousands of people from the police force, military, bureaucracy, and even universities (Reuters, 2021).

However, the Gülen movement and the AKP government have a history of cooperating in the removal of secular nationalists and the so-called ‘deep state’ from the bureaucracy between 2002 and 2013. Even Erdoğan admitted previously that two factions were “moving in the same direction but using different tactics” (DHA, 2016). “The

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Gezi Park protests, please visit: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/10/24/legacy-of-gezi-protests-in-turkey-pub-80142>

previous coalition worked well”, Butler and Friedman (2016) concluded. Erdoğan wielded political authority, while Gülenists infiltrated the civil service, police force, prosecutors' offices, and judiciary”. Relations were strained in 2012 when Gülenists attempted to question MIT (Turkish National Intelligence Agency) Assistant Secretary Hakan Fidan. Gülenists began to oppose Erdoğan's regime and his close ties to Russia after that. As a result, two close political allies have been fierce adversaries since 2012. At the outset of the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, there was a sense of unity among political groups and political parties in Turkey. Opposition groups, such as the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), and the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) all backed the government against the coup and participated in diplomatic initiatives in Europe (Adar & Seufert, 2021). Soon after, opposition parties, on the other hand, quickly began to see the government's purges as an attempt to establish a one-man administration during the state of emergency. CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu went so far as to say that the “coup attempt occurred with the government's knowledge and was thus a ‘managed coup’”. More than 200 people were killed and others were injured in Turkey after the failed coup attempt (Hoffman, 2020).

The Gülen movement has been accused of masterminding the coup attempt, and the Turkish government has recognized it as the FETÖ. During the national emergency in Turkey, around 100,000 military, public workers, judges, police, teachers, and intellectuals associated with FETO were detained or fired from their positions (Reuters, 2021). Notably, Turkey has escalated its approach to Russia in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt. As a result, the coup attempt further polarized the country and increased Erdoğan's control over the system, particularly after Turkey's controversial referendum on 16 April 2017, which led to the country's transition to a presidential system, and Erdoğan's crucial presidential election victory on 24 June 2018 (Stiftung, 2020). Following the failed coup attempt in Turkey on 15 July 2016, Turkish media and even government officials publicly accused the United States of being complicit in the plot (Reuters, 2021).

Despite the fact that President Obama condemned the coup, and stated that the United States had not participated in the attempt, the White House statement on behalf of President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry asserted that “The president and secretary agreed that all parties in Turkey should support the democratically-elected government of Turkey, show restraint, and avoid any violence or bloodshed. The secretary underscored that the State Department will continue to focus on the safety and security of U.S. citizens in Turkey” (Toosl & Bender, 2016), Turkish political analysts and ordinary citizens felt that the United States was somehow involved in the coup. This impression is particularly strong in Turkey, as evidenced by US support for the Egyptian military coup in 2013, as stated in a statement by then-US Secretary of State John Kerry (Kanat, 2016, p. 333). Despite this, the then-Turkish Minister of Labour and Social Security, Süleyman Soylu, stated shortly after the coup attempt in Turkey that the “US is behind this coup attempt” (Tribune, 2016, p. 8). Since the first military coup in 1960, Turkish intellectuals and citizens have consistently accused American governments of military coups in their nation (Güney, 2008). It is true that during the Cold War the US (through the CIA) was highly involved in Turkey and collaborated on several operations with Turkish intelligence (Ozkan, 2009). For example, Turkish researcher Mehmet Akif Okur determined that the US administration was aware of and supportive of Turkey's military takeover on 12 September 1980 (Okur, 2015, p. 215). However, conspiracy theories and anti-American propaganda thrive in this grey area, and evidence of US involvement in Turkish coups, such as the claim that “Our boys in Ankara did it”, is frequently based on media misconceptions and exaggerations. The worsening of bilateral relations became apparent after the coup attempt, when the US Department of State announced in July 2016 that American diplomatic staff in Turkey had the right to leave due to increased security risks and restrictions during the state of emergency (Lamothe, 2016). The status of influential Muslim preacher Fethullah Gülen, who was based in the United States, and his prospective extradition has become a key problem in bilateral relations (VOA, 2016). According to Erkmen (2017), the Turkish people viewed America's refusal to extradite Gülen as indications of the country's involvement in the coup attempt. Anti-Americanism in Turkey increased from 44.1% in 2016 to 65.5% in 2017 following the coup

attempt (Hacaloglu, 2017). Finally, the failed coup attempt and subsequent purges inside Turkey's security bureaucracy established a bad perception of Turkey's military capabilities in Washington. Kanat also believed that 2016 was the worst year for Turkish–American relations since the Johnson Letter and the 1 March memorandum rejection (2017, pp. 319–320). Despite several interactions between the two nations during the coup attempt, US government lawyers claimed that the evidence against Gülen's role in the coup attempt was not as substantial as Turkish officials maintained (CRS, 2017).

To summarize, following a promising start and a period of improvement, US–Turkish relations became more complicated and politically challenging during Obama's presidency, particularly following the failed coup attempt in 2016. The failure of the concept of Turkey as a model country during Obama's presidency is due to the Arab Spring's ability to bring democratic Islamic governments to Arab countries in the Middle East, the Syrian civil war, which overshadowed transition to democracy and turned into a violent civil war necessitating the use of military power, and Turkey's totalitarian transformation following the Gezi Park protests and especially after the failed coup attempt in the country. However, there was noticeable development in terms of economic and cultural interactions throughout this time period.

## Conclusion

The main focus of this dissertation is on the significant factors and actors that have shaped US foreign policy towards Turkey, especially after the AKP came to power in 2002. An interpretivist paradigm was adopted since the researcher was interested in using subjective experiences and interpretations from different experts in the researched subject in determining the implications of US foreign policy. A qualitative research approach was adopted since only qualitative data were to be collected and the principal objective of this research was to achieve deeper insight into the Obamas' policy towards Turkey, change or continuity.

The relationship between Turkey and the United States is currently a shambles. Recent meetings between US president and Turkey fueled hopes that the US–Turkey relationship could be repaired. However, because the underlying elements that formerly determined the relationship have altered, recovery from the current crisis is difficult.

This increasing divergence between America's and Turkey's worldviews makes it difficult to find a constructive solution to the wide range of bilateral issues that currently exist. This study considered five major areas of disagreement between the two countries and how they may work together to overcome them. The purchase of the S-400 air and missile defence system by Turkey, as well as continuous US assistance for Syria's Kurdish military and political factions, are at the top of the list of matters of concern. Other concerns are the consequences of Turkey's erosion of democratic norms; the US position on self-exiled Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, whom many in the Turkish government believe was the architect of the failed coup attempt in July 2016; the significance of the Halkbank court judgment on past violations of Iran sanctions; and the differing perspectives of the United States and Turkey on the Middle East. As a result, the relationship between Turkey and the United States clearly has to be redefined.

A foreign policy is a view, a vision, and a goal. US foreign policy towards Turkey has been pretty much consistent in its vision and goals. What has happened between these two countries is that different issues have gained heightened attention at different times. The goals mentioned above have been amplified or reduced in relative importance based on the geopolitical context of the era. What could also be argued is that different strategies have been pursued, adopted and then adjusted to achieve these goals. In essence, what has not changed are the strategies (what to do?) but at the same time what has changed are the tactics (how to do it?) when it has

come to issues of American foreign policy related to Turkey. As a result, in order to answer the main question of this research, which is one of whether the relationship between the US and Turkey is one of change or continuity in the Obamas' era, we have found that we can state that the relationship between the US and Turkey is change within continuity. With regard to their differences on some issues, they are still nonetheless an alliance and both countries' officials emphasize the importance of continued US–Turkey cooperation and Turkey's membership of NATO.

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