From Amity to Enmity: The sudden deterioration in Turkish-Syrian relations

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From Amity to Enmity: The sudden deterioration in relations between Turkey and Syria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze Turkey’s foreign policy change towards Syria after the beginning of the Arab spring. Turkish-Syrian relations had since the signing of the Adana accord improved drastically, moving from enmity to amity. However, since the beginning of the Arab spring in 2011, Turkish-Syrian relations changed significantly, moving from amity to enmity. Thus, this paper aims to analyze Turkey’s foreign policy change in order to find explanatory mechanisms behind this development. This paper has utilized offensive realism and constructivism in order to cultivate two hypotheses, each based on the theories assumptions of the international system. The third hypothesis is the manifesting of an offensive realist constructivist theory and aims to explain what motivated Turkey’s foreign policy change towards Syria. In this single case study, process tracing is utilized in order to find causal mechanisms. The material consists of press releases, statements, news reports following the events in Syria and Turkish-Syrian relations as well as leaked classified material. The analysis is divided into two sections, one descriptive and one explanatory. The findings support an offensive realist constructivist approach which is able to achieve a complete observation of how and why Turkish-Syrian relations deteriorated after the beginning of the Arab spring.

Keywords
Turkey, Syria, Realist Constructivism, Offensive Realism, Constructivism, Foreign Policy Change, Case Study and Process Tracing.
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1. Introduction

In the decade leading up to the Arab spring and the subsequent Syrian civil war, relations between Turkey and Syria were, after significant conflict and noticeable confrontations, on the mend. Improved relations resulted in flourished trade, finance, cultural exchange, religious kinship, diplomatic activities and military cooperation. Despite improved relations, signaled amity and even alliance, Turkey still took action against the Syrian government by supporting the armed opposition.

What is puzzling is that Turkey took this course of action when the Syrian government set about putting down the rebellion, was consequently weakened and therefore no longer posed a significant security threat to Turkey.

Change in foreign policy happens continuously. Turkey’s foreign policy change in the early years of the 21st century can be explained by a change in government, ideology and political identity. When the AKP (Justice and Development Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) came to power it instituted a zero problem with neighbor’s strategy which explains its shift towards Syria (Demirtaş, 2013). However, Turkey’s latest shift towards Syria is also puzzling in another aspect, the AKP is still in power in Turkey. Although the same party was in power in the Soviet Union, and the same party is still in power in China their foreign policy changed over time (Hermann, 1990). A partial explanation for that is that individuals within the party changed overtime. However, the AKP still has key individuals in power.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

The aim of this research is not to examine how Turkish-Syrian relations moved from enmity to amity. Instead focusing on recent events, beginning with the Arab spring, relations between Turkey and Syria had gradually and eventually drastically deteriorated. Consequently the aim is to examine why Turkish-Syrian relations deteriorate so rapidly, despite a decade of strengthening relations. Recognizing the aim, the research question will be divided into two;

- How did Turkish-Syrian relations deteriorate after the arrival of the Arab spring to Syria?
What motivated Turkey’s foreign policy change towards Syria after arrival of the Arab spring?

1.3 Background

Prior to the signing of the Adana accords in 1999, relations between Turkey and Syria where marked by conflict and confrontations. Issues where mainly related to the “Kurdish problem”, specifically Kurdish separatism in Turkey. Turkey had battled the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party, Partia Karkeren Kurdistan) for decades and the organization was supported by the Syrian regime during the 1980s and 1990s. Hoping to use the waterways as bargaining chip, Turkey answered by limiting access to the Euphrates and Tigris rivers full capacities. In return for seizing all support for the PKK, Damascus would secure its share of water resources. Although this failed, relations between the two states worsened (Aras, 2012).

The worsened relations reached its peak in 1998, a situation which today is seen as the turning point in their relation. The situation manifested itself as Turkey’s final attempt to solve its issues with Syria and the PKK. What lead the nations to be on the verge of armed conflict was the harboring Öcalan (leader of the PKK) by Syria at that time. Syria was also seen as using the PKK to wage an “undeclared war” with Turkey. Backed by Washington, Ankara initiated a diplomatic offensive and military maneuvers in order to legitimize its threats. Unlike previous attempts, the 1998 standoff succeeded and resulted in the signing of the Adana accords which declared the PKK a terrorist organization, and made sure that Öcalan would never again be allowed to enter Syria (Aras, 2012, Makovsk, 1999).

The decade that followed was marked by improved relations between Damascus and Ankara. In the early 2000s the two nations went beyond normalization and set course for amity and eventually alliance. Interests between the two nations aligned in the lead up to the Iraq war. In 2004, Bashar al-Assad conducted an historic visit to Ankara in which the two nations jointly declared that the establishment of a Kurdish state in post-Saddam Iraq would cross a joint “red line”. Also in 2004 Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Syria after having refused an invitation to Israel protesting Israel’s repressive policies towards the Palestinians.

At a time when Turkey was pressures by the US and France to isolate Syria due to the al-Hariri assassination in 2005, Turkey’s president Abdullah Gül defied NATO colleagues and visited Damascus. Further symbolizing the trust established between Turkey and Syria,
Damascus asked Ankara to mediate covert talks between Syria and Israel in 2008 and resulted in a message from Israel passed on by the Turkish Prime Minister at the time Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, stating that it would withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for peace. This was confirmed by Buthaina Shaaban, Syria’s expatriates minister at the time (BBC News, 2008, Aras, 2012, Hinnebusch in Hinnebusch and Tür, 2013).

Turkish-Israeli relations, already stained by Israel’s support of Iraqi Kurds, its repressive policies towards the Palestinians and Turkeys attempt to bring Hamas out of isolation and legitimize the movement, further declined during the Gaza war and when the Gaza flotilla raid took place 2010. As a result it further pushed Turkey towards Syria and seemed to end any remnants of a Turkish-Israeli alignment (Hinnebusch in Hinnebusch and Tür, 2013).

2. Previous research

The goal of this section is to gain an overview of the previous research as it is related to Syrian and Turkish relations. The literature is mainly concerned with gaining a historical perspective and goes about achieving that by describing turn of events. Due to the fact that focus lies on gaining a historical appreciation for Turkish-Syrian relations, there are limited research made which searches for causal mechanisms that can explain the recent shift form amity to enmity. However, articles that examine the shift from enmity to amity after the events in 1998 and 2002 are plenty.

In Birgül Demirtaş article “Turkish-Syrian Relations: From Friend “Esad” to Enemy “Esed”, she attempts to understand why Turkish and Syrian relations have followed patterns marked by periods of security-centered relations followed by ears of cooperation and why this cycle has not been broken despite attempts by both sides. The article explores Syrian-Turkish relations going back to the 1980s, 1990s and even further back. Instead of examining the causes for the relations to deteriorate since the beginning of the Arab spring, Demirtaş examines the troubled relations of the 1980s and 1990s and causes that lead to improved relations after the 1998 boarder standoff with an emphasis on AKP’s foreign policy. Although deterioration of relations are mentioned, it is not approached analytically or by presenting
theoretical causes for deterioration, instead events which lead to deterioration are presented and briefly discussed (Demirtaş, 2013).

In Damla Aras article from 2012, she asks whether Turkey will turn to instruments of hard power in order to establish stability to its southern border. Her article is centered on soft and hard power politics, in this since it approaches the case in realist terms. Although Damla does not fully express constructivist ideas of ideology and identity she does mention Turkey’s willingness to see a Sunni government in Syria. Also, mentioning Turkey’s rivalry in relation to Iran and the shared concern for Iran’s growing influence in the region and the establishment of a “Shiite [Half] Crescent”, the phrase coined by King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2003. There is also an emphasis on lessons learned by the Turkish government for events in Libya. This is related to Turkey’s unwillingness to take a position in that case and how that might have influenced Turkey’s expectations for foreign involvement in Syria and which could explain Turkey’s actions which is an interesting proposition (Aras, 2012).

In Oktav’s book from 2011, she explores turkey’s foreign policy in the 21st century with a specific question in mind; “is Turkey turning away from its Western oriented and adopting a more “Eastern-oriented” pattern of foreign policy behaviour?” (Oktav, 2011:xi). This book is not only concerned with Syria-Turkey relations but Turks complete shift eastwards and the causes of this shift. What is emphasized is amongst other things, the coming to power of the AKP in Turkey and how Davutoğlu’s five principles for Turkish foreign policy which in short can be summed up as placing emphasis on face-to-face communication, moderating diplomatic efforts and to actively participate in international organizations contributes to Turkeys shifting axis during at least the first decade of the 21st century. Moreover, the transformation cannot be solely explained in terms of agency driven policies and strategic choices but comprises systematic transformations and power shifts at the systematic, regional and domestic levels (Oktav, 2011).

In Jamal Wakim’s paper from 2014, he argues that the Turkish Prime Minister at the time, Erdogan wanted to play a vital role in Middle Eastern politics, specifically the Arab world. An alliance between Turkey and Arab states predominantly in the Gulf was promoted by the U.S. in order to block Russia, China and Iran form having access to the eastern Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean. A largely descriptive paper which is lacking in theoretical analysis of events, provides largely a recollection of events which accelerated deterioration in the
relations between Damascus and Ankara. Although recollection of events is use full, the fact that it lacks theoretical grounding result in limited to no contribution. This leaves this paper in a position where it can empirically contribute to this paper (Wakim, 2014)

Theoretically, realist constructivism has been used when examining change in foreign policy. Most noticeably Idris Ahmedi outlines a realist constructivist theory of foreign policy change in his doctoral dissertation from 2013. Although, where Ahmedi amends and modifies structural realism in his dissertation, this paper will be utilizing offensive realism outlined by John Mearsheimer in his book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Even though it would have been possible to use Ahmedi’s framework for foreign policy change, to apply it on this specific case and still make a scientific contribution it would not have been as complete as the inclusion of offensive realism makes it. This, due to offensive realism according to Mearsheimer, outlines the best way to survive in an anarchic system (Ahmedi, 2013, Mearsheimer, 2001)

Overall there seems to be a lacking in examining deterioration of relations between Syria and Turkey since the Arab spring spread to Syria in March of 2011. Also lacking is the examination of Turkey’s foreign policy change in relation to Syria after the beginning of the Arab spring from a realist constructivist perspective. Instead there is an abundance materials as it pertains to Turkey’s foreign policy change toward Syria after the AKP had won elections in 2002.

3. Theory: Realist Constructivism

Realist constructivism, as an attempt to bridge the gap between the two different theories, are expressed by Samuel Barkin in his article and book with the same title in 2003 and 2010 respectively, which is a concrete attempt to overcome the trench warfare like mentality which exists among International relations theorists. Barkins observes that neorealism has failed in its attempt to systemize realism. It is on this this basis which he determines that classical realism is most compatible with constructivism (Barkin, 2010). However, whereas Barkin´s texts are meta-analytic in nature and argues for classical realism as a basis for the theory and because Ahmedi´s attempt is not fully satisfying due to his use of structural realism, this
research paper will attempt to utilize John Mearsheimer´s offensive realism with a focus on power maximization. The reasons for embarking upon this endeavor is that the theories, which to some extent, are incompatible do manage to complement each other when combined. What theory A fails to explain in the international system, theory B is able to explain and complement. Thereby presenting a more complete interpretation of the case than would have been possible if one of the theories where to be utilized.

This will be attempted by using John Mearsheimer´s offensive realism, specifically, strategies for maximizing power. Constructivism will be approached through Mark Haas and John Owen. The former identifies ideological and identity perception and proximity as being at the core of what shapes policymakers perceptions of other states in the international system. The latter, points out that states push for regime change in other states if the conditions for it are favorable and is therefore compatible with offensive realism. The reason being that states pursue power maximization in order to maximize security (Haas, 2012, Owen, 2002, Owen 2010, Mearsheimer, 2001)

3.1 Offensive Realism, Power and Anarchy

According to Mearsheimer states seek to maximize power in an attempt to attain or maximize security. Because international relations are a zero-sum game where power and security are relative, one state´s aspirations for security falls on another states expense. Power is a core concept for all realists and calculating power lies at the very root of how states consider the world surrounding them. States compete for power among themselves because it can be regarded as the currency of politics (Mearsheimer, 2001).

In order to understand Turkey´s foreign policy change there is a need to understand why states pursue power. Mearsheimer identifies five assumptions about the international system which explain why states pursue power. None of the assumptions alone dictate that states behave competitively, but together they elaborate a world where states have considerable reasons to think and in some occasions behave aggressively (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The first assumption identifies the international system as anarchic and it pertains to the realist notion of anarchy which has nothing to do with conflict and chaos. Instead it refers to an ordering principle, with the absence of Hobbes Leviathan and the system is made up of independent, sovereign state with potentially no restrain on their actions (Mearsheimer, 2001).
The second assumption is that states in some capacity possess offensive military capabilities, which gives them the ability to possibly hurt or destroy each other. States could therefore potentially present a threat towards each other and because some state possess more military capabilities than others they can be presided as more dangerous (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The third assumption stresses that no state can be certain about another states intentions, especially regarding another state use offensive military capabilities. This does not mean that all states in the international system harbor hostile intentions; however, he emphasizes that it is inherently impossible to assess another states intentions with 100 percent certainty. Mearsheimer stresses that causes for aggression (offensive intentions) are many and as a consequence uncertainty regarding intentions becomes unavoidable. This leads states to never be sure if another state is motivated by offensive intentions to act jointly with offensive military capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The fourth assumption stems from another key aspect of realism as a family of theories, survival, as the formative objective of states. Therefore, maintaining the autonomy of the domestic political system and their territorial integrity as a sovereign state is of utmost importance (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The fifth assumption regards states as rational actors who are aware of the external environment surrounding them and therefore have to think strategically in order to survive. State A considers the preferences of other states in the system and how its own actions are likely to affect how other states behave, which in turn affects state A´s survival strategy. This means that states take into consideration the long-term, intermediate and short-term consequences of their actions (Mearsheimer, 2001).

### 3.1.2 Power maximization

Recognizing the main assumptions of Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, he identifies war as the most controversial strategy which can be employed in order to increase power. A method for gaining power without direct involvement by the aggressor or the nation acting offensively is war and proxy war, or what Mearsheimer refers to as bait and bleed. This strategy involves causing two rivals to engage in war so that they bleed each other to death. The benefit of bait
and bleed is that the state that engages in baiting and officially remains on the sidelines does so with its military and economic strength intact (Mearsheimer, 2001).

However, offensive realism and realism as a whole fails to explain the conflicts sectarian nature and more specifically why Turkey chose to support Sunni factions in Syria.

3.2 Constructivism and perceptions

For reasons described above, constructivism which concerns itself with ideology and identity will be used to complement realism and factors which it fails to explain. Mark Haas identifies two broad ways in which ideologies are likely to systematically effect leaders’ international choices and course of actions. The first, ideological distance, examines the extent of differences and similarities of political leaders ideological beliefs. “Ideological distances impact international relations by shaping policymakers’ understandings of the likely threats that others pose to their interests” (Haas, 2012:6). Most notably, a leader’s assessment of others intentions in international relations and their understanding of threats that others potently could pose to their domestic interests are affected by ideological distances (Haas, 2012).

The second way in which ideologies are likely to affect leaders’ choice of international policies is the effect of ideological polarity in any particular system. This is similar to how relative power considerations differ in multipolar, bipolar and unipolar worlds. The same idea could be applied to demonstrate the effects of ideologies in international relations, (as it pertains to alliance dynamics) but vary depending on whether the system is “ideologically bipolar” or “ideologically multipolar” (Haas, 2012).

The contemporary Middle East is ideologically divided into multiple groupings (liberals, Islamic fundamentalism and secular authoritarians). But even though the Middle East is “ideologically multipolar”, identity wise, it resembles a bipolar world with the Muslim world divided into Sunni and Shia states and groups. Each group tries to gain influence where their identity group exists (Haas, 2012).

Constructivist assumption about the international system is that relations of amity and enmity are shaped by ideational factors. Therefore, compared to realism it provides more determinate claims and a greater set of expectations. This is the case because constructivism considers the
source of amity and enmity in the international system. Consequently the theory concerns itself with the existence of perceptions and the assumption that perception shapes foreign policy. “Constructivism, after all, does not treat the state as a unitary, and domestic and systemic variants of this approach claim that states’ interest, identities, notions of domestic and international order, as well as perceptions of others could be shaped by societal or international forces” (Ahmedi, 2013:72).

John Owen states that regime change is not limited to the removal of a state’s government or ruler but includes change of institutions, ideologies, and operational rules. He argues that states are most likely to impose regime change in other states based on two reasons. The first, is that states observe a need to expand their power. The second reason is that state A finds that by imposing regime change in state B and implementing institutions preferable to state A, it becomes possible to bring state B under its influence (Owen, 2002, Owen 2010).

### 3.3 Foreign Policy and Change

Strategy as a part of foreign policy consist of three main elements. First element consist of defining goals and desired objectives. The second element, consist of identifying potential or actual threats to the objectives and goals. The third consist of the application of appropriate means of achieving the objective and goals (Layne, 1997).

Strategy, as a part of foreign policy, can be broke down into two main bodies; non-verbal foreign policy and verbal foreign policy. Non-verbal foreign policy refers to a state’s line of action in regard to an object. This places it at the operational level and encompasses observable actions such as, economic sanctions, use of military capabilities, ratification of treaties and so forth. Verbal foreign policy is when states declare to be following or intends to follow a line of action in regard to an object. Therefore studying verbal foreign policy is done only by studying statements which identify, goals interest, governmental doctrines (Ahmedi, 2013, Goldmann, 1988).

But one issue in regard to verbal foreign policy is that it can serve as a smokescreen to hide intentions. This means that this research in particular will mainly be concerned with non-verbal foreign policy. This does not mean that statements are entirely ruled out if they lend themselves to answer or assist in answering the research question.
Foreign policy change takes place on a continuous basis, however, it is rare to observe change which is significant and comprehensive as it relates to formative moment or transformation of a state’s foreign policy. This is because states conduct business today much like it did yesterday, unless a compelling reason presents itself resulting in actions dramatically different from yesterdays. Therefore change in foreign policy is most likely to take place when leaders calculate a hefty loss in the event of a change in the status quo. (Welch, 2005).

3.4 What counts as evidence?

The main problem which arises is, how to provide empirical support for the claim that Turkey had offensive intentions? It would be difficult to claim offensive intentions by assessing statements (verbal foreign policy) made by Turkish officials alone, because verbal foreign policy can serve as smokescreens to hide intentions. Instead, the actions (non-verbal foreign policy) taken by the Turkish state will be the focus of this research. But nonetheless, verbal foreign policy will not be ignored as it indicates shift in foreign policy.

A parallel to this case can be made in the events prior to the Iran-Iraq war. Iraq, at its height of power and Iran whose military had been left weakened and vulnerable due to the Iranian revolution which had taken place the previous year, presented an opportunity for Saddam to expand Iraq’s influence in Iran and the Gulf. So the actions of Turkey in Syria could have been motivated by similar offensive intentions to those implored by Iraq in the lead up to the Iran-Iraq war (Woods, Palkki & Stout, 2011).

3.5 Hypotheses

It is worth noting that Hypothesis 1 solely concerned with offensive realism and power maximization while Hypothesis 2 is solely concerned with constructivism. Hypothesis 3 is the manifesting of an offensive realist constructivist hypothesis and consequently concerned with power maximization, ideological and identity perception and proximity, as well as regime change.

Hypothesis 1: When the Syrian uprising started Turkey observed a chance to maximize its power and expand its interests in Syria by using the bait and bleed strategy.

Hypothesis 2: Realizing that it did not have as much influence over Syria, Turkey decided that a regime change from Alawi to Sunni would increase its influence over Damascus.
4. Research Design: Case Study and Process Tracing

4.1 Case Study

The purpose of this study is to examine Turkey’s foreign policy change towards Syria after the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011. Therefore, the unit of analysis is solely Turkey and as a consequence the study becomes unidirectional in nature. Also, the study will be limited to a period between 2011 and the end of 2014. The methodological approach is case study, where Turkey’s relation to Syria after the beginning of the Arab Spring constitutes a change in foreign policy. It is reasonable to adopt case study as a methodological approach based on the observation that the research question is concerned with the actor’s actions and to examine factors that can explain those actions (Gerring, 2007).

Despite the comprehensive use of case study methods, there is still no consensus on what it entails. A widely used definition of case studies define it as a “phenomenon for which we report and interpret only a single measure on any pertinent variable” (Eckstein in Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000:124). In other words, the case follows from the ambiguity which constitutes an individual as the case and can only be dispersed by examining measures made of concrete entities (Eckstein in Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, 2000). However, understandably there is still confusion surrounding case studies as methods for research. The process for conducting a case study coalesced with both the case (the unit of study) and the product provided by this method of investigation. Yin (1994) chooses to define case study as it relates to the research process: “[a] case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994:13).
This specific case will be a theory-guided case study which means that the aim is to explain and/or interpret a single historical episode rather than to generalize beyond the empirical material. In contrast to inductive case studies, which are highly descriptive but lacking in theoretical framework, theory-guided case studies are precision-guided by a well-developed theoretical framework which emphasizes theoretically specified aspects while choosing to ignore others (Levy, 2008). While it is argued that this type of case study should be left to the historians, but, as Levy writes, “history is too important to leave to the historians” (Levy in Levy, 2008:5).

Critic of case study method are often related to its capacity to generalize results because the findings are grounded in a single case. Studies that include a single observation place themselves at great risk of indeterminacy when faced with more than a single possible explanation. If there is measurement error, the study can also result in incorrect inferences. However, it is possible for a single case study to involve more than one observation which greatly reduces the problems. This study is solely relying on offensive realist and constructivist theory in order to extract explanatory factors which means that other factors will be excluded from the analysis. The aim is not to falsify the hypothesis but to examine their explanatory value (George and Bennett, 2005, Gerring, 2007).

Unlike other types of research methods in social sciences, case studies do not claim any specific method of data collection or data analysis. Data gathering methods can extend from testing to interviewing and can be applied to case study research. However, some data gathering techniques are utilized more than others. The decision to focus on qualitative case studies as it relates to this specific research paper originates from the understanding that this design is selected specifically because the researcher is interested in interpretation, discovery and insight rather than testing hypotheses. Therefore, it is also possible to define case study as “interpretation in context” (Cornbach, 1975:123). The researcher’s goal is to expose the interaction of specific variables and exposing characteristics, which is achieved by observing a single phenomenon or entity (case) (Merriam, 1998).

4.2 Process Tracing

Process tracing will be the method for qualitative analysis in this research paper. This is because process tracing lends itself useful when attempting to get closer to mechanisms causing the observed phenomena (George and Bennett, 2005). There are multiple research
traditions which can be linked to process tracing, but they differ from the approach discussed here. In this instance process tracing is defined as “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator” (Collier, 2011: 823)

Process tracing as a method differentiates itself in three distinct ways. The First, is called causal-process observation (CPO), the idea of which is to emphasize the divergence between, the empirical materials as foundation for qualitative research and the data matrix which quantitative researchers analyze, which are called data-set observation (DSO). A causal-process observation can in some occasion resemble a “smoking gun” which corroborates causal inference in qualitative research. CPO acts much like an indispensable supplement to correlation-based inference for quantitative research (Beck, 2010, Collier, 2011).

The second is description, process tracing is naturally compelled to analyzes the trajectories of causality and change, but this type of analysis will fail if the phenomenon in question is not adequately described at each step of the process. Therefore what resembles stagnant description is actually a crucial building block when analyzing the phenomenon. The third is sequence, were process tracing allocates detailed remark to the sequence of dependent, independent and intervening variables (Collier, 2011).

It is possible to question the level of reliability and validity this method is able to achieve. “Process tracing evidence is, almost by definition, difficult to verify, for it extends to evidence that is nonexperimental and cannot be analyzed in a sample-based format [...] So long as sufficient documentation is included in the account, the verification of a process tracing study is eminently achievable” (Gerring, 2007:184-185). This point further underlines the importance of description in process tracing in order to achieve transparency. Also, being transparent in the describing parts of the paper enables the presentation of the research process, assumptions and considerations (Bryman, 2012).

Process tracing requires the discovery of diagnostic evidence which provides the foundation for descriptive or causal inference. Tracing the process which leads to a specific outcome allows the researcher to narrow the list of potential causes, however, it may be difficult to disqualify all potential explanations. This is a specific issue which arises when human agents are involved, because the agent(s) may be doing all in their power to conceal casual processes.
This is an issue for this specific paper, as it relates to human agents, specifically within the AKP, actors such as Turkey’s former Prime Minster (now President) Erdoğan or Turkey’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs (now Prime Minister) Davutoğlu are likely concealing casual processes which holds the key to answer the research question(s)(George and Bennett, 2005). This is very much related to the verbal foreign policy versus non-verbal foreign policy debate examined in the chapter above.

4.3 Data and sources

Source selection and the gathering of data has been guided by a simple question; what kind of data would lend itself to understanding the motivations behind Turkey shift in foreign policy towards Syria? The data thus consists of press releases, statements, news reports following the events in Syria, relations between Syria and Turkey and leaked classified material. The news reports provide a chronological documentation of/and an understanding of events during the crisis as well as access to interviews with/and statements by officials and diplomats involved in the crisis.

5. Analysis

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

In this chapter the paper will provide a descriptive analysis concerning deterioration in Turkish-Syrian relations, this in order to answer the first research question. In order to answer the second research question, the next chapter of the paper will provide evidence for each hypothesis in order evaluate their explanatory value.

In February of 2011 in the Syrian city of Daraa, close to the Jordanian border, schoolchildren were arrested for scrawling graffiti which called for regime change. Residents found that these children were being beaten and tortured in prison. True or not, these arrests struck a chord and sparked protests in different regions including Aleppo and Damascus but the largest was in Daraa itself. Initial protests where calling for reform and the end of emergency rule which had been in place since 1963, not toppling of the regime. The regime responded first with crack downs against the protesters and later with promises for reforms. The same day as Syrian soldier’s reportedly opened fire against protesters, the government committed itself to
reforms. The reforms promised included raised workers wage, introduction of health care reform, introduction of more political parties in elections and bringing to justice those responsible for the killing of protesters (Sterling, 2012, BBC News, 2011).

The Syrian government admitted that the peoples grievances where legitimate but nonetheless concluded that regional and global powers where seizing the opportunity by contemplating to topple the regime (Wakim, 2014).

The arrival of the Arab spring to Syria presented itself as a major problem for Turkeys “zero problem towards neighbors” strategy and caught Turkey off-guard. Turkey’s initial reaction was much different to its stance today. The empiricism notes that Ankara seemed to not be involved in the crisis from the beginning. Actually, Turkey expressed concern for what could come to transpire in Syria if President Bashar al-Assad was to be removed (Wakim, 2014, Head, 2011).

“Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu told me at the end of March that Turkey feared the chaos that might well follow the fall of President Assad. This is not like Egypt or Libya, he said. It has the potential to become an intractable sectarian conflict, more like Iraq. And Turkey shares a 900km border with Syria” (Head, 2011).

It took several weeks before the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Ahmet Davutoğlu traveled to Damascus, met with President Bashar al-Assad and stated his country’s support of the reform package introduced by the Syrian government. At the time of the meeting, political unrest had been ongoing for three weeks. In the same visit, Davutoğlu confirmed that Turkey would be ready to help accelerate the reforms in every possible way in order to support security, stability and guarantee the prosperity to the Syrian people (Gulf News, 2011, Wakim, 2014).

Rather than subsiding as a reaction to the commitment to reforms by the government, protests intensified and spread. Despite having started in the south of the country, by the 9th of June 2011, protests had spread to coastal cities like Banias and Homs, Syria’s third largest city and its suburbs. Even Hama, the country’s fourth largest city and home of the infamous Hama massacre in 1982 as a part of the Muslim brotherhoods uprising (The Economist, 2011).
The government in Ankara initially relied on its soft power, believing that its influence on Syria and the Prime Minister at the time Recep Tayyip Erdoğan closeness to the Syrian President would provide moderate effect on the government’s actions. Despite this, Turkey could not remain neutral when faced with indifference to its warnings to cease the crackdown on protests (Aras, 2012).

The Turkish stance started to become critical of the Syrian government in June 2011, during which Erdoğan condemned the “atrocities” committed by Syrian authorities and continued by describing the violence as “unacceptable”. At the same time Ankara had started to hint that it might support action legitimized by the UN Security Council. Nonetheless, Davutoğlu still argued that the time for contemplating international intervention was still not right (Head, 2011).

Ankara’s shift in its approach toward Damascus stemmed from a number of different reasons. The first, Turkey wanted to see the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) ascend to power or at least share power with the Syrian regime. The empirical record suggests that Ankara asked Damascus to approve SMB’s return to Syria and to offer the SMB major ministries in the government in return for Turkey’s support in ending the rebellion. President Assad refusal for such a proposal where based in the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood, a party which promotes political Islam, was incoherent with the regimes secular nature (The Daily Star, 2011, Aras, 2012).

Reportedly, such a proposal was made in June 2011 and as stated above, Turkey started to become critical of the Syrian regime in the same month. This leads to the assessment that Syria’s refusal to accept the initial proposal is related to the start of Turkey’s condemnation of actions taken by the regimes.

“In June, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered, if Syrian President Bashar Assad ensured between a quarter and a third of ministers in his government were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, to make a commitment to use all his influence to end the rebellion, a Western diplomat told AFP” (The Daily Star, 2011).

After Turkey’s had started to condemn actions taken by the Syrian regime in the beginning of the summer 2011, Ankara started to become the primary supporter of the Syrian opposition.
On 9 July 2011, Davutoğlu travel to Saudi Arabia and meet with Saud Al-Faysal, Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs where “some regional and international developments which have recently come to the forefront are expected to be reviewed” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No: 163:2011). Syrian government has openly accused Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar of arming and/or supporting rebels in Syria. It is interesting to note that such support began after Turkey’s visit to Saudi Arabia (BBC News, 2012).

Different opposition group’s first came together as the Syrian National Council which later rebranded itself as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces. They later established a military wing called the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) which aim was to conduct an armed resistance against the Syrian regime. The opposition groups that gathered and formed the umbrella organization did so on Turkish territory. Turkey was also reportedly supplying military aid and training to the opposition as well as economic and political support (Demirtaş, 2013).

Tens of thousands of Syrian Sunnis also proceeded to join rebel factions such as the “Islamic Front”, “Ahrar al-Sham” and “al- Nusra Front”, which use anti-Shia rhetoric, also foreign Sunni fighters from western and Arab states enrolled in these and other factions furthering the conflicts sectarian nature. Similarly multiple Syrian Shias and Allawi’s proceeded to enroll in the Iran backed National Defense Force militia to fight against the Sunni factions on behalf of President Assad (Council on Foreign Relations, 2014).

There is no statement from Ankara which explicitly states that it feels threatened by Tehran based on ideological factors, in fact Turkey took extremely cautious steps to not cut links completely with Iran. However, the deployment of early warning radar systems in Turkey as a part of the west anti-ballistic missile defense would suggest that Ankara observes a threat from Iran, or at least Tehran sees this action as directed against it (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013).

After several attempts without result, Davutoğlu flew to Damascus in august 2011 to deliver what Turkish officials tautologically observed as a final ultimatum which lasted six and a half hours regarding the sizing of government actions against protesters. Turkey realized that the Syrian government was unwilling to resolve the issues through reforms and would instead continue with the use of lethal force (Aras, 2012). The talks on august 15th, 2011 “marked the
end of an era in Turkish-Syrian relations based on the slogan of a “common destiny, history and future” (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013).

The Syrian government responded to the talks by intensifying the assault on protesters and armed groups who had taken up arms against the government. The assault took place most notably in the coastal city of Latakia. “This prompted Mr Davutoglu to issue yet another warning: Turkey would not, he said, “remain indifferent” to continuing massacres” (The Economist, 2011).

Despite the fact that Turkey had directed harsh criticism towards the Syrian government it had not yet demanded the Syrian president to step down. The US and several of its major allies called on President Assad to step down on 22 August 2011. Turkey however had obtained for making such demands until the 22 November 2011 (Myers, 2011, Arsu, 2011).

In late November 2011, The Telegraph reported that Turkey began to signal intents of establishing a buffer zone inside Syria in coordination with the international community in the event of a mass exodus of refugees from Syria (The Telegraph, 2011). Syria did not abstain from issuing threats of its own against Turkey. Other than attacks against the Turkish diplomatic mission in three cities in Syria, the government in Damascus also hinted in October 2011 that it was considering reestablishing ties with the PKK and support them if it perceived Turkey as supporting the opposition (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013). President Assad continued by stating that “Turkey could fall into a state similar to ours” (Today’s Zaman, 2011) if it was to continue its support of the Syrian opposition.

Relations between Syria and Turkey continued to spiral down as Ankara decided to impose sanctions on Damascus, at the expense of losing its significant trade relation with its southern neighbor. The government in Ankara started freezing assets belonging to officials involved in the crackdown on the uprising in Syria, it banned all military sales and continued by suspended ties with Syria’s national bank (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013, Dombey, 2011).

Turkey, which initially had dragged its feet on imposing sanctions, decided to do so in late November 2011 after the US, EU and Arab League had already decided to impose broad trade sanctions of its own. The aim of the sanctions was to stifle the Syrian economy and diminish
President Assad’s power. The actions of the Turkish government were meet with Syria’s decision to suspend its free trade agreement with Ankara, discouraging duties on freight and fuels and imposed a 30 percent tariff on imports from Turkey (BBC News, 2011, Demirtaş, 2013). Turkey’s actions continued to reflect provocative intent with the interception of military equipment and weapon deliveries of all kind heading to Syria from Russia through Turkish waters, soil and air space (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013).

Turkey has been seeking an order-instituting role in the region and this time around, with support from its western allies, not independently unlike other time in the past. Erdogan also declared his government would coordinate sanctions directed against Syria together with the US and the rest of the international community. “Hillary Clinton declared we expect the regime change process in Syria will be realized without violence under the leadership of the Arab League and Turkey” (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013:200).

Understanding the limits of its capacity to institute order and to act in a mediating role with the government in Damascus, Ankara decided to end it zero problems with neighbors’ policy towards Syria and proceeded to end its previously anti-US rhetoric and started to work with the international community and its patron the United States (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013).

Supposing that President Assad would like other dictatorial leaders, like Libya’s Gaddafi, be toppled by the international community with the support of the United States, Turkey, wanted to have a seat at the diplomatic table. It achieved its seat by hosting 70 foreign minister from Arab and Western countries at the second Friends of the Syrian People summit in Istanbul, where key people such as the UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syrian crisis Kofi Annan and EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton where present. However, China, Russia, Iran and Iraq remained absent and these actions are appeasing sign on how far Turkey placed all it chips into the post-Assad scenario (Oktav in Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013).

Still Turkey remained concerned with the United States level of commitment as it had not yet offered diplomatic, political, financial or logistic support to the organized Syrian opposition to the extent of which Russia had been supplying the Syrian government. Ankara realizes that the US bitter experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan coupled with wariness of confronting China and Russia and the understanding that it does not see sufficiently vital interest in Syria to

Turkish-Syrian relations became drastically worse when Syria on 22 June 2012 downed a Turkish F-4 Phantom jet fighter over the Mediterranean Sea. After the incident, Erdoğan declared the incident as a hostile act and subsequently announced that Turkey would consider Syria as a clear and present danger. He continued by warning that Turkey would consider all military units approaching the border from Syria as hostile and treat it accordingly. Two days after the incident Turkey invoked article 4 of the NATO charter (Kaya, 2014, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No: 173:2012).

Western wariness became evident after the incident on 22 June 2012 when Turkey called on NATO to take action against Syria, however, NATO presided to only denounce the Syrian act declaring that it was not ready to militarily get involved in the Syrian crisis. The member states who meet as a result of the invocation article 4, did not even discuss invoking article 5. However, Turkey made an elaborate attempt at invoking article 5, which calls on member states to view an attack on one member state as an attack on all member states. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc mentioned that Turkey would pressure NATO to consider the incident as an armed attack under article 5 (Wakim, 2014, CBS News, 2012).

More than a year after the downing of the Turkish fighter jet by Syria, another opportunity for intervention presented itself for Turkey and its allies. In the suburbs of Damascus on 21 August 2013, according to US intelligence, a sarin gas attack by the Syrian regime caused the death of 1,400 people. While intervention was being discussed in the US, key Turkish officials Erdoğan and Davutoğlu expressed support and called on a comprehensive rather than a limited intervention targeting the regime in Syria. Since the summer of 2012 when Syria shot down the Turkish jet, the government in Ankara had become one of the prominent promoters and advocators of military intervention, internationally imposed humanitarian intervention or at least the implementation of a no-fly zone in Syria (Kaya, 2014).

The diplomatic developments which followed the incident on 21 August 2013, which saw Syria’s accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, left Ankara disappointed due to the fact that it faced the probability that President Assad would remain in power (Kaya, 2014).
On 27 of March 2014 multiple news agencies, including Reuters and Bloomberg, reported a Turkish security leak which then was posted on the video-sharing site YouTube. The leak contained recordings of top Turkish security officials contemplating the possibility of military action in Syria. Although, Reuters could not verify the authenticity of the recording, the Turkish government’s reaction to the leak highlights the severity of the leak and the matters discussed (Tattersall, 2014, Barden, 2014). In a press release from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and while speaking to reporters, Davutoğlu confirmed that the meeting took place and stated that:

“A cyber attack has been carried out against the Turkish Republic, our state and our valued nation. This is a clear declaration of war against the Turkish state and our nation” (Davutoğlu in Tattersall, 2014).

Calling the leak a “declaration of war” demonstrates the severity of the leak. The Turkish government proceeded to block the video-sharing site YouTube which further highlights damage controlling actions. The heavily criticized Russian state-funded television network Russia Today was the only report of the story which included an English transcript of the recorded Turkish conversation in full. Some parts of the recorded conversation have, according to a press release issued by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, been doctored (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, No: 98:2014).

What is of interest to this particular paper is a part of the conversation where Davutoğlu states that “Prime Minister [Erdoğan] said that in current conjuncture, this attack (on Suleiman Shah Tomb) must be seen as an opportunity for us” (Russia Today, 2014).

Turkey’s Chief of the National Intelligence Organization, Hakan Fidan continued the conversation by saying that he will “make up a cause of war by ordering a missile attack on Turkey; we can also prepare an attack on Suleiman Shah Tomb if necessary.” (RT, 2014, BBC News, 2014).

5.2 Explanatory Analysis

In this chapter arguments and evidence for each hypothesis will be presented and analyzed. A summarizing discussion will be conducted where these hypotheses are compared and some conclusions will be drawn.
Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1: When the Syrian uprising started Turkey observed a chance to maximize its power and expand its interests in Syria by using the bait and bleed strategy.

Support for Hypothesis 1 does exist. However, Turkey’s initial reaction to the crisis highlights how they were caught by surprise by the events Syria. For the majority of the summer of 2011 Turkish criticism of what was happening in Syria was modest in comparison to what was to come. Turkey criticized but still encouraged reform in Syria. A noticeable turning point in Turkey’s approach toward Syria came after the six and a half hours long deliverance of a final ultimatum by Davutoğlu on 15 August 2011. It was after the fact that the US and its major allies started to call for Assad to step down and started to introduce stricter sanctions.

However, it was not until November 2011 that Turkey started to call on President Assad to step down, invoked strict sanctions, razed its support of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and the FSA and began to signal intent of establishing a buffer zone in side Syria in coordination with the international community. These actions signal intent to escalate and worsen relations with Syria rather deescalate.

As it relates to change in strategy the three elements identified by Layne (1997) are visible. The first element is to define the goal which in this case is regime change in order to maximize power. Although Turkey is late to express that it wants Syria’s President to abdicate it dose in fact do so, thereby expressing that it wants regime change in Syria. The second element, identifying the threats to the desired goal. That threat in this case would be the Syrian government staying in power. However, mainly Iranian and Russian support to the Syrian government is considered as a threat to the desired goal because it exceeded the support the FSA received from the west. The third element using appropriate means to achieving the desired goal are evident throughout the descriptive analysis.

The Turkish government starts to explore necessary measures for achieving the desired goal by starting to impose sanctions, aborting trade treaty between Syria and Turkey, allowing the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces to convene on its soil supplying them with political support and finally by supplying the FSA with political, economic and military support. The later approach to achieving the desired goal is what
mostly resembles Mearsheimer’s bait and bleed strategy which is a strategy that causes two rival to engage in a protracted war so that they bleed each other to death. However, there is evident which suggests that Ankara wanted to get involved directly with its own military.

Support for this claim can be found Turkey’s signaled intent of establishing a buffer zone inside Syria in coordination with the international community and in the events which followed when Syria downed a Turkish fighter jet. After the downing of the jet, Turkey proceeded to invoke article 4 of the NATO charter, however, as was mentioned by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, Turkey was pressuring NATO to consider the incident as an armed attack under article 5 of the NATO charter. Therefore, the incident on 22 of June 2012 could be observed and analyzed as an opportunity for Turkey to legitimately act defensively in Syria with offensive intentions, the removal of Syria’s government in Damascus.

Although this was never realized due to wariness by Turkey’s allies in NATO, another opportunity did present itself during the summer of 2013. The sarin gas attack which allegedly was carried out by the Syrian regime according to US intelligence. During that specific crisis Turkey’s government, expressed strong support for intervention and called for a comprehensive intervention to deliberately targeting the regime in Syria. This part of the crisis was eventually settled through diplomatic means, but nonetheless, it demonstrates willingness to target the regime in Syria and intervene if the necessary pretext exists to legitimize such an intervention.

This is further evident in the leaked security tapes. Turkey’s reaction to the security leak and the fact that Davutoğlu confirmed that the meeting recorded on the tapes did in fact take place, lends itself to the belief that what was discussed was of utmost importance to Turkey’s national security. However because the tapes are unverified and because Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs allege that the tape was doctored and tampered with, this paper cannot solely rely on them as hard evidences for offensive behaviour.

While this hypothesis does succeed in answering the research question, it does so in a limited capacity by highlighting Turkey offensive intentions in Syria. However, it fails to explain key aspects of the conflicts sectarian nature and what factors ideology and identity play in Turkey’s course of action towards Syria.
Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: Realizing that it did not have as much influence over Syria, Turkey decided that a regime change from Alawi to Sunni would increase its influence over Damascus.

Support for this hypothesis does exist. During the beginning of the crisis Turkey expressed concern for what could come to transpire in Syria if the situation was to escalate because it shares a 900km border. When the Syrian government stated that it was willing to reform, the Turkish government showed support for the course of action chosen by Damascus. However, Turkey changed its tone towards the Syrian government in June 2011 when Erdoğan began to condemn action in Syria. Noticeably this criticism came after that Turkey had offered Damascus to allow the SMB to receive ministerial posts in the Syrian government in return for Ankara’s support for ending the rebellion.

Relating this to change in grand strategy the three elements identified by Layne are visible. The first element is to define the goal which in this case is regime change in order increase Turkey’s influence in Syria. By promoting regime change in Syria from an Alawi to Sunni, Turkey, a majority Sunni state with the Islamic AK Party in power, would increase its influence due to ideological and identity proximity. It is evident Ankara believed its influence with the Syrian leadership would result in the reintroduction of the SMB to Syrian political life, which would have increase Turkey’s influence in Syria due to the same reasons stated above. John Owen does not limit change to the removal of state government but does include change of ideologies and operational rule, which this could fall under. However, when the Syrian government refused based on incoherency with regimes sectarian nature, Turkey realized that it did not have as much influence in Syria as it first believed. This resulted in increased pressure from the Turkish government in the form of Erdoğan condemning actions in Syria and Turkey pursuing a course of action with the desired result being regime change in order to increase its influence in Syria.

The second element, identifying the threats to the desired goal. That threat in this case would be increased Shia influence in the region which manifests itself as the Iranian support Damascus receives. The increased Shia influence in the region, which manifests itself in the form of the Shia crescent, which includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran, all
states which in some capacity are involved in the Syrian crisis and its spill over (Council on Foreign Relations, 2014).

The third element using appropriate means to achieving the desired goal are evident throughout the descriptive analysis. Considering the Sunni-Shia sectarian dimension of the crisis and the Sunni-Shia rivalry manifesting itself in the Middle East, the appropriate means for achieving regime change in Syria would be to arm and support Sunni rebel factions willing to fight the Syrian regime due to its proximity to Iran and Shiism.

This hypothesis does succeed in answering the research question in a limited capacity, however, it fails to observe nations offensive intention in international relations.

**Hypothesis 3**

Hypothesis 3: *Turkey observed a chance to maximize its power and expand its influence in Syria by pursuing regime change from Alawi to Sunni using a bait and bleed strategy and promoting foreign intervention.*

This hypothesis delivers the highest explanatory value of the three hypotheses because it utilizes offensive realist constructivist approach to analyze the empirical material. Although Hypothesis 1 and 2 both achieve a level explanatory value both fail to complete the picture as both miss key aspects.

Relating this hypothesis to Leyne’s three main elements of grand strategy. First, Turkey’s defined goal in Syria is regime change. The reasons for this goal is an observed opportunity by Turkey to increase its influence and consequently to maximize its power in Syria and the region. An Alawi to Sunni regime change in Syria would increase Ankara’s influence in Syria due to identity and ideology proximity. In comparison to its regional and global allies Turkey is late to express that it wants regime change in Syria. The reasons for this is belief in the influence Turkey perceived to have with the Syrian regime. Turkey spent the summer of 2011 in talks with Syrian government beginning with the proposal to reintroduce the SMB to the political life in Syria and ending with what is observed as the final ultimatum in August of 2011.
The Syrian regimes constant refusal to introduce Turkey’s proposal during the summer of 2011 highlighted to the Turkish government that it lacked the influence in Syria which it thought to have. Consequently, it choose to pursue regime change to increase its influence and in the chaos that followed, weaken the Syrian army through the use of the bait and bleed strategy in order to maximize its security and power in the region.

The threats to this specific desired goal are primarily increased Shia influence in the region, which manifests itself in the Shia crescent and the increased resources Iran has relocated to support Syria. Another threat to the desired goal is the political and military hardware support which Syria receives from Russia, which Turkey has expressed concern about.

The appropriate means for achieving the desired goal is evident in the empirical record, which is the political, economic and military support for Sunni factions in and from outside Syria which are willing to fight the regime based on its proximity to Iran and Shiism. Furthermore, Turkey started to impose sanctions and aborting trade treaties with Syria. The former, support for Sunni factions willing to engage in an armed resistance against the regime is the approach which mostly resembles Mearsheimer’s bait and bleed strategy which is a strategy that causes two rival to engage in a protracted war so that they bleed each other to death.

However, there is strong evidence which suggests that Turkey was willing to directly get involved in Syria with its own military, whether by implementing a no-fly zone, buffer zone inside Syria or military intervention all in coordination with the international community. Turkey’s actions following the incidents on 22 June 2012 and 21 August 2013 suggest that Ankara was willing pursue military intervention based on the legitimate opportunity which the incidents had presented.

Discussion

There is empirical support for all hypothesis included in this paper. It is possible to observe that Hypothesis 1 and 2 are solely concerned with offensive realism and constructivism respectively, while Hypothesis 3 is concerned with the merger of offensive realism and constructivism. Hypothesis 1 and 2 by themselves do answer the research question as they
provide motivations for Turkey’s foreign policy change provided by that specific theory’s perspective but fails to include the complete picture which an offensive realist constructivist approach and Hypothesis 3 manages to achieve. It manages to both include offensive intentions for maximizing power and consequently security as well as identity and ideology proximity which enables states to achieve increased influence in foreign states.

However, considering Hypothesis 2 and the constructivist explanation, if it is increased influence Turkey is striving for in Syria by pursuing regime change, why would Turkey support Sunni factions in Syria if it could have supported the Syrian government, an ally at the time and increase its influence with Damascus? It is possible to point to Russia’s support for the Syrian government and how it gained increased influence in Syria by observing how they convinced Damascus to ascend to the Chemical Weapons Convention. It possible argue that increased support for Damascus in its hour of need could have resulted in increased influence with the Syrian government, as was the case for Turkey after the 2005 al-Hariri assassination in Lebanon.

The Constructivist explanation is that ideological and identity proximity between the AKP in Turkey and Sunni factions in Syria are closer than to President al-Assad and his Allawi background. Also, the regime in Syria is of a secular nature which also furthers the ideological and identity distance between Damascus and Ankara. Therefore the implementation of a Sunni regime in Damascus would increase the ideological and identity proximity thereby positively impacting the policymakers understanding of each other and consequently, Turkey’s influence in Syria.

As highlighted in the theoretical section, offensive realism assumes that states which pursue power maximization do so to attain and/or maximize security. Therefore, when Turkey pursues regime change as a course of action through offensive means it does so in order to increase ideological and identity proximity. If it was to succeed in its endeavor it would theoretically succeed in maximizing security by increasing ideology and identity proximity between the two states.

How Turkish-Syrian relations develop in the future are reliant on two factors. Whether if Turkey is successful in attaining regime change in Syria and implementing a Sunni regime in the place of the current one, then due to identity and ideology proximity, relations between the
two states are poised to improve. However, if the current government manages to remain in power, then relations between the two states are to remain marked by enmity. The reason for this assessment is that despite past transgressions in their relations it cannot be compared to the events which is currently taking place in Syria. Although the states officially are not at war, Turkey’s (and other states) utilization of bait and bleed or proxy war would suggest that their relations are at an all-time low. Their relations will remain so until there is regime change in either Syria or another party than the AKP comes into power which could spark future foreign policy change.

Conclusion

This papers aim has been to examine why and how relations between Turkey and Syria deteriorated after a decade of improved relations and does so by answering research question’s concerned with how relations deteriorated and what motivated Turkey to pursue foreign policy change? In order to answer the research question’s a case study has been conducted utilizing process tracing method and a realist constructivism theory. Multiple observations have been made to demonstrate Turkey’s offensive intentions and its motivations for pursuing regime change in a foreign state. Three Hypotheses have been developed using offensive realism, constructivism and offensive realism constructivism and the empirical record has been tested, presented and discussed accordingly in order to assess their explanatory value. As a consequence, the result of the study is that there is the strongest empirical support for Hypothesis 3 which is able to utilize offensive realism constructivism to achieve a complete observation of the situation between Syria and Turkey. It would be interesting for future research to be extended to include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Yamen, Bahrain and Iran to a larger extent, to examine regime change and the Sunni-Shia divide in the Middle East since the beginning of the Arab Spring.
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Internet resources


Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

