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RESEARCH PAPERS

Syria and Turkey: a turning point or a historical bet?

Dr. `Aqeel Mahfudh | February, 2012

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Series: RESEARCH PAPERS

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Abstract

This study examines Syrian-Turkish relations, which have experienced qualitative shifts in recent years, in a manner typical of political interactions in the Middle East, with their ambiguity, vagueness, their individual characteristics, their developments and counter-developments, their unspoken, denied, and repressed in terms of the language and the postures – in one word, Middle East politics with all its wagers. The paper attempts to answer the following question: are bilateral relations experiencing a decisive structural and conceptual turning point, or is it part of an open-ended historical bet?

The study concludes that Syrian-Turkish relations are not in fact at a turning point, in the sense of rupture and change, but are undergoing an active change in the context of bilateral interactions –closing a chapter and heralding a new one, but without deeply affecting their aims and deep-seated pillars. These relations have been charged with a hefty dose of acceleration and vagueness, which are – in themselves – part of the wagers, which has engendered a functional vagueness that is constantly open to other dynamics and wagers.

The study also concludes that Syria and Turkey, which labored during the past decade to construct their alliance, are working today to deconstruct it, beginning with Turkey's active revision of its priorities and policies, with all that implies in terms of the susceptibility to backtrack and change course in favor of new wagers. As a matter of course, or in reaction to the Turkish steps, Syria must take similar actions, which means that Syrian-Turkish relations are confronted by a critical turning point and active historical bets, in a manner that may far exceed the crisis of October 1998.

Syrian-Turkish relations

Syrian-Turkish relations represent a regional and international phenomenon that has attracted a considerable share of political and media attention; however, academic research into the dynamics and wagers involved in these relations remains inadequate in explaining the transformations, which appeared to run counter to the modern (and perhaps pre-modern) context of Syrian-Turkish relations.

The Syrian-Turkish phenomenon is an example of the working of two opposing dynamics, the first being the policies and factors of rapprochement, intersection, and

mutual dependency, and the second representing the policies and factors of separation, disengagement, and antagonism. The persistence of these contradictory dynamics keeps the relationship at a perpetual turning point that does not fulfill the conditions for its closure. This situation could change when the two parties agree – objectively and politically – on neglecting the factors and elements of antagonism, which would constitute what we term a historical bet. However, if the two parties opt for policies of competition and conflict, this could take relations back to the pre-Adana Accord phase (October 1998), and events could evolve into a direct confrontation, which we term historical regression.

The Syrian crisis constitutes another avenue for the examination of the nature of the shifts and wagers witnessed in Syrian-Turkish relations, and in the overall determinants of the bilateral ties; as well as the Turkish postures toward the crisis and the potential scenarios (from the Turkish perspective).

This study consists of an introduction and a theoretical framework, as well as seven main axes. The first theme deals with the question of the turning point in Syrian-Turkish relations, and whether indeed the relationship is witnessing what can be described as, a turning point, a collective confusion, or a preface for a historical bet. The second theme pertains to the historical bets in Syrian-Turkish relations. The third theme examines the general determinants of the Turkish position vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. The fourth theme is devoted to the general manifestations of Turkish policy toward the crisis. The fifth theme exposes the Turkish narrative in explaining its posture towards the crisis. The sixth theme deals with the relationship between Turkey and the Syrian opposition. Finally, the seventh theme is devoted to a description of the potential scenarios regarding the Syrian crisis (from Turkey's perspective), while the eighth themes will be an exposition of the conclusions and inferences of the study.

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Introduction:

Syrian-Turkish relations represent a regional and international phenomenon that has attracted a considerable amount of political and media attention; however, research on the dynamics and wagers involved in these relations remains inadequate in explaining the transformations which appeared to run counter to the modern (and perhaps pre-modern) context of Syrian-Turkish relations.

The Syrian-Turkish phenomenon is an example of the working of two opposing dynamics, the first being the policies and factors of rapprochement, intersection, and mutual dependency, and the second representing the policies and factors of separation, disengagement, and antagonism. The persistence of these contradictory dynamics maintains the relationship in a perpetual turning point which does not fulfill the conditions for its closure. This situation could change when the two parties agree – objectively and politically – on neglecting the factors and elements of antagonism, which would constitute what we term a historical bet. However, if the two parties opt for policies of competition and conflict, this could take relations back to the pre-Adana Accord phase (October 1998), and events could evolve into a direct confrontation, which we term historical regression.

The Syrian crisis constitutes another avenue for the examination of the nature of the shifts and wagers witnessed in Syrian-Turkish relations, and in the overall determinants of the bilateral ties; as well as the Turkish postures toward the crisis and the potential scenarios (from the Turkish perspective).

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is devoted to a description of the potential scenarios regarding the Syrian crisis (from Turkey's perspective), while the eighth theme will be an exposition of the conclusions and inferences of the study.

Research problem and aims

At the beginning of the 21st century, Syrian-Turkish relations entered a phase of active rapprochement due to domestic, as well as regional and international changes. To that was added the relatively novel political disposition and awareness of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who worked to assuage policies and programs, as well as mentalities, that reflected suspicion and caution from the project of change in bilateral relations (and that may have included conservative and prudent mentalities). A form of a hasty projection of the ideas of the two leaders took place on the ground of reality, which gave the impression that the two sides were on their way to establishing a close alliance that may extinguish – in an unprecedented manner – the legacy of their former policies and, perhaps, the alliances of each of them with third parties.

However, the evolution of the Turkish position regarding the events in Syria (starting in March 2011) prompted many to presume that the alleged rapprochement could not be explained through the developments, bilateral measures, and political rhetoric during the crisis, but through what would come after. This is a legitimate avenue of analysis that could lead to different explanations, some of which approaching conspiracy theories and stressing the element of dissimulation in politics; however, I tend towards the hypothesis of the political wagers, since events are shaped by the wagers and not the conspiracies, which is what I will attempt to show in this paper.

This, in turn, poses numerous challenges, not only to politicians, but also to researchers and scholars, with the need to offer analytic and explanatory approaches aiding, as much as possible, in methodically deconstructing the successive developments and counter-developments, the quick thrust toward rapprochement and the hasty regression, the bets and the counter-bets. What is required today is not merely to renew epistemological approaches, psychological awareness, and the tools and concepts by replacing them, but also by revising them and their ramifications, because themes and facts – even realities – can also be reproduced, engendering a new meaning each time.

Significance of the study

The study of Syrian-Turkish relations offers us a way of approaching the developments and the manner in which the Turks and the Syrians were capable of surpassing the phase of antagonism in their relationship and entering a new stage of rapprochement or strategic alliance. This took place in a relatively short time, starting with the Adana Accord (October 1998), up until the formation of the Council for Strategic Cooperation (October 2009).¹This was followed by the sudden rush into policies (or, more accurately, bets) which may undermine all that has been achieved on the level of relations between the two countries and the two regimes (at least in their current state). The significance of this study and its scholarly and academic import can be summed in the following points:

- The examination of the Turkish-Syrian phenomenon with its shifts, ramifications, and wagers, as well as the circle of those affected by it. This phenomenon was seen, both in the phases of rapprochement and antagonism, as a turning point in the relations of the parties involved, and even on the direction of regional politics.
- The cultural analysis of Syrian-Turkish relations, and the attempt to test and experiment with concepts such as the turning point and the historical bet on a test case with an evolving political nature.
- Studying turning points and historical bets is an examination of what is difficult to predict; it involves, therefore, an amount of risk-taking or academic wagers; which may include the practicing of interpretation and speculation in some respects.
- Examining the Turkish posture toward the Syrian crisis: the general determinants (the international, regional, bilateral and domestic environments – in what pertains to Turkey), the general manifestations of the Turkish position (in politics, security and military affairs, ethnic relations, and the media), the Turkish narrative in justifying the Turkish posture during the crisis (change and democracy are an ethical position, the will of the peoples, the offering of advice, the Turkish burden or what needs to be done,

¹ The high-level Syrian-Turkish Council for Strategic Cooperation held its first ministerial meeting between Aleppo (Syria) and Gaziantep (in Turkey) on October 13, 2009. In the meeting, both sides agreed to abolish entry visas between the two countries, in addition to the signing of 30 agreements and memorandums of understanding in the fields of defense, security, agriculture, irrigation, the economy, commerce, education, foreign policy, oil and minerals, transportation, housing, electricity and health. The second meeting, which was dominated by security affairs, was held in Lattaqiya (Syria) on October 3, 2010.

the existing challenges), Turkey and the Syrian opposition, the potential scenarios from Turkey's perspective (reform, the alternative regime, chaos and civil war).

Previous literature

There is a growing number of scholarly works on Syrian-Turkish relations or specific aspects thereof; these relations are often mentioned in the wider context of studies relating to Syrian or Turkey. We find a considerable number of works on Turkish policy towards Syria and Iran², the Turkish position toward peace talks between Syria and Israel in the 1990s³, Turkish mediation between Syria and Israel at a later phase, Turkey's policy in the Middle East,⁴ Turkey's relations with the United States⁵, the European Union⁶, and Israel⁷, the debate on change in Turkish policy between East and West⁸, issues relating to water and the Kurds⁹, Iraq, the Gulf, and Iran.¹⁰ The same

2 See, for example, Bülent Aras & Rabia Karakaya Polat, *From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's Relations with Syria*, Security Dialogue, SAGE Publications: Vol. 39, No. 5, (2008), pp. 495–515.

3 See: Aysegül Sever, *Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks in the 1990s*, Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 5, No. 3, (September 2001), pp. 87 – 99.

4 See, for example: Meliha Benli Altunışık, *The possibilities and limits of Turkey's soft power in the Middle East*, Insight Turkey, No. 2, Vol. 10, (Ankara: April-June 2008), p. 50-53.

and William Hale, *Turkey and the Middle East in the New Era*, Insight Turkey, (Ankara: Vol. 11, No. 3, 2009), pp. 143-159.

5 See: Stephen Larrabee, *Troubled Partnership U.S.-Turkish Relations in an Era of Global Geopolitical Change*, (Santa Monica: Rand, 2010).

6 See, for general reference: Peter M.E. Volten (editor), *Perceptions and Misperceptions in the EU and Turkey: Stumbling blocks on the road to accession*, (Groningen: The Centre of European Security Studies, 2009),

Heinz Kramer, *Turkey and the EU: The EU's Perspective*, Insight Turkey, (Ankara: Vol. 8, No. 4 October and December 2006), pp. 24-32.

7 See:

Gokhan Bacik, *Turkish-Israeli Relations after Davos: A View from Turkey*, Insight Turkey, (Ankara: Vol. 11, No. 2, 2009), pp. 31-41.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Asher Susser, (Editors), *Turkish-Israeli Relations in a Trans - Atlantic Context: Wider Europe and the Greater Middle East*, Conference Proceedings, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2005), pp. 51-58.

8 See for an example: Philip Robins, *Between the EU and the Middle East: Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Government, 2002-2007*, Working Papers, (Milano: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale- ISPI, 2007), p.23, pp. 19-20.

9 Nesrin Ucarlar, *Between Majority Power and Minority Resistance: Kurdish Linguistic Rights in Turkey*, (Lund : Lund University, 2009).

10 See: Aras & Polat, *From Conflict to Cooperation*, pp. 495-515.

applies, to some extent, to Syrian politics¹¹, despite the fact that scholarly production on the topic remains relatively low compared to Turkey.

There is a limited number of works examining Syrian-Turkish relations comprehensively, the two following studies could be cited:

Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities (2009)¹²

This study examines relations between the two countries based on a main hypothesis centering on elements of antagonism and elements of rapprochement, which – the study argues – applies to the case and levels of Syrian-Turkish relations. The study also examines a number of secondary hypotheses, including the notion that the foreign policies of both countries share common foundational pillars, but produce varying manifestations and outcomes; and that bilateral relations are marked by hesitation, indecisiveness, and deferment, which is the result of a voluntary will among the two parties. This study represents another effort by the author of this paper in analyzing the Syrian-Turkish phenomenon.

From distant neighbors to partners: the change in Syrian–Turkish relations (2006)¹³

This study is based on direct facts, and it offers a lengthy narrative of the history of relations between Syria and Turkey and their evolution; it is the account of the shift of the two countries from being distant and antagonistic neighbors to becoming partners. The study is characterized by serious inquiry, it uses relatively new tools of analysis, but it does not maintain the objective balance between the historical narrative and the analysis of the hypothesis advanced by the paper regarding

11 See, for instance: Flynt Leverett, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial by Fire*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005). Arabic translation by the Center for Strategic Data, 1st edition, Damascus, 2005.

Hinnebusch, Raymond, *Globalization and Generational Change: Syrian Foreign Policy between Regional Conflict and European Partnership*, in: Gerd Nonneman (Edits.), *Analyzing Middle East Policies and the Relationship with Europe*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 81-99

12 Aqeel Sa'eed Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities*, 1st edition, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009).

13 Meliha Benli Altunçik & Omer Ozelm Tur, *From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian–Turkish Relations*, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (SAGE Publications: 2006), pp. 229–248.

antagonism and partnership. Furthermore, Turkish events are presented more prominently than those of Syria, even though the study bases some of its analysis on primary Syrian sources.

Study hypotheses

A veritable test case exists in Syrian-Turkish interactions and, sometimes, manifestations of numerous historical and intellectual visions. This study will examine whether these relations have witnessed a turning point or a rupture with the past phase, or whether it is all part of other aims within broader strategies. What are the sources and determinants of this active dynamic and wagers that are open to the future, while also being tied to the past?

The main hypothesis of this study focuses on, that Syrian-Turkish relations are subjected to the system of antagonism-rapprochement¹⁴, and that shifts exist within this framework, in the shape of the system, or the direction of the binary; this was exhibited in two main phases:

- The first lasted for over 10 years (1998-2010), and was marked by the preponderance of the factors of rapprochement over the factors of antagonism in a quick and substantial manner, to the point that increasing predictions saw these relations as heading in an openly evolutionary path with an undetermined horizon.
- The second phase is recent, it could be said that it originated in the so-called wave of Arab revolutions, when the indicators of antagonism began to increase; however, strains became public with the eruption of the wave of demonstrations and protests in Syria (March 2011), which engendered an increasing preponderance of the factors of antagonism over the Syrian-Turkish scene.

This study argues that entering into a strategic alliance is not a turning point in the sense of rupture and radical change in bilateral relations, but that it was rather an exit from a system of interactions dominated by antagonism. As a result, these factors of

¹⁴ For a description of the antagonism-rapprochement system, the central thesis of a comprehensive study on Syrian-Turkish relations, see: Aqeel Sa`eed Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities*, op. cit., pp 199-200.

antagonism become – in the case of alliance – sidestepped, silenced, or unspoken, in one manner or another.

Research methodology and the main concepts

This study adopts the approach of cultural analysis in the study of international relations¹⁵ - which branches, in turn, into several sub-approaches – in order to cover the problematic and main hypotheses of the study as described above. Focus is placed on a conceptual duality: the turning point and the historical bet, which are utilitarian concepts aiming at placing the transformations and dynamics of Syrian-Turkish relations in the framework of an experimental analysis – helping to clarify and shed light on some aspects of these relations.

Turning Point

The turning point was originally a mathematical and physical concept that was borrowed by social sciences and humanities as usually happens with a varying amount of adaptation – and used to extend scientific or normative support to the analysis. Still, there is no observable turning point in social phenomena, especially political ones, unlike material and natural phenomena. Therefore, seeking a point of transformation in politics is a theoretical affair or, in other terms, a normative employment of a borrowed concept. However, this inference is not devoid of material and moral indicators, which are many, such as the indicators relating to commercial trade, social interaction, developmental indices¹⁶, opinion surveys that reflect the mutual imageries and perceptions, influential political and environmental events, etc.¹⁷

15 Al-Sayid Yaseen, *The epistemological map of the international society*, 1st edition, (Cairo: the General Books Commission, 2008) pp 61-63.

16 See, for example: Aqeel Sa`eed Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities*, op. cit., pp 302-306, 345-351.

17 Talip Küçükcan, *Arab Image in Turkey*, Seta Research Report, (Ankara: No. 1, June 2010), p.40.

Mensur Akgün, (& Others), *The Perception of Turkey in Middle East*, (Istanbul: TESEV-Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Foreign Policy Program, September, 2009), p.36.

Meliha Benli Altunışık, *Turkey: Arab Perspectives*, (Istanbul: TESEV-Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Foreign Policy Program, No. 11, 2010), p.32.

Historical bet

The wager is a metaphorical term, which is based on the ongoing negotiation between what the state unit desires and what it expects to achieve (or what it views as feasible). This process involves a number of alternatives, which makes politics into a constant wager and a perpetual conflict among alternatives that may be analogous or contradictory- so long that politics are a competition between the wills, demands, and objectives of a varying number of players and concerned parties.

The wager in this context is not only a play on the references to facts and events, or an interpretation of the vocabulary and language of political programs and schemes, it is only a play on the probability and potentiality of these wagers, and the overlap (or contradiction) existing between them and other wagers and alternatives.

However, there is another dimension that has a special (in reality, decisive) significance: the wager is the manifestation of a number of active quests by a party (or parties) that interprets the political sphere with an amount of rigor and flexibility, being endowed with a varying amount of power and initiative. At first glance, the wager appears self-evident and natural, even a corollary to policies; however, the wager is not so evident, in fact, it involves an architecture and a voluntary will, being based upon active perceptions, will, and initiative that is based, in turn on a mixture of facts and illusions, or aspirations.

A. Syria and Turkey: is it a turning point?

Discussion of a turning point involves an eventful moment, a specific time and place that observers of Syrian-Turkish relations can point to and say that everything was over here (when discussing the developments of rapprochement for example), or that all has started here (in relation to the recent rise of antagonism).

Such a line of thought leads to the selection of a foundational event: practically, psychologically, and chronologically; analysts often point to the October 1998 crisis and the Adana Security Accord, which represents for many a new juncture and the heralding of a new dynamic. The same applies, to some extent, to a number of associated developments and events up to the Israeli war against Gaza (December

2008- January 2009) and the Israeli assault against the Turkish Marmara vessel (May 30, 2010), which was part of the Freedom Flotilla heading toward Gaza. The same significance could be ascribed – in the opposite sense – to the current crisis in Syrian-Turkish relations and the evolution of the Turkish position vis-à-vis the events and protests that flared in Syria since March 2011.

The developments that succeeded the October 1998 crisis have shown that that moment was a turning point or a new beginning, and that its significance defined what came after it. Therefore, it is important to locate such a turning point on the political, epistemological, and cognitive levels, which cannot be contained in a single moment or event, regardless of their importance. The concept refers to a relatively long chronological and behavioral period, in this case exceeding ten years (1998-2010), which makes the use of the term political turnaround valid. But each turnaround is linked to what follows it, and the current manifestations during the Syrian crisis will also be interpreted by future developments and repercussions.

In fact, the political rhetoric was filled with insinuations and assessments on the shift in Syrian-Turkish relations, which was part of an active official ideology and a popular imagery with a celebratory character that is not seen in other cases, even those of openings between Arab states, for instance. This question requires further analysis from various angles and venues, and this phenomenon is associated with the Syrian side more than the Turkish one, as shown by opinion surveys conducted in a number of Arab countries and Turkey in late 2009 and early 2010.¹⁸ The author has cited this data in a different context¹⁹, and this information shall be repeated here due to its importance.

The aforementioned survey shows that 87 percent of the Syrians polled perceive Turkey's image as excellent, compared with a 75 percent average for the ten Arab countries in which the survey was conducted. In assessing Turkey's image, Syrians (along with the Palestinians) occupy the first rank among the ten Arab countries (see Table 1). On the other hand, 37.1 percent of the Turks polled perceived Syria's image

¹⁸ See:

Kucukcanp, Arab Image in Turkey, & Akgün, The Perception of Turkey in Middle East, & Meliha Benli Altunışık, Turkey: Arab Perspectives.

¹⁹ Aqeel Mahfudh, Syrian-Turkish relations, the transformations and the wagers, The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, January 16, 2011, pp39-40:

<http://www.dohainstitute.org/file/pdfViewer/8f8c36b6-8d55-4936-a665-8b8e8968d88e.pdf>

as positive, with 25.3 percent judging it as negative, 19.7 percent stating that it is neither negative nor positive, and 17.9 percent undecided. Syria comes in the fifth place among Arab countries in terms of popular perceptions in Turkey, headed by: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and Yemen (see Table 2).

Table 1: Turkey's perception among Syrians*

Question	Syria (percent)	Average result in the 10 Arab
Do you perceive Turkey's image as excellent?	87	70
Can Turkey be a model for the Arab World?	72	61
Has Turkey become more influential in the Arab World?	81	71
Should Turkey play a greater role in the Arab World?	82	77

Table 2: Turkish perceptions of the Arabs**

STANCE					
Country		Positive	Neither positive nor negative	Negative	Indecisive
	Egypt	42,7	21,0	17,2	19,1
	Saudi Arabia	41,0	19,1	24,1	15,3
	Palestine	38,2	17,6	20,7	18,0
	Yemen	37,9	19,3	16,9	20,9

	Syria	۳۷,۱	۱۹,۷	۲۵,۳	۱۷,۹
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The author recalls that referring to this data was rejected by a number of politicians and academic during (preliminary) roundtable discussions on Syrian-Turkish relations in Damascus in late 2010. Some expressed an excessive level of confidence in the future of relations with Turkey, painting them as a strategic option, as if rhetorical and behavioral considerations become a reality merely by desiring or wishing for them.

We mention this particularity in order to alert intellectuals and politicians to aspects of mutual perception between Syrians and Turks that require examination and debate, rather than limiting the matter to Turkish propositions to review the image of Turks in Syrian school books! This is reminiscent of the pressures exerted by the United States for school books to be revised in a number of Arab and Islamic countries following the events of September 2001.

The political discourse of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as well as the main figures in his government and party, included emotional rhetoric on the relationship between Syrians and Turks; however, his rhetoric took an opposing content and direction since the flaring of event in Syria. Instead, the Prime Minister’s rhetoric focused on active suggestive and interpretive sayings – which were repeated at an unusual rate, claiming that what was taking place in Syria is an internal affair for Turkey ²⁰. Erdoğan concludes that it is impossible for us to remain silent in the face of these events ²¹.

*selected data from the results of an opinion survey conducted in ten Arab states by the foreign policy program in the Center for Economic and Social Studies (TESEV) – Turkey, July 24-29, 2009.

Source: Mensur Akgün et al., The Perception of Turkey in Middle East, (Istanbul: TESEV-Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Foreign Policy Program, September, 2009), p. 36.

**selected data from the results of an opinion survey conducted in 12 regions or towns representing 12 provinces, conducted by the Pollmark Research Company on a sample composed of 3040 individuals aged 18 and older from the cities in the countryside, January 3-11, 2008.

20 On May 14, 2011, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that what is taking place in Syria is like a domestic affair, for we share 850 kilometers-long borders, and strong ties. Hurriyet Daily News, Istanbul, May 15, 2011.

Erdoğan's statement and insinuations found an echo with specific social and political sections in Syria, which explains the pro-Turkish slogans and calls in certain areas, such as Homs, Baniyas, Tel Kalakh, Jisr Al-Saghur, and Hama –where Turkey's flag was raised and slogans and signs appeared supporting Erdoğan, some of which demanded Turkey's intervention in the Syrian crisis²². These manifestations may have been a reflection of the ongoing domestic tensions and the wave of religious and political polarization in the region, which was associated with the atmosphere of the Turkish elections in June 12, 2011 and what followed²³.

Due to these positions and statements, Erdoğan was capable of garnering a relatively high approval rating among Turks and Arabs. An opinion survey conducted by the PEW Research Center during the period between March 21 and April 26, 2011 showed that 62 percent of the Turks polled supported the foreign policy of Erdoğan's government, while 78 percent of those surveyed in Egypt expressed their confidence in Erdoğan's policy, compared to 72 percent in Jordan and 64 percent in Lebanon²⁴. Erdoğan's support in Arab countries exceeded that in Turkey itself²⁵ (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, in a meeting for the union of Turkish chambers of commerce and stock markets in Ankara (May 16, 2011), Erdoğan said that Turkey follows the developments in Syria as if they were an internal matter (Assafir Newspaper, Beirut, May 17, 2011).

21 Akhbar Al-'Alam, March 28, 2011.

22 Akhbar Al-'Alam, May 13, 2011.

23 Mohammad Norelddin, Erdoğan transgresses the electoral red lines: playing the sectarian and ethnic tunes, Assafir Newspaper, May 13, 2011.

24 Pew Global Attitudes Project, PM Erdoğan Gets High Marks for Foreign Policy, In: Eve of Elections, a More Upbeat Mood in Turkey, (Pew Research Center, June 7, 2011), p.3.

25 Today's Zaman, Istanbul: June 8, 2011.

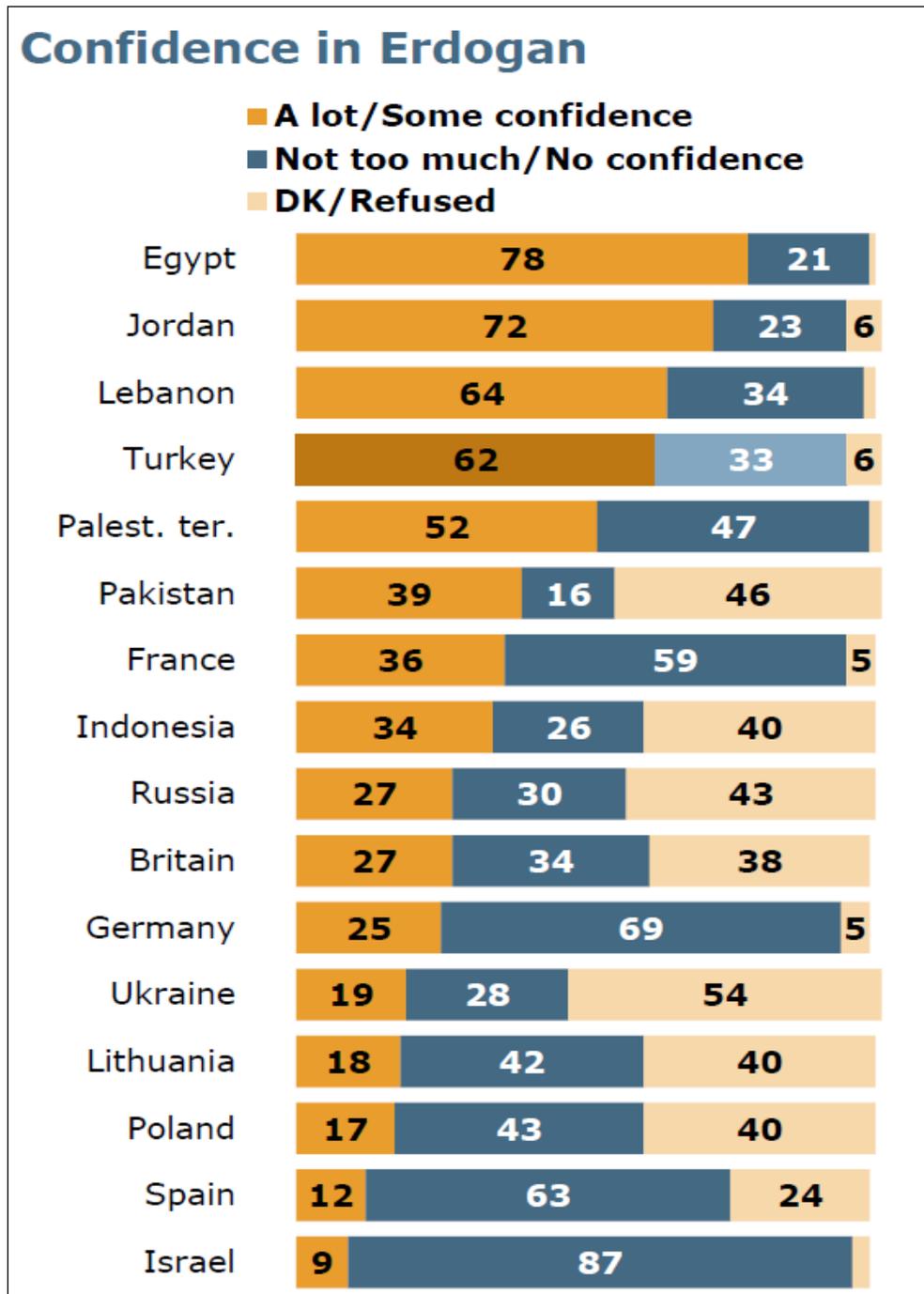


Figure 1: Public confidence in the policy of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, PM Erdoğan Gets High Marks for Foreign Policy, In: Eve of Elections, a More Upbeat Mood in Turkey, (Pew Research Center, JUNE 7, 2011), p.3.

Black holes?

The theme of the turning point engenders several problems; for it applies to practical political relations and also has numerous repercussions on other sectors. In fact, this turning point has marked –in an unprecedented manner - bilateral relations as a whole as well as aspects of the relations with other parties. However, the problem lays in the aspects that were not involved in the transformation, that remained un-thought, unspoken, denied, or quarantined intentionally by those in power. In reality, this fact goes beyond being a mutual desire to being an intentional will; in other terms, it was the result of conscious decisions, and various political, security, economic, and cultural facts that –somehow- wished for the change, or the turning point, not to affect the paradigm or the deep-seated system that guides the policies of each side. What will be the status of questions of water, the borders, Alexandretta, as well as the hydraulic resources and lands and people who are affiliated with Turkey?²⁶ And what will become of the sensitive security engagements with NATO, the United States, Israel, etc.? Will they be affected by the notion of the turning point?

The answer so far is a resounding no. In fact, the very opposite of this has taken place in some of these instances, which was to be expected. These issues and questions are being perceived as sources of threat to the evolution of the ongoing relations –black holes or potential flashpoints that could reemerge so long as they have not been declared as points of dialogue or points of disagreement, or even questions that are left for the future. These themes are closely related to the ongoing evolution in relations, especially after the crisis of protests in Syria.

²⁶ Aqeel Mahfudh, Arabs in Turkey: a factor of rapprochement or crisis?, paper presented in the conference –the Arabs and Turkey: the challenges of the present and the wagers of the future, Doha: the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, May 18-19, 2011.

The factors of rapprochement–repulsion

It is obvious that the question goes beyond some existing points of disagreement to what we can term factors of repulsion that are inherent in all, or most, themes in Syrian-Turkish relations. Each theme is, at the same time, a factor of rapprochement and a factor of repulsion.²⁷ The matter depends on a number of variables, interpretations, domestic and foreign changes, pressures, etc.

Thus, the turning point is a dual process and a complex one. It could be a progression forward, and it could also usher a reactionary retreat. The ongoing turning point in Syrian-Turkish relations involves numerous latent elements, unspoken motives and denied realities. The Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Al-Mu'allim pronounced in 22/6/2011 that the relations between Syrian and Turkey were a one-sided love affair.²⁸

In this instance, speaking of a turning point may be accurate, because the parties involved were not capable of guaranteeing the persistence and stability of the factors of rapprochement and the intentional will of the policy makers and the political elites on both sides. This took place to the benefit of special interests implicit or unspoken preferences and beliefs, outside foreign interactions and the dynamics of regional and international expansion, and these elements pertain more to the Turkish position than to the Syrian one –as long as Turkey is the party taking the initiative in the ongoing crisis.

The experts and diplomats involved in the field of negotiation and direct communication between Syria and Turkey, as well as the practical and executive aspects of Syrian-Turkish relations, are aware, from experience, of the opposing trends within the Turkish stance on Syria. These experts are also aware that what is taking place today does not

²⁷ Aqeel Sa'eed Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities*, Op. Cit., p.45.

²⁸ In a press conference in Damascus (June 22, 2011) Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Walid Al-Mu'allim criticized the stance of certain states vis-à-vis the crisis in Syria. After being prodded by journalists for a comment on the Turkish position, he said: we are careful to maintain the best possible relations with our neighbor Turkey... we share more than 850 kilometers in borders, they affect us and we affect them. And we do not wish to undermine years of effort led by Assad to establish a special strategic relationship with Turkey. Al-Mu'allim called upon the Turks to reconsider their position', exclaiming: Syrian diplomacy is famed for its calmness and lack of hasty reactions, and by the fact that it always extends its hand to others; but as I have previously said, one-sided love is exhausting and so are international relations. (The Syrian Arab News Agency – Sana, June 23, 2011).

fall outside the historical and political context of the relations –in the midst of a regional environment and state formations that are indefinite, unstable, and with a high propensity to being affected by third parties. This takes us back to the dynamics of dependence, expansion, or outside infiltration.

A collective confusion, or a preface for a historical bet?

The trend toward rapprochement and quick leaps between Syria and Turkey was not a simple accident or a mere normalization of relations after a protracted conflict. The Adana Accord (October 1998) despite its importance and symbolism was neither a reconciliation accord nor a peace accord nor an accord to end a conflict. It was mainly a declaration of intentions, perhaps an extraordinary declaration of intentions, but it was the subsequent developments which gave it a relatively large importance, narrating it as a foundational event or a turning point in Syrian-Turkish relations. This is because the Accord was followed by a fluidity of events, facts, bilateral interactions, treaties, etc. that shall be referred to throughout this text.

As a result, Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad was seen speaking in Istanbul, during the month of Ramadan, on the unity of blood between Syrians and Turks, and on the children of the single homeland and the one law²⁹. At the same time, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that Syria perceives Turkish issues as its own, and the same goes for Turkey; as such, we have been capable of aiding each other in resolving our problems. Syria-Turkish relations have gone a long way in the past seven years, and this did not only occur on the level of the politicians, but also on the level of the two peoples.³⁰

However, relations between the two parties were not an objective in and of themselves, but were meant for other purposes. Relations were restricted to some matters while keeping others unspoken. i.e., the relations were restricted to the factors of rapprochement without reaching resolutions regarding the factors of repulsion, which

²⁹ See the speech of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad at the Iftar of the Justice and Development Party that was held in the WOW Hotel in Istanbul on September 17, 2009. (Al Wattan, September 18, 2009 and Tishrin, September 18, 2009).

³⁰ See the speech of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the Iftar of the Justice and Development Party that was held in the WOW Hotel in Istanbul on September 17, 2009. (Al Wattan, September 18, 2009 and Tishrin, September 18, 2009).

are numerous, significant and historical. Will these factors of discord, then, engender the turning point as it has been defined above?

The basic premise of the notion of transformation or the turning point, is for it to be stable and public. In the Syrian-Turkish case, it was difficult to distinguish whether the transformation in relations was stable, formal, or temporary; and whether its perception corresponded to its reality; and whether the shift in relations was linked to Iranian-Turkish interactions, Syrian-Iranian interactions, and Turkish-Israeli interactions.

Rapprochement with Syria had been a necessary condition for the Turkish strategic depth policy, which has been discussed frequently in recent years.³¹ However, the strategic theory that was based on the notion of the strategic depth has faced grave and serious challenges with the beginning of the wave of revolutions in the Arab world³². Has there been a certain confusion in Turkey's policy? Did Turkey commit deep mistakes in dealing with the strategic depth?

A writer specializing in Turkish affairs said: Turkey has succumbed to the illusion of excess power and excess confidence to practice roles that are, to say the least, larger than Turkey and unfitting of a country that wishes to become a great regional power that also practices a global role in some matters. The illusion of excess power and confidence has made Turkey fall into a series of deadly mistakes... This constitutes a deep blow to the foundations of the Turkish project in the Middle East region as a whole, and not only in the Arab region.³³

There is another matter at hand, which is that Turkey and Israel are working to renew their relationship³⁴, prompted by the considerations and events of the Arab moment,

31 Mohammad Nureldin, Turkey and Syria: the end of the strategic depth, Assafir Newspaper, May 17, 2011.

32 Mohammad Nureldin, Turkey: from the strategic depth to the deep mistakes, Al-Sharq Newspaper, Doha, May 14, 2011.

33 Ibid. also see a presentation of the opinions of a number of Turkish officials, journalists, and intellectuals regarding the position of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on the Syrian crisis in: Khalil Harb, Erdoğan Harasses Syria... why?, Assafir Newspaper, June 16, 2011.

34 The official Chinese news agency announced that Turkey was conducting intense mediations to achieve the release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who was captured by Hamas. Sources spoke of the possibility of the appointment of a Turkish mediator to resolve this issue between Israel and Hamas instead of the German mediator Gerhard Conrad (DPRESS, May 23, 2011). Israeli businessman of Turkish origin Eliko Donmez said that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is the only man capable of rescuing Shalit. In: Al-Akhbar Newspaper, Beirut, July 7, 2011.

especially in what relates to the Syrian crisis³⁵. The Syrian issue was the declared justification for the abstention to send the Turkish vessel Marmara as part of the freedom flotilla 2³⁶; given that this is a phase in which Turkey gives its full attention to the Syrian subject.³⁷ It appears that this move was related to joint American-Turkish arrangements; Erdoğan received from the American president Barack Obama a double congratulation, the first for winning the legislative elections and the second for Turkey's decision not to participate in the freedom flotilla.³⁸

Today, however, the matters appear clearer. The official Syrian and Turkish cover has been lifted in regards to many of the ongoing dynamics. Other facets of the relationship can now be expressed, different from those propagated by the official institutions and media of the two regimes, which are today engaged on a level of symbolic violence and political quarrel –with one of the parties discovering that the love was one-sided while the other side was concerned with other matters.³⁹

A Syrian official with close ties to the regime complained that Turkey has let us down. We stood by her side in her difficult circumstances, and in solidarity with her government when Turkish soldiers were killed in attacks and confrontations. We have propped-up Turkey's role in the Middle East when we proposed her to mediate in the peace process. President Assad used to strongly demand from everyone, including the Americans and the Europeans, that Turkey be the mediator; and he persisted in this request even at the height of the Turkish-Israeli quarrel. Due to Syria and Iran, Turkey

35 The Turkish Zaman Newspaper said that Israel has offered help to Turkey in coordinating work in Syrian refugee camps in Alexandretta, as well as the provision of Israeli aid. See: Israeli lawmaker seeks permission to deliver aid to Syrian refugees, Today's Zaman, June 16, 2011. See also: Serkan Demirtas, Ankara on the eve of critical decisions on Syria, Israel, Hurriyet Daily news, June 15, 2011.

36 On June 19, 2011, an Israeli official announced that the decision of Erdoğan's government to withhold the participation of the Marmara vessel in the freedom flotilla 2 was a positive decision which we hope will contribute to the reestablishment of normal relations between Israel and Turkey, (Al-Shuruq Newspaper, Cairo, June 21, 2011).

37 Assafir Newspaper, June 20, 2011.

38 Ibid.

39 The Syrian media has greatly hesitated before allowing the appearance of critical media reactions or assessments of the Turkish position on the Syrian crisis. In fact, numerous journalists moderating debates used to declare, at every such instance, that what is being said does not express the official position. At the same time, official and unofficial Turkey was busy waging a harsh campaign against the Syrian regime's dealing with the protest.

has expanded her role in the region and the world, finding itself a place in the mediation over the Iran nuclear dossier.⁴⁰

There is another side to the matter, this time on the Turkish side. This time (Turkey) is concerned, confused, enraged, and, most dangerously, clumsy... Syria, which became a successful symbol of what Turkey could reap in the region, and of the possibility of propagating a better and more acceptable image for Turkey in the eyes of the Arabs, has become –through Turkey’s will or despite it- the potential breaking point for this impressive ascendancy... so what has happened? What caused the bitterness dominant tone of the statements coming from Ankara and Damascus –even with a diplomatic veneer? What has made the Turkish politician squirm when talking about Syria while, in the recent past, a wide smile would be on his face when proudly exclaiming that the relations linking Syria to Turkey were the making of God?⁴¹

In sum, Turkey’s posture regarding the events in Syria may be surprising in terms of the trend of the relations over the last decade, but it does not fall outside of their historical context. At the same time, the Turkish stance is relatively consistent with the active pragmatism that has marked the policies of Turkey and Syria; in the sense that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government has found it expedient to treat the Syrian matter as a Turkish domestic affair. Thus the situation quickly evolved from supporting the reforms lead by president Bashar Al Assad⁴² into supporting stability⁴³ in Syria, to reestablishing stability, to fears of sectarian war and fragmentation⁴⁴ etc. That in parallel with the changing stance vis-à-vis the existing political regime, which Turkey

40 Sami Kulaib, The difficult Syrian era... a race between sectarian strife and reform, Assafir Newspaper, June 15, 2011.

41 Khalil Harb, Erdogan Harasses Syria... why?, Assafir Newspaper, June 16, 2011.

42 The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his support for the reform project in Syria, repeating what he claimed was advice offered to President Bashar Al Asad, but that he did not respond to in an adequate manner. Akhbar Al-Alam, March 31, 2011.

43 The Turkish foreign ministry stated that Turkey cannot accept or tolerate any behavior or action that may lead to the destabilization of Syria, or that might damage the will for reform, Turkish Foreign Ministry statement, April 2, 2011.

44 On May 14, 2011 Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed concerns from the occurrence of sectarian clashes whose effect could spread to Turkey, especially in the South Eastern regions, and we do not wish to see that... and we wish to quickly surpass, together, this awful predicament. Hurriyet Daily News, Istanbul, May 15, 2011.

Erdogan has also expressed his fear from the division of Syrian, Assafir Newspaper, May 16, 2011.

said must enact democratic change or change itself, and that President Bashar Al Assad must perform that role personally. This position escalated from public advice and direct criticisms, to demands and conditions⁴⁵, to the announcement of plans to establish a buffer zone⁴⁶ and impose a no-fly zone.⁴⁷ If all these acts did not reflect a critical juncture or a turning point in Turkey's regional policy, then they would be closer to what we can term a collective confusion in understanding the Syrian moment. As for the ongoing events today, they appear to be closer to a historical bet inside and outside Syria, especially toward the Arab region and the Middle East, and in regards to Syria specifically. Syria, which previously described relations with Turkey as a strategic option and a model for relations among states, finds itself today being forced to perform comprehensive changes in its perceptions and positions vis-à-vis Turkey –and it may be more accurate to say: preparing for an imminent clash with Turkey.

Here, it appears that Turkey has entered into a new wager⁴⁸ by forfeiting its alliance with the regime of President Bashar Al Assad who has offered Turkey everything that is possible in the realm of politics. In the current moments of confusion, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has forgotten that Bashar Al Assad gave him more territory than that which Syria had been claiming for over forty years in the Golan, 'this one is a sister, and that one is an enemy, the Syrian president surely said.'⁴⁹ This demarche represents a rupture with the former rapprochement policies in favor of a new political disposition, which is quickly showing its face but remains under construction.

45 See: Mohammad Nurreldin, Turkey and Syria: three scenarios, Al-Sharq Newspaper, June 4, 2011.

46 On June 11, 2011 Turkish diplomatic sources said that the establishment of a buffer zone on the Turkish-Syrian borders to deal with the increasing flow of displaced Syrians... was an option on the Turkish agenda. Adding that, if Turkey witnesses a situation similar to that of collective migration from Iraq to Turkey during the Second Gulf War when thousands of displaced Iraqis entered Turkey, then it might be forced to form a buffer zone inside Syrian territories to confront collective migration. However, this decision and its enforcement require the approval of the UN Security Council. Akhbar Al-Alam, June 12, 2011. See, for a Turkish perspective on the matter: Aisha Karabat, the Turkish buffer zone in Syria: its scenarios and challenges, Al-Akhbar Newspaper, June 13, 2011.

47 Mohammad Nurreldin, Obama and Erdoğan inspired by the Libyan scenario: a no-fly zone over Syria?, Assafir Newspaper, June 23, 2011.

48 Mohammad Nurreldin, Turkey and Syria: the end of the strategic depth, Assafir Newspaper, May 17, 2011.

49 Khalil Harb, Erdoğan Harasses Syria... why?, Assafir Newspaper, June 16, 2011.

Here, Khalil Harb brings up a controversial matter in Syria itself, where there are serious reservations and opposition to the Syrian government's demarche on the historical border dossiers, their geography and security, Kurds, water, Alexandretta, the economy, the situation of Arabs and Syrians in Turkey, etc. and the manner in which the Syrian political regime has remained silent on these matters, or has quarantined them, or dealt with them in a non-reassuring manner.

B. Syria and Turkey: a historical bet?

A wager is a form of intentional political action; it follows and builds upon an event or a transformation point. The heralding of what is termed a transitional period in Syrian-Turkish relations signifies the launching of an unspecified project with contradictory or hesitant motives, as well as a mentality with a fair amount of uncertainty (and, perhaps, an unlimited supply of hope) regarding the end point and the next move. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that we cannot determine how the other will receive our actions, neither his reactions, added to the fact that the positions of the other is not a mechanical result of a direct reflection of his will –various elements come into play, domestic and foreign. The purpose of this section is to test whether the official positions (of Syria or Turkey) and the intentions of the policy makers constitute a wager, or whether they have turned into a wager, or whether they could later solidify into a historical bet. For relations between Syria and Turkey, the wager, for either of them, is an expression of an internal dynamic, psychological and behavioral, which lies at the heart of each side's policy, without being restricted to their bilateral relations. In other words, the wagers being placed may be the origin of the Syrian-Turkish event today, while in reality, these tendencies precede the actual events, and are constitutive of it.

This causes wagers to be largely overlapping, as it is normal for a Syrian policy maker to assume that his relationship with Turkey will reflect on his relationships with third parties, and even on conditions inside Turkey and Syria themselves. Thus, wagers often overlap, sometimes even reproducing each other, which makes distinguishing them a matter of meticulous examination and analysis.

What has taken place during the last decade in Syrian-Turkish relations was that a host of mutual concerns remained unspoken. These differences were difficult to express, even in an indirect and unofficial way; which means that the effective level of the evolution of relations was less than claimed. Such a dynamic exists and is often employed in relations between states. Syria and Turkey may have taken that route due to their awareness of the nature of the challenges of domestic, regional, and international politics, as well as the two countries being affected by the dynamics of foreign infiltration, the policies of the global system, and regional competition – especially applying to the United States, Europe, Iran, Israel, and others.

The Strategic Cooperation Council was founded in 2009 even before strategic talks were initiated. The two parties lurched together toward common interactions and wagers, without doing much regarding the bilateral concerns, crises, and the existing and potential sources of threat.

Paying attention to this aspect helps us understand the hesitation –or even foot-dragging- in terms of the initiatives between Syria and Turkey, at least in the early stages. That would also help explain why Syria’s name was not removed from the list of the sources of national security threats in Turkey until October 28, 2010⁵⁰. Syria left the matter unspoken for almost a decade, with its media also falling silent upon the lifting of Syria’s name from the list, as if it were a procedural or normal affair. The same would explain why the Syrian political regime is today refraining from interpreting the latest shifts in the Turkish position regarding the Syrian crisis, leaving the matter to a number of journalists and commentators regardless of credibility and the standards of quality and performance.

In order to avoid uncalculated initiatives, and to avoid the relations being based on what has been termed a collective confusion, it is important to include the ongoing developments in the context of a political dynamic that is open towards the future, whilst affording the element of uncertainty the importance it deserves given the current regional and international circumstances. All of those calculations are subsumed under what is termed in this paper a historical bet.

Syria’s bets

Turkey has been intensely present, more than any other state, in the political, economic, cultural, and media scenes in Syria. This has furnished inaccurate indications on the nature of relations between the two countries, pushing some to assume that they are built on a base of solid agreement. However, starting in March 2011, the Syrian crisis has shown this to be untrue, placing the Syrian and Turkish policies in front of a process of deep questioning.

50 The Turkish National Security Council met on October 28, 2010 in order to review the national security document known as the Red Book –which is a secret document. The name of Syria (and Russia) was dropped from the list of the sources of threats to national security, with Israel being described as a principle threat for Turkey see: Al-Akhbar Newspaper, October 30, 2010.

For example, demonstrators and parts of the Damascus countryside that are known for the manufacture of home furniture, have complained that the liberalization of trade between Syria and Turkey was in the interest of Turkish industries⁵¹, leading to calamities in the Syrian economy, forcing the closure of many Syrian factories especially in the field of textile and furniture. This has reflected negatively on the people, to the point that the protests witnessed in the city of Saqba (Damascus countryside) was at the background of the closure of these factories, as (Saqba) is a town that relies on the making of furniture in small workshops. And after Turkish manufactured furnishings flooded the Syrian markets, these workshops were shut down, all the protests that took place in Saqba were due to the unemployment of the workers whose workshops were closed down.⁵²

The same applies to the sector of textiles and clothing, with many companies and establishments being forced to close under the pressure of Turkish competition.⁵³ Merchants and businessmen from Aleppo, Damascus, and other regions noted that the economic agreements with Turkey did not accommodate the need of the manufacturing, commercial, and even agricultural sectors⁵⁴, adding that the government has failed in addressing this problem seriously⁵⁵, perhaps because the

51 Interviews with Syrian citizens in the regions of Saqba and Darayya in the Damascus countryside, including workers and owners of small factories producing home furniture, The Syrian News Channel, April 7, 2011. Also see: Yusuf Al-Bunni, What lies behind the popular protest in the Eastern Ghuta..., Qasyun, May 8, 2011.

52 See: Munir Al-Hamash, An Arab perspective on the reality and horizons of Arab-Turkish economic relations, presented to the conference: The Arabs and Turkey: the challenges of the present and the wagers of the future, Doha: The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, May 18-19, 2011.

53 Interview with merchants, factory owners, and members of the chambers of commerce in Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs in: Suha Mostafa, fifty percent decline in the manufacturing of clothing and textiles, Al-Iqtisadiyya Magazine, issue 385 in:
http://www.iqtisadiya.com/archives_detail.asp?issue=385&id=4510&category=local

54 See: general remarks on the Syrian-Turkish trade agreement in a lecture by the vice chair of the Damascus chamber of commerce. In: Mohammad Ghassan Al-Qalla', the private sector and the challenges of the partnership agreements and the free trade zones (Damascus: the Association of Economic Sciences). The article can be found online: http://mafhoum.com/syr/articles_05/kalla.htm

55 Interview with merchants, factory owners, and members of the chambers of commerce in Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs in: Suha Mostafa, fifty percent decline in the manufacturing of clothing and textiles, Al-Iqtisadiyya Magazine, issue 385 in:
http://www.iqtisadiya.com/archives_detail.asp?issue=385&id=4510&category=local

political dimension had the primacy over other considerations in Syria's perspective of relations with Turkey –or because the senior officials do not possess investments or partnerships in these sectors, which led to their neglect.

Syria has offered Turkey everything that it could offer in the realm of politics, and still, that was not sufficient to maintain close relations with it, what has, then, taken place? Could the phase of rapprochement and alliance be closed? Were the previous developments part of a larger wager, or was it merely the logic of things that pushed Turkey to do what it saw fit even if that contradicted the expectations and ethics of former commitments?

During the last decade, Syrian policy has attempted to affirm that its regional alliances balanced two strong parties: Iran and Turkey, which prop up and support Syrian policy and its foreign objectives, even if in different styles. In fact, Turkey's position regarding the events of Gaza gave an important margin of maneuver to Syrian diplomacy, believing that –with its relations with Turkey- Syria has been able to surpass the broad stereotype engendered by the axis of moderation labeling Syria as part of the axis of extremism.⁵⁶

The latest developments in the Syrian crisis have shown the existence of a practical (and not merely theoretical) possibility for tension to return to the course of bilateral relations once unexpected changes take place, either domestically in Syria or Turkey or both, or due to the external infiltration of regional policies.⁵⁷ All of these factors and elements were present, to differing degrees, in the Turkish position vis-à-vis the events in Syria. There is also a domestic dimension for the wager (on the part of both sides), as questions of borders, historical conflicts, and negative memory are present among relatively large sections of the cultural, political, and social environments of both sides. These pressures may have lessened, especially with the two sides agreeing on conciliatory and expedient resolutions for their border problems –which practically postponed the matter or quarantined it to an indefinite date. Below, it will be shown how these border solutions acquired an interventionist character and represented an element of pressure on Syria due to the high fluidity of traffic between the borders in

56 Aqeel Sa'eed Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey: the current reality and the future possibilities*, Op. Cit., p. 455.

57 Ibid.

the tense areas such as Jisr al-Shughur, the peripheries of the Alexandretta province, and the Eastern region. In fact, Syrian policy is being greatly questioned today, and officials must answer important questions in that regard, and in terms of their dangerous wagers and their concessions over many issues that are of great significance to Syrian policy. A discussion is also needed regarding the way in which Syrian-Turkish relations shifted from a point of transformation, an alliance, and even a historical bet into hasty bets and an active involvement in the dynamics of intervention and control, which carries existential threats on Syria itself, and not merely the current political regime.

This questioning can apply to a large volume of writings, commentaries, and analysis that glorified the rapprochement between the two sides. The latest developments have put the entire former political analysis in question, especially the negligence (willful or otherwise) of the fact that most of the previous conflictual issues did not change and no final and decisive agreement was made regarding most of them such as: the water, the borders, relations with Israel, Iran, and the United States, etc.

During the era of rapprochement, the ambition –or the wager- of the political regime in Syria was that a number of bilateral and regional issues would be agreed upon with Turkey, without entering into an open alliance regarding these matters; as a Turkey that is more engaged in the region will lead to shifts in the dynamics of regional politics in a manner affecting Syria itself, which is taking place today.

Turkey's bets

Syria is now more present in the Turkish political and media scene than in the past. But this presence remains incomparable to Turkey's place in the Syrian scene, which reflects the difference in the relative weight of each party in relation to the other. Syria has provided Turkey with an important margin of influence and interest in Syria: in politics, economics, culture, the media, etc. This margin is not compared to the space provided by Turkey to Syria. It was shown above that opinion surveys in both countries have revealed a serious variation in each side's assessment of the other⁵⁸. The fact that Turkish perceptions of Syria did not change much in the last years, despite all the ongoing developments, is somehow surprising.

58 See: Kucukcanp, Arab Image in Turkey, & Akgün, The Perception of Turkey in Middle East, & Meliha Benli Altunışık, Turkey: Arab Perspectives.

Turkey has attempted to affirm that its lurch Eastward does not involve regional imperialist, Ottomanist, or Islamist tendencies, claiming that the opening to the East goes along with changes in domestic political perceptions and political mode. But this does not mean that others, such as the Arabs, would not be affected by events in Turkey.⁵⁹ There are also domestic dimensions that resemble those of Syria.

The Syrian rapprochement with Turkey was an indication, and perhaps a motive for other neighboring states to engage more with Turkey, since the factors of repulsion and discord with Syria were far greater than with all other surrounding states. Following the reinvigoration of relations with Syria, a certain degree of rapprochement could also be seen in the relations of Turkey with Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus. Furthermore, performing the role of mediator between Syria and Israel has contributed, to an extent, in giving Turkey the image of a country with regional stature that is capable of managing negotiations between conflicting parties.⁶⁰

There is also a domestic dimension to this wager, given the relative retreat of what was described as a Syrian wager on Turkey, in addition to the Justice and Development cabinet expressing readiness to enact changes toward the enemies of the interior and not only the enemies of the outside.⁶¹ This especially applies to the Kurdish and Alavi questions.⁶² The reality is that the achievements of the nascent Syrian-Turkish relations have all turned into channels of influence and pressure on Syria during the last crisis.

59 See for example: Mohammad Nurreldin, Turkey's image among the Arabs, *Al-Sharq Newspaper*, May 7, 2011.

Also see the opinion of Ibrahim Kalin advisor to President Abdullah Gul in: Ibrahim Kalin, On the Turkish model, *Today's Zaman*, Istanbul: June 15, 2011. & Ibrahim Kalin, Is Turkey a model for the Arab world?, *Turkish Press*, February 11, 2011.

Also see the opinion of Buthaina Sha'ban, political and media advisor of President Bashar Al Assad, in an interview with the official Arabic-language Turkish channel on April 2, 2011.

60 See for example: Altunışık, The possibilities and limits, pp. 50-53. & Bülent Aras, Turkey between Syria and Israel: Turkey's Rising Soft Power, *Seta Policy Brief*, (Ankara: No. 15, May 2008), p. 6.

61 See and compare: Dilek Kurban and Yilmaz Ensaroğlu, Toward A Solution to the Kurdish Question: Constitutional and Legal Recommendations, (Istanbul: TESEV Publications, September 2010).

62 Martin van Bruinessen, Turkey's AKP government and its engagement with the Alevis and the Kurds, Paper presented at the symposium The Otherness and Beyond: Dynamism between Group Formation and Identity in Modern Muslim Societies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 5-6 December 2009.

This did not take place as an accident or as a result of a conspiracy, but due to an intentional will, planning, and management –in other terms, a wager.

An example of this would be the question of the permeability of the borders, about which the Syrians are now complaining, whereas previously it had been a matter of Turkish protest. The arrangements on the borders between Syria and Turkey, limit protection, security, and the army to the Turks in exchange for logistic support from Syria, in addition to great flexibility in the movement (or infiltration) of people, goods, ideas, politics, and, more recently, weapons and material and moral support for the opposition in Syria. It has been said that, during operations in Jisr al-Shughur which is close to the borders with Turkey (the Alexandretta province), that the Syrian authorities have found evidence of security interference and logistical support by Turkey to the gunmen in Syria.⁶³

Another issue pertains to Turkey's political influence on sections of the Syrian population, such as those with Turkmen origins, as well as its influence in the religious street that is close to political Islam and the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood. The same applies to the conflict between Syria and Israel, with Syria appointing Turkey as an exclusive agent to mediate in any indirect negotiations with Israel –and Syria is used to this sort of agencies- in addition to many other factors. It has already been mentioned that there is sometimes a difficulty in distinguishing between what we term a collective confusion in the perspective on bilateral relations, and between what we call a historical bet. That is due to the fact that the standards of reality, imagination, bets, and sometimes ideology and fiction, overlap in a manner that makes it difficult to dissociate the factors and shifts in Syrian-Turkish relations –making the very analysis of these relations into another wager of a scholarly nature.

This analytic difficulty engulfs the Syrian-Turkish phenomenon with a large amount of obscurity and confusion; which are sometimes an inseparable part of political wagers. This lack of clarity may become a functional obscurity for all parties, which helps in delaying decision or confrontation, keeping the door open for other dynamics, which are

63 Debate regarding the security of the borders between the two countries reemerged during the latest crisis. The Syrian Ambassador in Ankara, Nidal Qabalan, declared that the two countries pursue the enforcement of security agreements between them in this regard, and that Syria has handed over to the Turkish authorities a number of wanted elements from the Turkish PKK, and that Syria expects Turkey to do the same by handing over the wanted gunmen who escaped to Turkey from Jisr al-Shughur and other regions (statements, June 28, 2011).

part of an interpretive fertility that is inherent to the Syrian-Turkish phenomenon and its regional and international repercussions. The next axes shall focus on the examination of the Turkish position vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis.

C. Factors determining the Turkish position toward the Syrian crisis

A form of agreement appeared between Syria and Turkey regarding developments in Tunisia and Egypt; Syrian President Bashar Al Assad and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed understanding, and even support, for the course of events in the two countries. The two leaders discussed the matter during their meeting in the city of Aleppo after placing the foundation stone for the building of the Friendship Dam on the Orontes River in February 6, 2011.⁶⁴ At the same meeting, Erdoğan made his first comment on the events in Syria when he mentioned reform in the country and its importance.

Turkey expressed its support for the recent protests, viewing them as a political and peaceful expression of the demands of democratic change and reform, and that President Bashar Al Assad should advocate reformist policies that must agree with, and even be a response to, the popular demands for change. Turkey also stressed the need to deal with the protests positively, warning that delaying reform would involve serious threats to the political regime in Syria, as well as for Turkey itself given the elements of geographic and political proximity, overlaps between ethnic groups in the two countries, etc.

Turkey said that it had offered advice in favor of change but that the Syrian response – according to different and repeated statements- was not at the pace needed. Since events evolved the way they did in the past phase, the political regime must hasten the

⁶⁴ Turkey announced the delaying of the building of the Friendship Dam on the Orontes river along the borders between Syria and Turkey due to the protests that erupted in Syria. The Turkish Water Works Company stated that the execution of the Dam project has been advancing at a slow pace since the launching of works in February 6, 2011, following a long delay due to disagreements over technical details. The two countries had announced their approval of the dam project, with the two sides deciding to limit its use to the needs of irrigation and the regulation of water levels. (Assafir Newspaper, July 4, 2011).

response to local (and international) demands for rapid change; otherwise, a possibility exists for unfortunate developments. Turkey also stated that violence would not be justified or acceptable, and that Turkey would do what it must if ethnic or sectarian clashes flare up, or if further violence occurs between the security forces and the opposition, or if Syria turns into a failed state. Furthermore, Turkey deals directly with the Syrian opposition, starting with its invitation of the Syrian opposition (the Muslim Brotherhood and other parties) to work based in Turkey and to pursue their activities close to the scene of events in Syria.

The Turkish position toward the events in Syria poses a number of questions regarding its nature and determinants. Why did it take a harsh critical tone? Why are the Turks practicing this level of unbridled interference in Syrian affairs? And does that mean the end of the era of rapprochement or alliance between the two countries?

The broad determinants of these questions can be examined on the following levels: the international environment, the regional environment, the bilateral environment, and the domestic environment.

1-The international environment:

The influence of the international environment is determined by the positions of the United States and Europe, and the Turkish agreement with the US-EU reading of the Syrian dossier. Turkey continues to coordinate with the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and others, in order to prepare Syria's dossier to be put on the table of the UN Security Council, as well as pursuing political, security, economic, and media pressures on the Syrian regime as part of systemic plans to overthrow it. Turkey's activity in this field can be summed up in the following points:

- There were communications between the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the US President Barack Obama devoted to coordination between the two sides on the Syrian situation; and the two leaders agreed to launch a common initiative in the Security Council. Talks between Obama and Erdoğan also touched on the option of establishing a no-fly zone over Syria to protect civilians from the

repression of the regime, and the need for a serious international initiative similar to the actions of the Security Council toward Libya.⁶⁵

- Turkey is active on the level of international organizations, such as the Refugees Commission and the Human Rights Commission, which act as supporting or partner institutions in one way or another. Turkey could also make use of these institutions –or other parties- to intervene in the Syrian crisis.

- The NATO alliance is the potential military arm for any Turkish initiative or intervention to establish so-called safe havens⁶⁶ that could become a launching base or a prelude for a path similar to the Libyan scenario⁶⁷. In such a scenario, the NATO intervention could be direct in the absence of an international umbrella, or even a mandate by the Security Council. US State Secretary Hillary Clinton expressed her country's concern over the presence of Syrian military units on NATO borders, warning from potential clashes between Syria and Turkey in which NATO will not remain uninvolved.⁶⁸

- The August 2, 2011 Security Council presidential statement on the crisis in Syria⁶⁹ (which did not meet objections from Russia and other countries) indicates potential shifts in the international posture –especially the Russian position- toward the Syrian crisis.⁷⁰ This was followed by a statement by Russian president Medvedev

65 Assafir Newspaper, June 23, 2011.

66 See for example: Soner Cagaptay, A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?, Hurriyet Daily news, July 3, 2011.

67 Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu said that he has handed a message to Syrian President Bashar Al Asad to the effect that he must cease violence against protestors and responds to the demands of the people, otherwise, he would face international isolation and a fate similar to that of the regime of Libyan President Mu'amar Al Ghaddafi. (Today's Zaman, August 9, 2011). Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also compared the situation in Syria to that of Libya, exclaiming: we have done what we could with regard to Libya but we were not capable of achieving any results... and now the same situation is repeating itself in Syria. (Anadolu Agency, Ankara, August 17, 2011).

68 US State Secretary Hillary Clinton has demanded that Syria pull its troops from the regions bordering Turkey, because the presence of Syrian troops there will lead to the worsening of the conditions of refugees on the Syrian-Turkish border. (Akhbar Al-Alam, June 24, 2011).

69 Wisam Kan'an and Mohammad Al-Shalabi, the Security Council statement in the eyes of the opposition and the regime, Al-Akhbar Newspaper, August 6, 2011.

70 Sami Kulaib, the gunmen of Syria and the Russian position, Assafir Newspaper, August 5, 2011.

warning of a sad fate for the Syrian president⁷¹, and a statement by the Russian foreign ministry (August 9, 2011) asking Syrian authorities to halt violence, indicating that Russia's position may change if dialogue and reform fail.⁷²

- US State Department Spokesman Mark Toner said (August 8, 2011) that secretary Hillary Clinton has spoken on the phone with her Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoğlu asking him to transmit an American message to the effect that Syria must immediately return its soldiers to their barracks and to release all those arrested⁷³. The official in charge of the Syrian dossier in the US state department Fredrick Hoff also lead a series of talks in Ankara (August 8, 2011) regarding the latest development in Syria and the region⁷⁴. Hoff's talks came the day before the visit of Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to Syria (August 9, 2011).

- The visit of Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to Syria and his meeting with president Bashar Al Assad on August 9, 2011, as well as the warnings and pressures that accompanied it, signaled a clear message: that Turkey had been delegated by the United States and Europe to negotiate with the Syrian regime or at least to transmit the messages of various parties to the Syrian side.⁷⁵

71 Al-Akhbar Newspaper, August 6, 2011.

72 Al-Hayat Newspaper, August 10, 2011.

73 Assafir Newspaper, August 9, 2011.

74 Ibid.

75 A high level Turkish source –that requested to remain anonymous- stated to the newspaper Hurreyat on 4/8/2011 that Abdullah Gul's message to Assad, which was described as a warning was clear in the sense that if Assad did not initiate the steps for transition toward democracy, Turkey would move to the stage of international intervention. The source added that Turkey will begin with economic sanctions and the lowering of the level of diplomatic relations with Damascus, after which Ankara will be prepared to support the Syrian opposition, and to even establish a security belt along the Syrian borders. He also added that Turkish military intervention in Syria is not to be discounted, but in the context of international resolutions issued by the UN Security Council. (Assafir Newspaper, August 15, 2011).

- UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon spoke on the phone with Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to discuss the events in Syria. The Turkish minister informed the General Secretary about his latest meetings in Damascus on August 9, 2011.⁷⁶
- Turkey discussed, on the highest levels, the possibility of intervening in the Syrian crisis under the humanitarian intervention heading. This was a major part of the phone calls that took place between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and American President Barack Obama.⁷⁷

2-The regional environment:

The nature of Turkish policy regarding stature and Turkey's ability to practice moral or political influence on the course of events in Syria is determined not only by Turkey's close relations with Syria, but also by Turkey's regional stature and its attempt to prove a real ability to practice a decisive influence on positions and policies. This perception goes along with Turkey's attempts to promote an image of active regional and international stature.

All this takes place in the presence of three sources of regional competition or threats, consisting of Iran, the Arabs, and Israel. These are active axes, but with varying influence on the regional situation. As for Turkey, it appears to have the most weight or the most ability to influence regional (and international) policies, which is due to its strength and relative ability to influence all parties. In terms of moral weight and influence, Turkey may be the second regional power (after Iran) in Syria, but it is attempting to become the primary player.⁷⁸

-Israel

The revision of relations between Turkey and Israel was due to Turkey's active response to the possibilities of Arab developments. Therefore this revision is an

⁷⁶ Anadolu Agency, August 17, 2011.

⁷⁷ Turkey points again to the possibility of military intervention, Assafir Newspaper, August 15, 2011.

⁷⁸ See and compare: Nihat Ali Özcan, Turkey-Syria-Iran triangle is being redrawn, Hurriyet Daily news, June 22, 2011.

opportunity for a new balancing act, and at the same time, raising the level of security and intelligence relations is a sensitive matter to Turkey with the possibility of returning of the internal Kurdish question. Israel appears prepared to aid Turkey in that regard, which is also linked to various other issues.

The return of relations between Turkey and Israel to their previous level before the Marmara vessel incident is a decisive issue in Turkish foreign policy. It may even be the objective equivalent for the deterioration of relations with Syria. The matter is not merely one of compensating a lost ally, but, rather, a reshuffling of political roles, especially in light of the high-level coordination between Turkey and the West – specifically the United States- regarding the Syrian crisis and the developments in the Arab region.

The announcement of the non-participation of the Marmara ship, or any other Turkish ship or Turkish activist, in the freedom flotilla 2 was a serious indicator that Turkey has rearranged its foreign policy priorities by focusing efforts and mobilizing regional and international powers to manage the situation toward the Syrian crisis. The following question emerges: why were the Turks absent from the 'freedom flotilla 2'?⁷⁹. The Turks speak of various reasons, such as technical difficulties, the complete focus on relief efforts in the Syrian refugee camps in the Alexandretta province, the independence of the relief organization from the government, etc. However, the real reasons may be elsewhere, specifically in the need for a return of relations with Israel, and the US intervention in the mediation efforts between the two sides.

Political chatter remained limited to press leaks and modest admissions of the existence of mediations to reconcile the two former allies⁸⁰ -until Turkish participation in the freedom flotilla 2 was canceled. The Turkish decision to abstain from participation was a

79 See and compare: Why will Marmara not participate in the 'freedom flotilla 2?', Assafir Newspaper, June 20, 2011.

Aisha Karbat, Why were the Turks absent from the 'freedom flotilla 2?', Al-Akhbar Newspaper, July 2, 2011.

80 In its July 5, 2011 issue, the Israel Ha'aretz Newspaper revealed that Turkey and Israel have been conducting, for weeks, direct secret communications in an attempt to end the ongoing crisis between them. The talks were taking place through two channels: the first between an envoy of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (who remained nameless) and the director-general of the Turkish foreign ministry, Feridun Sinirlioğlu. The second channel, according to the same source, was opened between the Israeli delegate in the UN investigation committee Yusuf Chagnuber and the Turkish delegate Ozdam Sandbirk. (Al-Akhbar Newspaper, July 6, 2011).

serious indicator of the narrative above, which was evidenced by the United States and Israel's welcoming and celebration of the Turkish decision.⁸¹

In fact, there is a Palestinian facet to the matter as well. Turkey is advancing toward Israel, moving away from Syria (with its current political regime), not for purposes and objectives that are purely related to Syria, but also for Palestinian considerations. The US President Barack Obama has promised the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that Turkey would have a role in the Palestinian-Israeli dossier that would compensate its loss with the opening of the Rafah crossing and the change of the regime in Egypt.⁸²

But what about the issues that remain unsolved, such as the report of the international investigative commission regarding the vessel incident? Is there a possibility to reach a compromise?

It appears that neither American mediation nor the mutual need of the two parties allowed them to surpass the Marmara incident despite the numerous negotiations between them. Israel does not appear prepared to apologize and pay compensation⁸³, and Turkey does not appear to be prepared to retreat from its main demand.⁸⁴ But all

81 Israeli official: Israel is prepared to cooperate with Turkey to end the episode of the 'Marmara' vessel, Al-Ahram Newspaper, June 24, 2011. Over several months, the US administration has conducted talks with the senior levels of the Turkish government with the aim of aborting the launching of a new Turkish fleet to the Gaza Strip, in addition to pushing the Turks to improve relations with Israel. (Al-Akhbar Newspaper, July 6, 2011).

82 Israel and Turkey have renewed their military and security cooperation. The Israeli Debka intelligence website claimed that Israeli vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon has visited Turkey and met secretly with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and with the head of the Turkish intelligence Feydan Hakan. In exchange for a return to cooperation, Netanyahu agreed to the US President Barack Obama on a political price consisting in offering Turkey a share in the Palestinian-Israeli political negotiations, and that Israel would accept Hamas joining the game. Erdoğan told President Obama that he has a good opportunity to positively influence the position of Khaled Mesh'al regarding his stance toward Israel. (Al-Qabas newspaper, June 26, 2011).

83 Israel refuses to apologize for the massacre of the Marmara vessel and proposes to offer compensation, Assafir Newspaper, June 24, 2011. Washington pressures and Israel refuses to offer an apology to Turkey for the Marmara crime, Assafir, August 18, 2011.

84 Erdogan: no normalization with Israel before apologizing for the Marmara massacre, Assafir, July 9, 2011.

that does not hamper commercial trade⁸⁵ and the return of security and intelligence coordination.⁸⁶

A report by Turkish intelligence that was presented by its head general Hakan Fidan to the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has shown that Syria and Iran halted their intelligence cooperation with Turkey in the field of combating terrorism. Iran refused to provide Turkey with intelligence information on the military operation that Iran undertook to liquidate the members of the Kurdish Bijak organization. Syria has also ceased its cooperation with Turkey in the field of combating terrorism with the escalation of events in Syria. The report said that Syria offers support to the PKK organization, and has even begun to host some of the organization's leaders as the situation was before 1999. The report stated that Israel was the foremost state in terms of cooperation with Turkey in the field of combating terrorism, and has recently begun to share some intelligence information despite the ongoing crisis between the two states.⁸⁷

The Turkish intelligence service presented an intelligence report during a Turkish National Security Council meeting on February 24, 2011 stating that the PKK is establishing relations with Israel, and some of its elements have confessed to receiving training at the hands of Mossad officials. And that the Turkish intelligence is in possession of video footage of an interview of the second man in the PKK Murat Karayilan in which he says that the party and Israel have worked together during the incident of the Marmara vessel. The Turkish intelligence report said that the PKK and Israel have coordinated together some of the attacks executed by the party.⁸⁸

85 The Israeli Yediot Ahronot Newspaper revealed, based on data by the Association of Israeli Exporters, that Israel's exports to Turkey rose by around 40 percent in the first half of 2011 compared to the same period during the previous year. Turkey is the sixth largest importer of Israel exports, achieving a growth rate of 72 percent, which is the highest rate of growth in exports to Turkey this year, compared to the same period of the last year. (Akhbar Al-Alam, August 26, 2011).

86 Al-Qabas Newspaper, June 26, 2011.

87 A report on terrorism by Turkish intelligence: Israel is the best cooperator despite the crisis, Assafir Newspaper, August 30, 2011.

88 See: Intelligence report reveals links between PKK, Israel, Today's Zaman, March 8, 2011 for further information on the alleged relationship between the PKK and Israel, see: Turkey is common enemy, PKK member tells Israel, Hurriyet Daily news, Istanbul: 22-9-2010. & Itai Anghel, PKK leader: Israel is helping Turkey to destroy us, Haaretz, September 22, 2010.

-The Arabs

Arab states seem to have a propensity to absorb Turkish influence, perhaps due to the feeling of imbalance in material and moral strength, in order to balance the potential Iranian influence in the region, or due to Turkey's might and its closeness to the West and Israel. It could also be because Turkey is a non-Arab actor, which makes it safer for many Arab regimes, or due to the West's attempt to grant Turkey the chief position in the region as compensation for membership in the European Union.⁸⁹ Coordination between Turkey and a number of Arab states appeared to be a preface for further joint engagement in the Syrian crisis⁹⁰, after a long hesitation to publicly enter the fray. In the recent past, Turkey, the United States, and other parties have urged the Arab states to engage further in the Syrian case⁹¹. Arab states hesitated from dealing with the Syrian crisis, leaving the task to Turkey and the West, but they soon began to declare a string of escalating positions, beginning with a statement of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the position of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz in his address to the regime in Syria.

Despite Saudi Arabia's sensitivity toward the wave of change in the region it may have concluded, after complicated calculations, that the pros of rupturing the link with Iran exceed the cons of the emergence of a new democracy in Syria⁹², assuming that events will lead to a stable democratic state. It is possible that Saudi Arabia sees in the current situation of Al Assad an opportunity to strike a blow to Iran, even if the price was the undermining of the rule of Al Assad with the possibility of the occurrence of chaos in a country that is situated in the heart of the Arab nation.⁹³ Saudi commentators say that the warnings launched by King Abdullah have paved the way for other countries to

89 See and compare: Ali Bulatch, the idea of the 'Turkish model', Zaman Newspaper, March 11, 2011.

90 Davutoğlu speaks on the phone to his Emirati counterpart regarding the situation in Syria and Libya, Akhbar Al-Alam, 12/8/2011, also: the Jeddah meeting between Abdullah and Abdullah... 'recalibrates' the Turkish beat!, Al Wattan Newspaper, August 16, 2011.

91 Contradictory Syrian signals following the Arab positions... and the Turkish visit, Assafir Newspaper, August 9, 2011.

92 Saudi Arabia 'reneges' against Syria, Assafir Newspaper, August 10, 2011.

93 Ibid.

exert pressures on the Syrian regime, while leaving the regime with a margin to avoid collapse.⁹⁴

The Saudi interpretation of the crisis in Syria affects –in varying ways- other Arab positions. In this regard we could mention the announcement of several Arab countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Tunisia, etc.) of the withdrawal of their ambassadors from Syria, the issuing of the Arab foreign ministers’ statement on the Syrian crisis on August 28, 2011 (which will be discussed further below), and the talks of an Arab initiative to resolve the crisis in Syria.

Arab states were concerned with the potential repercussions of the Syrian crisis on the Arab region and the Middle East, others were busy with their domestic conditions and concerns, or have waited for the suitable regional and international moment –especially that the Syrian situation is complex and overlaps with numerous regional and international issues.⁹⁵

It appears that the United States, Europe, and Turkey have reassured Arab states and encouraged them to take sharper positions to the Syrian crisis. Arab political calculations and the complexities of the Syrian question were hampering factors that were quickly subdued due to Syria’s through the weakening of Syria through a string of pressures, political, economic, media, and security measures, etc. From this perspective, bringing down the Syrian regime appears more probable now than it used to be at the beginning of the events (March 2011).

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton believed that it would be better and more efficient for Turkey and Saudi Arabia to call on Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to step down rather than the United States. Clinton noted that if Turkey or the Saudi King made such a call, the Assad regime would not be able to ignore it, since Turkey and Saudi Arabia and other states have more influence with Bashar Al Assad than the United States which barely has any relations with Syria.⁹⁶ The engagement of the Arab League in the crisis comes as part of the interaction between a number of Arab states and Turkey

94 Ibid.

95 Cristophe de Rokvoy, Why did Arabs remain silent toward the Syrian crisis?, Middle East online, May 6, 2011.

96 Al Yawm Al Sabi’, August 17, 2011.

(and other parties).⁹⁷ This stems from the increasing awareness in Turkey and the West that pressures on Syria require an Arab framework, along the lines of the Arab League's demarche during the crisis in Libya.⁹⁸ Coordination between Turkey and the Arab League was effectuated through the correspondences and meetings between the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and the General Secretary of the Arab League Nabil Al-Arabi.

During his meeting with the Turkish minister (July 2, 2011), Al-Arabi said that Turkey has a historic role in the region, and we hope for this role to grow and expand, and cooperation between the Arab League and Turkey shall continue... the region is undergoing very difficult circumstances, and there is a need for Turkish participation and support.⁹⁹

Al-Arabi opined that the repercussions of the ongoing crisis in Syria threaten not only Syria, but the security and stability of the region as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Al-Arabi called for the launching of a real dialogue in order to achieve reconciliation, because what is going on in Syria concerns the Arab League and all the states, because Syria is an ancient state, which has institutions and has a role and a stature in the region, and we hope that it will be able to surmount the current crisis through peaceful means and to begin a real dialogue in order to achieve the needed reconciliation among the people.¹⁰¹

At later occasions, Nabil Al-Arabi directed strong criticisms, even if implicit, to the Syrian authorities¹⁰², issuing a statement after an emergency meeting of the Arab foreign ministers to discuss the Syrian crisis that called for the respect of the right of the Syrian

97 Assafir Newspaper, August 29, 2011.

98 Turkey likens the situation in Syria to the event in Libya, Al Itihad Newspaper, August 18, 2011.

99 Al Ahram Newspaper, July 3, 2011.

100 Assafir Newspaper, August 11, 2011.

101 Contradictory Syrian signals following the Arab positions... and the Turkish visit, Assafir Newspaper, August 9, 2011.

102 Assafir Newspaper, August 29, 2011.

people to a secure and dignified life, as well as their legitimate aspirations for political and social reform.¹⁰³

-Iran

Iran believes that Syria is being targeted by the West due to reasons relating to Syria's alliance with Iran and its support of the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, and that the West and its regional allies are riding the wave of legitimate popular protests and demands in order to bring down the regime in Syria. Iranians believe that they are being targeted through potential changes in Syria that could be opposed to Iran and to the Lebanese Hizbollah. The Iranian position can be summed up in the following main points:

- Supporting the official Syrian line regarding the foreign dimensions of the crisis. The Supreme Guard of the Islamic revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei described the protests in Syria as a fake version of the Arab revolutions and that they are the making of the United States of America.¹⁰⁴ The Subuh Sadiq Newspaper which is affiliated to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard said that what is taking place in Syria is a complex conspiracy. The paper accused Turkey of establishing camps on the borders with Syria with the purpose of supporting the opposition and smuggling weapons to the protestors in Syria.¹⁰⁵
- Supporting Syria in the face of foreign attacks. Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi (August 28, 2011) said in response to a question regarding the NATO threat to Syria that the Syrian people is a people of resistance affirming that American and Western threats will not weaken the resolve of the Syrian people, and that NATO

103 Al-Hayyat Newspaper, August 29, 2011. Syria has rejected the statement because it contained an unacceptable language that contradicts the general atmosphere of the meeting, and goes against the nature and purposes of the task delegated to the League's Secretary General, and also because the meeting ended with an agreement not to issue any statements or to make any media announcements. Furthermore, the statement was not discussed during the Council's meeting, and was not proposed to the Arab foreign ministers or the heads of delegations according to the rules of procedure as stated in the League's internal charter and the rules of meetings. SANA, August 28, 2011 and Assafir Newspaper, August 29, 2011.

104 Al-Arabiyya News channel, July 19, 2011, Akhbar Al-Alam, July 19, 2011.

105 Ibid.

cannot threaten [Syria] with an attack, if this happens, God forbid, then NATO would sink in a swarm that it will never be able to exit.¹⁰⁶

- Calling on the Syrian government to respond to the demands for reform. Iranian foreign minister Salehi had announced (August 27, 2011) that governments must respond to the legitimate demands of their peoples, whether in Syria or Yemen or others. In these countries, the people are expressing legitimate demands and the governments must quickly respond.¹⁰⁷

- Concern regarding the repercussions of the overthrow of the regime of President Bashar Al Assad. The Iranian foreign minister warned of a political vacuum in Syria, saying that a vacuum of power in Syria will have unpredictable repercussions on neighboring countries and on the region... and it could cause a catastrophe in the region and beyond.¹⁰⁸

- The Western offensive against Syria aims at neutralizing the resistance. Foreign minister Ali Salehi said that Syria is an important link in the chain of resistance in the Middle East, and some want to do away with this link.¹⁰⁹

- Offering proposals to resolve the crisis, an Iranian source in Damascus said that Tehran offered a set of proposals, most of which are political in nature, more than once, in order to surmount the ongoing Syrian crisis, adding that dozens of articles included in the proposals that were handed in writing to Syrian officials included solutions that could have contributed, according to the Iranian point of view, to lessening the state of tension in the Syrian street, especially when the crisis was at its beginning. We place our experience in the service of our friends in Damascus, while stressing the need to lower the intensity of the security option.

- Attempting to help the regime in Syria in clarifying its point of view. Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Reza Sajjadi said that Iran is exerting tireless efforts on the

106 Assafir Newspaper, August 29, 2011.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

global level, and through international institutions, to reflect the reality of what is taking place in Syria, accusing the West of misrepresenting the events in Syria. Sajjadi added we have offered suggestions to Syria, but the Syrian government sees that it can resolve its problems alone.¹¹⁰

News spread to the effect that Iran has directed political and security messages to Turkey regarding events in Syria, and that Iran will confront any NATO intervention in Syria by striking NATO targets in Turkey¹¹¹, and that Iran has directed similar messages to other parties through Arab states such as the United Arab Emirates; that, in addition to the potential risks, challenges, and losses due to the decline of relations between Turkey and Iran. The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said if we were made to choose between Turkey and Syria, we will undoubtedly choose Syria.¹¹² Even stronger terms are used, behind the scenes. Furthermore, Iran has already taken a strict position regarding any potential NATO intervention in Syria, which included warnings regarding the NATO bases in Turkey.

Turkey riposted by publicly accepting to join the Missile Shield Project which it has agreed to in principle, but had abstained from naming the countries targeted by the missile shield. The path of Turkish foreign policy in the last months, especially toward Syria, goes along with Ankara's complete agreement to the deployment of the missile shield on Turkish territory.¹¹³

Turkey has previously warned against mentioning Iran as a country that is targeted by the project, but this does not change the nature of the project. That was reflected by French President Nicholas Sarkozy who told the Turkish President Abdullah Gul, during

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Elie Shalhub, Iran: protecting the walls of Damascus in defense of Beirut and Tehran, Al-Akhbar Newspaper, June 24, 2011.

The spokesman of the Iranian foreign ministry denied allegations of Iran threatening Turkey after receiving information claiming that NATO intends to attack Syria through its bases in Turkey. (in: Iran denies allegations of Iranian threats against Turkey, Akhbar Al-Alam, June 29, 2011).

¹¹² Assafir Newspaper, July 21, 2011.

¹¹³ The Turkish Milliyet Newspaper (July 14, 2011) reported that intense communications took place in recent months between American President Barack Obama and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and between the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. The paper stated that Turkey, which perceived the missile shield project with caution, now welcomes it.

the Lisbon Summit where the project was approved in fall 2010, we should call a cat, a cat; i.e. Iran should be named by name.¹¹⁴

3–The bilateral environment

Relations between Syria and Turkey evolved in an unbalanced manner: political and temporary considerations may have overtaken the Syrian side, while Turkey was operating on broader and deeper levels. It appears that relations have exhausted their potential, which has permitted Turkey to consider the ending of its relations with Syria as a regional player and to interfere in Syria's future paths and to dominate it; especially that the Turks are aware of the increasing gap in economic and political power between the two countries, and Turkey's ability to exert influence even inside Syria itself, while Syria's ability to extend its influence inside Turkey has diminished.

When balances in politics are shaken, the relations must be reshaped according to the new material and moral balance of power; and it appears that this is what is taking place with the Turks, who feel that they have the power and the will to effect events, while Syria lacks this ability, as well as being exhausted with its internal situation, the failure of economic policies, and the security and political challenges.

Here, it is possible that Turkey will work to crystallize a new theory for its foreign policy that surpasses the notion of strategic depth and the principle of zero problems to the principle of active intervention in the age of Arab revolutions with the aim of affecting their demarche. The initiatives of the Turkish foreign policy at this level can be summed up in the following points:

- Turkey maintained its pressures on the regime in Syria in order to enact change, following a complex policy that included the readiness to offer advice, media and political pressure, organizing the Syrian opposition, threats of international intervention¹¹⁵, enforcing political and economic sanctions, alluding to military action, etc.¹¹⁶

114 Assafir Newspaper, July 15, 2011.

115 The Turkish Radikal Newspaper quoted Turkish sources as saying that Turkey's participation in the international intervention within the concept of 'humanitarian intervention' was the theme of broad Turkish debates and estimates on the official level, and it also was a major topic in the phone conversation between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and American President Barack Obama. Assafir Newspaper, August 15, 2011.

- Syrian Ambassador to Tehran Hamed Hasan described the position of the Turkish government regarding events in his country (July 11, 2011) as suspicious, adding that the Turkish posture shocked the Syrian side and that the statements of Turkish officials caused the bewilderment of the Syrian leadership, and that the Syrian people sees no justification for the organization of Syrian opposition conferences in Turkey.

Hasan also accused America and Israel of working for years to destabilize Syria under the banner of popular protests; millions of dollars were spent and armed gangs were supplied with weapons, supplies, and information technology (by the US and Israel), claiming that these actions come as part of the revenge against Syria due to its rejectionist positions.¹¹⁷

- Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that his country wishes for Syria to hasten the enactment of what was agreed upon with Syrian President Bashar Al Assad in Damascus, and to translate the matters that were agreed upon on the terrain of reality at the closest possible time.¹¹⁸

- Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that for Ankara, what is taking place in Syria is a domestic Syrian affair. For the first time since the beginning of the events, Davutoğlu's statements included an indirect admission that the Syrian army is facing armed fighters in some cities. Following talks with South Africa's foreign minister (August 20, 2011), Davutoğlu said in a press conference that when the Syrian army conducts military operations in the cities, it is reminiscent of collective punishment tactics. Armed men should be confronted in a manner that does not cause suffering to the civilians.¹¹⁹

- During an interview with the official Syrian television (August 21, 2011), Syrian President Bashar Al Assad directed an implicit message to Turkey, saying: we do not

116 Akhbar Al-Alam, August 13, 2011.

117 Al-Riad Newspaper, July 12, 2011, and Akhbar Al-Alam Newspaper, July 12, 2011.

118 UPI, August 15, 2011.

119 SANA, August 20, 2011.

know the real intentions (of the Turks)... perhaps they reflect a type of concern as we hear so often; if so, we appreciate and thank the concern of others over Syria. And perhaps they stem from a worry that any instability taking place in Syria will affect Turkey, which is a natural concern. The third possibility is that there is an attempt to play the role of the guide or the teacher or the role-player at the expense of the Syrian cause; such an issue would be firmly rejected by any official anywhere in the world, including in Turkey.¹²⁰

- The higher anti-terrorism commission in Turkey met on August 25, 2011; the meeting was chaired by the vice prime minister Bashir Atalay, and saw the participation of the ministers of foreign affairs, the interior, defense, justice, and finance, as well as the heads of the police and the intelligence services and security officials. The meeting discussed the ongoing developments in Syria and the negative potentialities that could affect Turkey's security and stability.¹²¹

- Turkish President Abdullah Gul said that Turkey had lost its confidence in the Syrian regime with the continuation of its bloody campaign against the protestors, the situation (in Syria) has reached a point where nothing is enough anymore; Gul also claimed that the promises of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to halt the security campaign did not materialize, adding that he is closely following the latest developments in Syria, and that he receives daily intelligence reports on the details of the ongoing events in the country.¹²²

- Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that the officials of the Syrian regime may face the same fate as the Arab leaders who were deposed in 2011, and that the only solution is to immediately give up weapons and listen to the demands of the people. Erdoğan stressed that Turkey is reminding the Syrian and Yemeni governments of this reality as it previously did with the Egyptian and Tunisian governments.¹²³

120 SANA, August 21, 2011.

121 Assafir Newspaper, August 26, 2011.

122 Akhbar Al-Alam Newspaper, August 28, 2011.

123 Assafir Newspaper, August 29, 2011.

4–The domestic environment

- This issue is linked to several factors, notably the need to simulate the political mode of a broad and active current in Turkey, which is that of political Islam, which was very affected by the events in Syria, especially as presented by the international media – i.e., this Turkish public was affected by religious and sectarian pressures and ideologies, that were intentional and made with the purpose of incitement, regarding the events. The political and media discourse of the government in Turkey not only went along with this mode, but has also engaged in directing it, mobilizing it, and manipulating its components in order to garner further sectarian polarization inside Turkey itself, and not only abroad.

- Many of the instances of sectarian incitement were explained as part of the fever of the parliamentary elections, which were conducted on June 12, 2011. The practical purpose was to gain a larger section of the vote of the religious Turks (and Arabs and Kurds) who usually voted for other parties, such as the Nationalist Action Party, the Republican People's Party, the (Kurdish) Peace and Democracy Party, etc. this public represents a very influential bloc in the elections; and since this sort of mobilization conjoined with media pressure can produce direct and effective responses in electoral behavior, Erdoğan's party garnered over 50 percent of the voters' ballots in the aforementioned elections.

- Turks have serious fears that the development of events in Syria could lead to the creation of new situations, or catalyze domestic sources of threat in Turkey, especially that the social, ethnic, and religious composition of the two countries is similar. Turkey could be seriously affected at two potential levels of the conflict: the Kurdish level and the sectarian level¹²⁴. Officials and analysts have discussed these two issues profusely, and Erdoğan has warned against them at a frequent and bewildering rate, to the point where some thought that Erdoğan seemed as if he were inciting these factors.

- The Syrian and Arab media has focused, with varying amounts of exaggeration, on the electoral factor in interpreting the Turkish position. This line of analysis was not accurate because the electoral position of Erdoğan's party was comfortable according to opinion surveys; the purpose of seeking further polarization may have been to obtain a

¹²⁴ Hazem Saghiyeh, Where lies the conspiracy?, Al-Hayat Newspaper, June 14, 2011.

comfortable majority that would allow the party to unilaterally amend the constitution, or to make such amendments easier. It could also be meant to justify planned initiatives such as resuming security and strategic relations with Israel¹²⁵ and pressuring Hamas in order to adopt specific policies that are amenable to Israel¹²⁶ –as well as preparing the public opinion for any potential military options against Syria, which requires a political blinding that can only be achieved through religious and sectarian polarization.

- Erdoğan personally practiced daily incitement –during and after the electoral campaign-¹²⁷, sending messages to the domestic Turkish scene and abroad regarding fears from a civil war and a potential division of Syria¹²⁸, with the accompanying exaggerations and polarizations regarding sectarian and ethnic strife.¹²⁹ These sectarian tactics are among the Turkish tools of influence over the Syrian domestic scene, and even in other spheres of the Arab and Islamic world, and there are circles in Turkey that believe that such a form of regional leadership should be sought.

5- Regarding the relative weights of the aforementioned determinants

All the levels and determinants mentioned above exist as influential factors in shaping the Turkish position regarding events in Syria. Here, the personal factor should also be stressed, and which is difficult to gauge and predict. This factor manifests itself in questions such as: what is the nature of the personal relationship and personal impressions between President Bashar Al Assad and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan? Are the perceptions and impressions between the two men preventing communication and the building of trust? This question –as important as it is- has to be cast aside due to the

¹²⁵ See and compare: Why did 'Marmara' not participate in the 'freedom flotilla 2?', Assafir Newspaper, June 20, 2011. And: Aisha Karbat, Why were the Turks absent from the 'freedom flotilla 2?', Al-Akhbar Newspaper, July 2, 2011.

¹²⁶ Al-Qabas Newspaper, Kuwait, July 26, 2011.

¹²⁷ Assafir Newspaper, May 27, 2011.

¹²⁸ Al Wattan online, May 2, 2011, and Assafir Newspaper, May 16, 2011.

¹²⁹ The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said during a meeting for the Association of Turkish Chambers of Commerce and Stock Exchanges in Ankara that Turkey is following the developments in Syria as if they were a domestic Turkish affair... we are exerting great efforts to prevent sectarian clashes in Syria. (Assafir Newspaper, May 17, 2011).

lack of any verifiable information. The personal modes and perceptions of the two leaders, and those close to them may influence the nature of the relationship between them; and this mainly applies to Erdoğan for he possesses the main power of decision regarding his country's stance toward the crisis in Syria.

We must now gage the relative weight of each of these factors influencing the Turkish position. What is the nature of their influence? Which are more influential? Which are stable? And which are variable? How should they be perceived; individually or combined? And this must be among the priorities of Syrian policy in this regard, with important stakes being dependent upon it, because by knowing the relative weights of the determinants and effects, sources of threat can be contained and effective treatment of the factors of the crisis between Syria and Turkey becomes possible.

It has been confirmed that there is an objective agreement –that did not emerge organically- between Turkey and parties such as the United States, France, Great Britain, Israel, and others, on the need to unravel the Syrian knot in regional politics under the banner of revolutions and democratic change, matters that are ignored in other countries where the conditions of freedoms, rights, and even basic human needs are more critical than in Syria. All of this would not have been possible without the existence of an active domestic environment in Syria.

D. The general manifestations of Turkey's position regarding the events in Syria

Turkey has adopted a complex position that includes an intentional degree of opacity and that functions on multiple levels. The Turkish discourse insinuates that Turkey supports the stability of the country, in all possible interpretations, to the point where supporting stability becomes the main objective and not the persistence of the political regime; and –from this perspective- the political regime itself may become a hurdle in the way of stability. With one foot in each trench, Turkey shows support for stability and the path of reform, while at the same time opening up to other options and alternatives, such as the current opposition or any potential future arrangements. All while practicing political, media, psychological, and even interventionist pressures on the political regime and on social, ethnic, and religious segments in Syria itself. The

general manifestations of the Turkish position, and the rhetoric of the Turkish policy, toward the events in Syria will be exposed through the following major axes: the political manifestations, the security and military manifestations, the ethnic manifestations, and the media manifestations.

1- The political manifestations

Turkey has shown varying behavior toward Syria, such as expressing its readiness to reach agreements with countries and parties that oppose Syria's policies. The Turks also exhibit a dynamism of rapprochement-diversions according to the potential gains and the possible role in Syrian affairs, especially if things developed toward further escalation –and Turkey is wagering on the fact that it possesses influential cards that could affect the direction of the current crisis. The political manifestations of the Turkish stance could be focused into the following points:

-Shifting from supporting the political regime to supporting stability, which –in the Turkish perspective on the Syrian phenomenon- are not synonyms. Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in a seminar in Istanbul (March 27, 2011) we wish for change that does not engender political instability.¹³⁰

- Stating that Turkey perceives the events in Syria as an internal affair, with all the negative -political and moral- connotations involved in the saying, which reflects a form of brute pragmatism or even disregard for the qualitative weight of the partner. It appears that Turkey is exploiting Syria's preoccupation with the ongoing crisis and, perhaps, its need to adapt with emergent Turkish policies.

- Exerting political pressures at a daily rate. Syrian affairs are almost never absent from the statements of Turkish officials such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gul, and Ahmet Davutoğlu. Syria was part and parcel of the electoral campaign of

130 Assafir Newspaper, March 29, 2011.

the Justice and Development Party, and an item in the internal debate that preceded parliamentary elections in June 12, 2011.¹³¹

- Active dealings with the Syrian opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and working to formulate an organization or a council that joins individuals and parties of the opposition abroad from various currents and affiliations, through public or secret conferences. In addition, Turkish policy has labored to sponsor contacts and understandings between the Muslim Brotherhood and other actors such as the United States and European countries, paving the way for them to lead the opposition.

Turkey has expressed its readiness to offer the Syrian state technical and legal support in matters relating to the legislations and laws affecting political parties, the media, combating corruption etc. by doing so, it was proposing itself as a monitor for reform¹³², and Turkish officials have repeated this rhetoric with a flare of arrogance that is unfamiliar in international relations.

- Turkish President Abdullah Gul called on his Syrian counterpart Bashar Al Assad to enact democratic reforms before it is too late. In the message that was transmitted on Tuesday 9/8/2011 by foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Gul said: I do not want a day to come where you feel regret as you look backward, realizing that you took too long to act, or that your action was too little... placing yourself at the helm of change will grant you a historic position instead of being swept by the winds of change.¹³³

- Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu directed what he described as the final warning to Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, stating that if military operations against civilians in Syria do not cease, there will be nothing left to discuss.

131 There is an opinion that this counts the importance of the electoral contest, given that the Justice and Development Party enjoyed a relatively comfortable position according to opinion polls in Turkey.

132 Turkish sources said we have given President Bashar Al Assad a large booklet including our entire experience in the field of founding parties and associations and the peaceful resolution of differences; he was always receptive, but we have not found a veritable translation of this positivity, Al-Shark Al-Awsat Newspaper, London, June 13, 2011.

133 Akhbar Al-Alam, August 13, 2011.

Davutoğlu recalled his last visit to Damascus on August 9, 2011¹³⁴, saying that he carried two specific demands: halting military operations against civilians and withdrawing the army from the cities, and responding to the democratic demands of the people. Turkey did not allow Syria any period of grace in terms of halting military operations. Davutoğlu said that after returning from the Damascus meeting, tanks withdrew from Hama, but since the evening of Thursday August 11, 2011... military operations expanded causing further bloodshed.¹³⁵

- The Turkish foreign minister said today, we wish to address the Syrian leadership once more: intensive operations against civilians in cities should be halted, the army should withdraw from towns and life should return to normal. If operations do not cease, there will be nothing left to talk about regarding the steps that we shall take during this period. This is my final word.¹³⁶

- Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan likened the situation in Syria to that of Libya saying we did what we could regarding Libya but we were not capable of achieving any results, therefore the matter has become an international affair now. Qadhafi did not fulfill our hopes and the result was clear... now the same situation is playing out in Syria... I have sent my foreign minister and have personally called several times. and despite all that the civilians are still being murdered.¹³⁷

- Turkish President Abdullah Gul said that Turkey has lost its confidence in the Syrian regime, and that the situation in Syria has reached a state where nothing is enough anymore.¹³⁸ Gul affirmed that Turkey had offered significant contributions to Syria in order to achieve democratic transition, but that he has lost his confidence in

134 The Turkish foreign minister's visit to Syria (August 9, 2011) was seen as a decisive event and an opportunity for Syrian-Turkish relations, see for example: Hasan Kanbolat, Davutoğlu in Syria: the beginning of the end, , Today's Zaman, Istanbul: August 8, 2011, & Fatma Dişli Zibak, Assad's Choice, Today's Zaman, Istanbul: August 10, 2011.

135 Anadolu Agency, Ankara: August 15, 2011.

136 Anadolu Agency, August 15, 2011.

137 Anadolu Agency, August 17, 2011.

138 Anadolu Agency, August 28, 2011.

the Syrian regime due to its recent positions toward its people, adding that he is closely following the latest developments in Syria and is receiving daily intelligence reports on the details of the ongoing events in the country.¹³⁹

2– Security and military manifestations

Security and military aspects represent an extension to the political manifestations, but by other means. In reality, security and military methods are an executive tool for a political decision. As there are both public and secret levels in the political field, the same applies to military matters: security and military affairs have public facets and others that are secret. This could be expressed in the following points:

- Turkey has focused on security and military (or intelligence) interaction with the events with the head of the Turkish Military Intelligence general Hakan Fidan – rather than the foreign minister- becoming the mailman for Syria –a decision that was made by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Similarly, Turkish officials and the media would leak military and security information and reports regarding the situation in Syria in all the statements, insinuations, psychological pressures, and negative publicity; while focusing on highlighting the meetings of Erdoğan with the Chief of Staff and the head of intelligence in the media outlet.
- The dossier of the events in Syria was transferred to the Turkish National Security Council, as the stress was being placed on the fears of instability, religious and sectarian conflict, Kurdish repercussions, the possibility of division, and the potential security threats against Turkey. The military establishment was given directions to be prepared for any potential security development, and to prepare specific field options that could be enacted if necessary. At the same time, practical and executive steps were taken to make the borders more porous to the infiltration of individuals, weapons, and all forms of moral and material support.
- Discussing border security, and even closing the borders for a short period (a few hours) on April 1, 2011 under the pretext that PKK fighters had crossed the borders from Syria into Turkey –an act that involved several insinuations concerning the inability of the Syrian state to secure the borders, the confirmation of the

139 Anadolu Agency, August 28, 2011.

presence of Kurdish fighters in Syria, or the stirring of fears inside Turkey regarding the return of the PKK into action starting from Syria, which would require some form of Turkish intervention, or, the objective could be to insinuate that Syria wishes to resume its support for the PKK party.

- Spreading rumors to the effect that the Turkish army is prepared to establish safe havens in specific regions inside Syrian territories, such as Al-Qamishli and Deir Al-Zur¹⁴⁰ as a precaution to absorb the potential flow of refugees into Turkey if the violence in Syria escalated. The official denial of such information is but a form of confirmation.¹⁴¹ Information was also spread claiming that the Turkish army was preparing to conduct military operations against Syria aiming to establish military and political opposition bases along the example of Benghazi in Libya –as part of plans by NATO and other parties.¹⁴²
- Security and intelligence coordination with international, regional, and Syrian opposition parties. Rumors spread to the effect that Turkey had participated in organizing meetings and plans –in this regard- for the interest of political and intelligence centers in Turkey itself, as well as countries such as the United States and Israel, and even Arab states. These actions are independent from the ongoing coordination in the context of security and strategic agreements with NATO, the United States and Israel, and others in the fields of security, combating terrorism, containing sources of threat, etc. these alliances and arrangements could also potentially affect the Syrian situation.
- Turkey has recalled its military reservists due to the continuing crisis in Syria, with large army units set to be deployed along the Syrian-Turkish borders. The

140 See for example: Robert Fisk, *Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?*, *The Independent*, May 30, 2011. and Soner Cagaptay, *A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?*, *Hurriyet Daily news*, July 3, 2011.

141 See the formulation of the denial in the following title: *Turkey denies the intention to establish a safe zone for refugees by intervening in Syrian territories.* (Akhbar Al-Alam, June 1, 2011). As for the actual news piece, it read as follows: a responsible source in the Turkish foreign ministry has denied ongoing talks regarding Turkey's planning of a military intervention in Syrian territories with the objective of establishing a safe zone in which refugees from Syria could be gathered; if the events ongoing in Syria escalated and a large wave of collective displacement toward Turkey takes place. The source affirmed that Turkey has no plans in this regard, and that such information has no truth to it whatsoever. (Akhbar Al-Alam, June 1, 2011).

142 See for example: Robert Fisk, *Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?*, *The Independent*, May 30, 2011.

mobilization call included all soldiers and officers who had completed their service in the Turkish army in the last five years¹⁴³. There are Turkish military preparations and reinforcements for the Second Army that is responsible for the Syrian borders. There may be some truth to the claims of the Turkish intelligence regarding the sneaking of PKK fighters into Turkey through the regions of Gaziantep and the Alexandretta province¹⁴⁴, however, the main objective of such leaks is to prepare for intervention and the imposition of a buffer zone inside Syria or pressuring Syria to execute the demands transmitted by Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Tuesday August 9, 2011 regarding the need to hasten the enactment of radical reforms.¹⁴⁵

3- Ethnic manifestations

There is a great resemblance between the ethnic structures in Syria and in Turkey, which justifies the Turkish statement indicating that the Turks regard the Syrian phenomenon as a Turkish domestic affair; but this is not only due to the similarity, but also to the propensity of Turkey to be influenced by the events in Syria (is there not a potentiality in the opposite direction?), especially regarding the national and sectarian dimensions; Turkey hosts a large and active Kurdish ethnicity, which has political, cultural, and national demands that cannot be neglected indefinitely. The manifestations of the ethnic dimension of Turkish position vis-à-vis Syria's demands can be summed up in the following points:

- Narrating events in Syria from a sectarian perspective, which includes the non-innocent or intentional repetition of terms and vocabulary such as the Sunnis and the Alawites. On March 31, 2011 during a visit to London, Erdoğan said that President Bashar Al Assad is a beloved name in Syria, enjoying benefits stemming

143 Akhbar Al-Alam, August 13, 2011.

144 The Hurriyet Newspaper reported that the Turkish intelligence warned that two groups composed of six terrorists have entered Turkey through Syria, including a female suicide bomber, adding that the group is planning a suicide attack near a military unit (Assafir Newspaper, August 26, 2011).

145 Turkish military massing at the borders in preparation for intervention and the imposition of a buffer zone in Syria, Al Arabiya, August 12, 2011, Akhbar Al-Alam, August 12, 2011.

from his wife, due to him being Alawite and his wife being Sunni, which made him into a phenomenon that is inclusive of all of Syria.¹⁴⁶

The terminology used to depict the situation appears to contradict the mainstream political terminology in Syria, as it does not conform with the vocabulary and terminology of public policy and the political culture of the country; this language, however, conforms to Erdoğan's description of the situation in Turkey itself, as he always speaks of Sunnis and Alawites in Turkey as well.

- Warning of massacres similar to the tragic example of Halabja in Iran, and stirring fears of the risk of the flaring of sectarian sedition that could travel from Syria into Turkey. This perspective betrays a brute approach to the Syrian question, a metaphor that does not conform with reality, especially that Turkey was referring to an incident relating to the Kurds, while its story with its own Kurds is no better than the former state of Iraq's Kurds with Baghdad's central state.

- Intervening on the Turkoman front, inciting or encouraging their public to demonstrate, as well as preparing and choreographing instances of televised displacements of Syrians to camps that were previously prepared for this purpose. These actions have shocked the Syrian side given the fact that Turkey is intervening with the Syrian ethnic fabric, while Syria had attempted to cast aside the ethnic factor in its relations with Turkey –in order to maintain the momentum and evolution of these relations.

- Turkey also intervened with the Arabs in Turkey¹⁴⁷ in order to affect their position and perceptions regarding the events in the homeland. That took place in the following ways:

- Organizing continual protests against the Syrian regime, especially on Fridays, in the mosques and in front of the Syrian embassy in Ankara and the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Assafir Newspaper, April 1, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ For further information on Arabs in Turkey, see: Aqeel Saeed Mahfudh, Arabs in Turkey: an axis of communication or an element of tension?, a paper presented at the conference the Arabs and Turkey: the challenges of the present and the wagers of the future, Doha: The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, May 18-19, 2011.

At the same time, demonstrations supporting the regime of President Bashar Al Assad took place in the Alexandretta province, Antalya, and other regions; especially as the Syrian opposition was holding its conference in the city of Antalya (May 30-June 2, 2011).¹⁴⁹

- The holding of symposiums, conferences, and solidarity meetings for students, researchers, economists, etc. against the regime and in support of the Syrian opposition. That included, for instance, the meeting held in Ankara by The Association of Friendship and Cultural Solidarity with Syrian Businessmen and Industrialists in order to discuss the developments in Syria; this meeting which took place in the Teachers' Club in Ankara saw a large participation by Syrians and Turks of Syrian origin.¹⁵⁰

- Encouraging Turkey's Arabs to adopt positions that could affect the situation inside Syria. For example, the Arabs of Mardin issued a statement on the crisis in Syria saying the Arabs of Mardin are among the oldest and established Arab tribes that have thrived in the city of Mardin and its environs since times immemorial, they have always been an inseparable part of the Arab nation and especially its Syrian sons, even if their (the Arabs of Mardin) territory today falls in the land of a non-Arab state, which is the brotherly state of Turkey. As such they condemn the bloodshed that the Syrian people, with its different races and ethnicities, is being subjected to, whichever may be the hand that sheds the blood, (the Arabs of Mardin) stand in one line next to their brethren of the (Syrian) people.¹⁵¹

- Turkish positions engaged in something akin to flirtation with opposition parties and activists on the inside, which explains the pro-Turkish slogans and calls in

148 See for example: Demonstrations in the Turkish city of Istanbul condemning violence against the protestors in Syria, Russia Today (Arabic), April 16, 2011. An official in the Turkish Association of the Endowment of Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Aid said that a large demonstration took place in the Bayazid square facing Istanbul University after the Friday prayers, indicating that the Association has organized, in cooperation with 13 Turkish associations and organizations, protest demonstrations against the practices of the Syrian regime toward the peaceful protests of the Syrian people that demand freedom.

149 Al Wattan Newspaper, June 2, 2011.

150 Turkey Today, The Turkish Jihan News Agency, July 27, 2011.

151 See for instance the statement of Mardin's Arabs on May 7, 2011 in: <http://almuhallamia.com/vb/showthread.php?p=20> last accessed on August 30, 2011.

certain areas such as Homs, Baniyas, Tel Kalkh, Jisr Al-Shughur, and Hama, where the Turkish flag was raised, and where placards and writings supportive of Erdoğan appeared, some calling for Turkey's intervention in the Syrian crisis.¹⁵²

- The Hurriyet Newspaper quoted a high-level Turkish official, who wished to remain anonymous, as making statements that reflect a sectarian reading of the Syrian crisis when he said the rule in Syria is in the hands of an Alawite minority that is related to the Shi'a in the region and to Iran. Based on that, the (Shi'a) Iranian support for Syria is one of the factors prompting Turkey to prepare to participate in a military intervention against Syria.¹⁵³

4- The media manifestations and communication support

The Turkish media scene adopts a position close to that of the government regarding the Syrian crisis in terms of the media coverage and the opinion articles that do not stray from the broad lines of the government's stance regarding the crisis¹⁵⁴. In fact, the media often serves as a front for the incitement and mobilization of the public opinion to stand with the government's foreign policy, or to prepare the public for what is to come.

- The media in Turkey is directing active demands to the government for a broad intervention in the Syrian affair¹⁵⁵ under various slogans and justifications¹⁵⁶, headed

¹⁵² Akhbar Al-Alam, May 13, 2011.

¹⁵³ Assafir Newspaper, August 15, 2011. On the other hand, the People's Republican Party, the Labor Party, and others have reservations toward the policy of the Justice and Development Party on the Syrian crisis, its management of the refugees dossier, and the attempts at incitement and raising sectarian tensions, especially in the Alexandretta region where a mode supportive of Syria and President Bashar Al Assad prevails, see: Hasan Kanbolat, Syrian reflection on politics in Hatay, Today's Zaman, August 10, 2011.

¹⁵⁴ See for example:

Fatma Dişli Zibak, Syria must heed int'l warnings, Today's Zaman, August 8, 2011.

Ergun Babahan, Saddam failed to see it, so has Assad, Today's Zaman, August 8, 2011.

Abdulhamit Bilici, Will Assad listen to Turkey or follow in Saddam's footsteps?, Today's Zaman, August 12, 2011.

¹⁵⁵ See for example: İhan Tanır, Ankara must lead the pressure against Damascus, Hurriyet Daily news, Istanbul: August 5, 2011.

¹⁵⁶ Suat Kiniklioğlu, Questioning Turkey's 'doves' on Syria, Today's Zaman, Istanbul: August 10, 2011.

by the need to support the demand for change and to help the Syrians bring down the regime, or as a preemptive policy to prevent aspects of the crisis from spreading into Turkey, either on the Kurdish or sectarian fronts.

- The Turkish media did not wait for the situation in Syria to clarify, initiating an open campaign against Assad personally that is still continuing until now. Making the matter even more puzzling, media outlets that are very close to the Justice and Development Party, such as *Star*, *Turkiye*, and *Yeni Safak* newspapers, as well as those affiliated with the Turkish preacher residing in America Fethullah Gulen (such as *Zaman*), were the most savage in this campaign from the outset; many of the Islamist authors who used to call for the unity of Turkey and Syria took the most extreme positions in this unprecedented smear campaign in a manner that cannot be comprehended.¹⁵⁷
- Turkey worked to direct or engineer the image emanating from the Syrian scene by preparing camps to receive refugees and presenting them as if displacements were taking place; sometimes, these camps were merely a form of cover for the escape of Syrian armed men who are supported by the Turkish side –in addition to the humanitarian dimension.
- Turkey arranged for a visit for American actress Angelina Jolie to the camps in the Alexandretta province¹⁵⁸, which gave a global humanitarian dimension to the Syrian scene, in addition to the visits of officials from the UN refugee agency¹⁵⁹, the UN Human Rights Commission¹⁶⁰, the European Council¹⁶¹, and others.
- Refugee camps and the other side of the borders with Turkey became the scene of broad media activism, with permanent cameras placed to continually monitor and register what goes on in the border region in order to supplement media coverage.

¹⁵⁷ Assafir Newspaper, May 17, 2011, and see for example: Murat Yetkin, Assad has nine lives, Hurriyet Daily news, Istanbul: August 10, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Angelina Jolie visits Syrian refugees, thanks Turkey for assistance, Today's Zaman, June 17, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Akhbar Al-Alam, June 10, 2011.

¹⁶⁰ The Arabic speaking official Turkish channel, June 17, 2011.

¹⁶¹ A delegation from the European Council visits the camps of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Al-Anba' Newspaper, Kuwait, July 24, 2011.

- Permitting the Syrian opposition, in areas close to the borders, to communicate through Turkish cell phone networks and by using satellite transmission. There are reports on suspicious Turkish telephone networks, such as the third (undeclared) cellular network in Lebanon that was reputed to have had a role in Syria's troubles.¹⁶² Several meetings were held, including in Istanbul (July 27-July 30, 2011) in order to help the opposition digitally organize its operations, and to allow it to use modern communications, smart phones, etc.¹⁶³
- The Turkish media gave very broad coverage to the Syrian opposition's conference in Antalya (April 31-May 3, 2011), while they seemed to have ignored the Syrian decree no. 49, issued in 2011, granting Syrian nationality to the Kurds whose names are listed among the foreigners' records in the civic affairs department of Al-Hasakah.¹⁶⁴
- The Turkish media has reported several positions and leaks that the Turkish government did not wish to adopt outright, such as the talk of safe havens¹⁶⁵, the direct threats and warnings of a Turkish surge into Syrian territories, and the sectarian and religious incitement, which has gone beyond the traditional political dimensions to become an exaggerated phenomenon inside Turkey itself.
- The Turkish media highlighted the Turkish protestors and opposition that are supportive of the positions of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan vis-à-vis the Syrian process, in a manner reinforcing Erdoğan's position among the Turkish public.

E. Turkey and the Syrian opposition

For Turkey, the Syrian opposition represents a real wager that Turkey attempts to mature and catalyze, doing everything possible to make it a realistic choice and a

¹⁶² Khalil Harb, Erdogan Harasses Syria... why?, Assafir Newspaper, June 16, 2011.

¹⁶³ Al Akhbar Newspaper, July 28, 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Assafir Newspaper, May 17, 2011.

¹⁶⁵ See for example: Robert Fisk, Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?, Independent, May 30, 2011. & Soner Cagaptay, A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?, Hurriyet Daily news, July 3, 2011.

considerable force in politics, and even in the field. Turkey's story with the opposition began many years ago, MPs from the Justice and Development Party had spoken with President Bashar Al Assad regarding the Muslim Brotherhood; furthermore, the Turkish media that is close to Erdoğan's party and his cabinet continues to depict the Syrian phenomenon from a critical perspective that is close to that of the Brotherhood.

The latest events in Syria have revealed a new reality, permitting Turkey to take public and declared measures; the first steps consisted in holding a conference for the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey, as well as the hosting of the General Supervisor of the Muslim Brotherhood in Turkey where he issues statements opposed to the Syrian regime and leads the activism and the participation of the Brotherhood in the events.¹⁶⁶

One of the Syrian officials said that the Syrian leadership has realized, even if belatedly, that the protest movement that struck Syria recently was organized and coordinated by the Muslim Brotherhood, and that some of those are acting from their place of residence in Turkey. The Syrian authorities are in possession of enough tangible evidence -such as recordings, communications, and information- to make this conclusion beyond doubt; even if the time to publish this evidence has not arrived yet, including a broadcast station that was provided by Turkey to the Syrian Brotherhood in order to transmit opposition media material¹⁶⁷. During his visit to Syria (April 2011) Ahmet Davutoğlu said that the Turkish steps came to contain the Muslim Brotherhood, and not to stir sedition or to harm Syria's stability.¹⁶⁸

Turkey also sponsored another opposition activity that was termed The Conference of Syria's Tribes, followed by Antalya's conference that was held under the title The Syrian Conference for Change (May 30-June 2, 2011), which was attended by between 275 and 300 participants composed of opposition figures in exile and a number of partners from Turkey, the United States, and Arab and European countries¹⁶⁹. The conference

166 Assafir Newspaper, April 4, 2011.

167 Al Akhbar Newspaper, April 12, 2011.

168 Ibid.

169 Al Akhbar Newspaper, June 3, 2011.

was prepared, coordinated, and funded through the efforts and coordination of several active intelligence services.

The conference met reservations by Syrian opposition figures such as Burhan Ghalyoun, Hasan Abd al-Azeem, and others. The reason for the protest was that the conference, or a number of its organizers and participants, was linked to foreign agendas, American and European as well as Turkish ones, with Burhan Ghalyoun describing Turkish policy as wishing to coronate the Muslim Brotherhood's organization at the head of the Syrian opposition.¹⁷⁰

Syrian activists attempted to demonstrate against the conference. Five hundred Syrian citizens arrived in Antalya for that purpose, but the Turkish authorities limited their movement in an unexpected manner, asking them to leave Turkey before escorting them to the airport¹⁷¹. These actions seem to contradict previous statements by Erdoğan himself who said that Turkey, which had opened its doors to the opposition, also had its doors open to those supporting President Bashar Al Assad.

- Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood agreed to interpret and depict the events as popular demands. There was also a resemblance in the specification of the nature of these demands, especially after the statements of Ibrahim Kalin, adviser to President Abdullah Gul, to the effect that the Islamists must be included in the system of rule.¹⁷²
- The rejection of the Syrian regime's interpretation of events, especially in what relates to the existence of foreign and domestic schemes to destabilize Syria. Turkey and the Syrian opposition say that no foreign conspiracy exists.¹⁷³
- Turkey plays the role of the Syrian opposition's Godfather, continuing to organize and coordinate opposition conferences in Turkey, while sending messages to the Syrian domestic scene highlighting its pressures against the Syrian regime –and

170 DPress, Damascus, June 1, 2011.

171 Al Watan Newspaper, Damascus, June 3, 2011.

172 Zaman Newspaper, Istanbul, May 23, 2011.

173 Watan Newspaper, Istanbul, March 31, 2011.

encouraging the persistence of protests. Those receiving these Turkish messages gave clear responses by displaying photographs, placards, and slogans supporting Turkey and thanking Erdoğan for the support that he offers to the opposition.¹⁷⁴

- The careful management of the refugee dossier as to make it a continual issue and avoiding serious coordination with the Syrian side; the Turkish Red Crescent has even refused to assist the Syrian Red Crescent in that regard.¹⁷⁵ One of the refugee camps blocked the way of an international Red Cross team with boulders and gunfire when they attempted to enter the camp from the Syrian side of the borders¹⁷⁶; such an incident does not occur spontaneously and must be linked to a Turkish will that insists on being the exclusive gate to dealing with this dossier.

- The plans to establish safe havens¹⁷⁷ and refugee camps represent a potential prelude to the coordinator of the opposition actions, in order to take the country on the Libyan path.

- A Syrian opposition conference was held in Istanbul (July 16, 2011) named The National Salvation Conference announcing a shadow government that is supposed to be prepared to manage Syria's affairs in the post-Assad phase¹⁷⁸. The conference was attended by around 350 opposition figures who elected a salvation council including 25 opposition members in exile, with the hope of electing another 50 from inside Syria. The conference called for the peaceful transfer of power in Syria to a national government and forming a salvation commission composed of 75 members representing the full spectrum of the Syrian opposition inside and in exile in order to manage the transitional phase.¹⁷⁹

174 Akhbar Al Alam, May 13, 2011.

175 Russia Today-Arabic, June 17, 2011.

176 SANA, June 29, 2011.

177 See for example: Robert Fisk, Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?, Independent, 30-5-2011. & Soner Cagaptay, A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?, Hurriyet Daily news, Istanbul: July 3, 2011.

178 Al-Yawm Al-Sabi', Cairo, July 14, 2011, Akhbar Al-Alam, July 14, 2011.

179 Assafir Newspaper, July 18, 2011.

- The Syrian News Agency (SANA) criticized the opposition meeting in Istanbul claiming that as with their previous meetings, (the Istanbul Conference) was characterized by provocative speeches against their homeland, with the speakers calling for foreign help to achieve their power ambitions. SANA said that the human rights advocates among those assembled fielded the staunchest calls for violence, sabotage, challenging the state, and breaking the law; the news agency indicated that the meeting overlapped with the visit of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Istanbul.¹⁸⁰
- Over 200 Syrian activists, arriving from Syria, the United States, Europe, and Saudi Arabia, met in Istanbul for four days (July 27, 2011) with the objective of coordinating the protest movement in Syria. One of the organizers said that the event was a strategic meeting including workshops on smart phone technologies and different kinds of satellite phones, and whatever can be used in a conflict such as this one. The participants will also discuss safe methods of communication with individuals in Syria.¹⁸¹
- Syrian opposition figures belonging to the Islamist current held a meeting in Istanbul on August 20-21, 2011 in order to prepare for the announcement of the Syrian [transitional] National Council that is expected to coordinate the action of the Syrian opposition. The council is composed of 120 members, half of whom are abroad and the other half inside Syria. A preparatory committee worked for two weeks before this meeting in order to formulate standards for the representation of the various political powers in Syria.¹⁸²
- Ersat Hurmuzlu, senior adviser to Turkish President Abdullah Gul, said that the people and the regime and the opposition in Syria must realize the fact that Ankara has no hidden agendas in the Syrian case. Hurmuzlu hoped that the Syrian opposition would unify its ranks to be strong in front of the world, noting that this

180 SANA, July 17, 2011. Assafir Newspaper, July 18, 2011.

181 Al Akhbar Newspaper, July 28, 2011.

182 Assafir Newspaper, August 22, 2011, and see: Syrian opposition seeks united front in Istanbul, Today's Zaman, August 21, 2011.

matter is left, after today, to the Syrian people with the multiplication of scenarios regarding this dangerous situation.¹⁸³

F. The Turkish rhetoric toward the Syrian crisis

The general Turkish rhetoric regarding the events in Syria could be summed up in the following points: change and democracy, the ethical position and the will of the peoples, the Sultanistic protocols i.e. providing advice, the Turkish burden or what Turkey must do, and the existing challenges or fears from instability, civil war, or division.

1- Change and democracy

The Turks stressed the importance of political change and reform in response to the demands of the people, and that everything must be decided through the electoral ballots. Peaceful protest and political reform are seen as two indispensable conditions in the current regional time, and that Turkey cannot disregard what is taking place in the region –including in Syria- in response to interest-driven considerations and personal relations with leaders, because the will of the peoples comes first.

Ersat Hurmuzlu, President Abdullah Gul's adviser expressed this by saying it was natural for Turkey to support the demands of the Syrian people, as we did in all Arab states where popular protests occurred. It was natural to address the Syrian authority and indicate the need to listen to the just and legitimate demands of the Syrian people.¹⁸⁴

Hurmuzlu said that the Turkish leadership has repeatedly informed its Syrian counterpart that we are not against any regime or in favor of any regime, we are always with the peoples; and there is a need for change in the region, and instead of this change being imposed by the outside, let it happen from the inside. The solution is

¹⁸³ Akhbar Al-Alam, August 28, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Al Akhbar Newspaper, May 25, 2011.

not in using force and violence, but in the leaders moving ahead of their peoples by hastening the enactment of reforms.¹⁸⁵

Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that Turkey feels concern toward what is happening and has a clear position consisting in the necessity of the Syrian authorities enacting reforms and recognizing the legitimate demands of the people, and halting confrontations through a time table that puts an end to this tension; he added: we are working hard to achieve the reform process without damaging stability in Syria... the time has come for Syria to act with more decisiveness on the front of political reform.¹⁸⁶

2- The ethical position and the will of the peoples

Turkish officials insist that their position toward the events in Syria emanates from an ethical vision, which prioritizes the will of the peoples for change. In this regard, the following points deserve to be mentioned:

- Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that what is taking place in Arab countries is the expression of the will of these peoples, that the Middle East is at the beginning of a new phase, and that the demands for change and reform should be assimilated by the region's leaders.¹⁸⁷
- During a televised debate on the TV Net channel on May 29, 2011, Davutoğlu said that Turkey is exhibiting a moral position regarding the events in Syria. He added we have told Assad that we will offer him all forms of support in the matter of reform. We have shared everything with him, and we have expressed our concern by saying: like any Syrian, we are worried about the future of Syria and we wish to exert all efforts. And like any Syrian I say, we (the Syrians) must lead the change.¹⁸⁸

185 Al Akhbar Newspaper, May 25, 2011.

186 Akhbar Al-Alam, June 10, 2011.

187 Milliyet Newspaper, Istanbul, March 23, 2011.

188 Assafir Newspaper, May 3, 2011.

- President Gul's Senior Adviser, Ersat Hurmuzlu, said that Turkey is not concerned from change that could take place in a very friendly country, even if it were Syria, simply because Ankara realizes that the Arab peoples surpass their governments in terms of their positive perception of Turkey and its role; thus, the change of regimes does not mean the collapse of relations with Turkey.¹⁸⁹
- Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that the Syrian regime must immediately refrain from spilling the blood of the innocent, directing a warning: those who seek their objectives through the shedding of blood will drown –sooner or later- in the sea of spilt blood. He added: the despots cannot maintain their tyranny forever.¹⁹⁰

3- Sultanistic protocols: advice and council

The daily political commentaries of Turkish officials on the events in Syria focus on what they describe as former and current advice that was offered to President Bashar Al Assad in support of reform, a behavior that has become a distinguishing mark in the political and media discourse, as well as the official political demarche of Turkey with Syria. The matter involves the exertion of political pressures in the form of lessons and advice; these calls surpass the usual logic (or illogic) of advice in relations between countries, to a brand of political preaching that also addresses the social and cultural mentality of the public in Syria and the region. In this regard, focus can be placed on the following main points:

- Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that he was not surprised by the developments in Syria, and that he has previously spoken at length with President Bashar Al Assad on the need to enact reforms, the last of such occasions was during their meeting in Aleppo (February 6, 2011) after the inauguration of the Friendship Dam on the Orontes River.

Erdoğan expressed his support for President Asad's reformist project, however, he began repeating, on many occasions, what he termed as advice that he had offered to President Assad; Erdoğan went even further by repeating his advice in a critical

¹⁸⁹ Al Akhbar Newspaper, May 25, 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Akhbar Al-Alam, August 24, 2011.

manner, such as claiming that his advice would be sufficient to spare the country its current predicament, and that President Assad had not responded adequately.¹⁹¹

- During his reception of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (April 7, 2011), President Bashar Al Assad stressed Libya's readiness to benefit from the experiences of other countries, especially Turkey, in order to enhance the low projects that were designed by the relevant departments in the field of reform.¹⁹² Buthaina Sha'ban, political and media advisor to the Syrian President, exclaimed the Turkish model is important for us, Turkey has achieved great strides in the last years, and relations with Turkey are vital and cannot be trifled with.¹⁹³

- Upon his visit to Damascus (April 6, 2011) Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that his meetings in the Syrian capitol were focused on how Syria could benefit from the Turkish experience in transforming from a one-party system to a multi-party system in 1946. The journalists who accompanied Davutoğlu, Ghenghis Tshandar and Abdulhamit Bilici, affirmed that the largest part of his discussions with President Bashar Al Assad (two out of three hours) turned into a seminar on the Turkish experience, and that the meeting with Assad was superb given the great relief of the Turkish minister.¹⁹⁴

- On May 27, 2011 Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said that he believed that Syria could end the turmoil, but that the medication must be a form of shock therapy that included reforms in the fields of the economy, security, politics, and justice. He added if reforms were launched now, that would open the door for change and peace. He expressed his belief that President Bashar Al Assad wanted reforms but that specific elements within the regime were preventing reforms from taking place.

191 Statements, March 31, 2011.

192 SANA, April 7, 2011.

193 Buthaina Sha'ban, interview with the official Arabic speaking Turkish TV channel, April 2, 2011.

194 Assafir Newspaper, April 8, 2011.

- The official Turkish Anadolu agency quoted Erdoğan as saying that he had called President Bashar Al Assad on May 31, 2011, asking him to take a bold decision and to release all political prisoners; two days later a general pardon was announced. Erdoğan commented: I will call Assad to express my gratitude.¹⁹⁵
- The Turkish foreign ministry said that the speech of President Bashar Al Assad at Damascus University (June 20, 2011) carried positive as well as negative signs, and that a number of the promises made by Assad were among the Turkish advice directed to the Syrian leadership from the early days of the crisis. However, Assad's accusations against the opposition forces of conspiring against Syria in coordination with foreign powers, as well as the vague character of his reformist promises, are negative points. Turkish officials justified their position by the fact that Assad will have to conduct dialogue with the opposition forces that he is accusing of conspiracies, thus this accusation is a negative act because these statements do not build an atmosphere of trust between the opposing sides.¹⁹⁶

4- The Turkish burden or the logic of what must be done

Turkey's perspective on the events in Syria emanates from what Turkey sees as a political and ethical burden, due to the cultural and historical commonalities and the sense of moral responsibility; that in addition to the requirements of the Turkish model that Turks (and others) say that they must fulfill. It has already been mentioned above that Turkish officials affirm that they departed from ethical considerations when dealing with Syrian (and Arab) affairs, especially after the recent developments.

The concept of the Turkish burden escalates from the stance of offering advice and counseling, to offering support in the reform process, to practicing political and media pressures, up to coordinating regional and international efforts to intervene in the ongoing Syrian crisis. That is due to the fact that the notion of the burden easily becomes a form of super-Machiavellism, where what is good for Syria becomes what the Turks believe to be good for Syria. Here, the Syrian regime must enact reforms in a manner that makes others admit that these moves were taken under the influence of Turkish advice and pressures, otherwise, the so-called Turkish burden turns into its

¹⁹⁵ Anadolu Agency, June 2, 2011.

¹⁹⁶ Akhbar Al-Alam, June 22, 2011.

other facet, which is what must be done; i.e. working to induce change through various means, with the military and security option being one of them, even if not at the forefront so far. However, numerous hurdles and objective limits prevent such initiatives.¹⁹⁷

Joost Lagendijk, adviser to the Istanbul Center for Policies, said that Ankara's great discontent with what is happening in Syria is because Al Assad did not heed Turkish advice, which undermines Turkey's claims that it had become, during the last years, the strongest regional player. And it always said that the improvement of relations with Syria and Iran were the best demonstration of the success of its policies (zero conflicts), adding it has become clear that Turkey does not exert great influence over its neighbors, as it was proven that no other country had a decisive influence on Damascus.¹⁹⁸ In this context, the following manifestations could be listed:

- In an Istanbul seminar (March 26, 2011) Davutoğlu said the time for change in the Middle East has arrived. Turkey will work to achieve security and freedoms in this difficult phase of Middle Eastern history. What we saw as good for Turkey, we should also see as good for others: in this regard, Turkey supports change in the Middle East, but the manner of change is also important.¹⁹⁹
- Turkey has made plans to establish, safe havens inside Syrian territories, from Al-Qamishli to the city of Deir Al-Zur and other regions²⁰⁰, in order to prevent a potential flow of refugees into Turkey if the need arises.²⁰¹ Information was leaked on these preparations for political, media, and psychological purposes. Erdoğan himself spoke of the need for the Syrian regime to avoid repeating what he termed as, the Hama massacre, because committing such errors will cause problems that

197 See for example: Nihat Ali Ozcan, Will Turkey risk fighting with Syria?, Hurriyet Daily News, June 29, 2011.

198 Assafir Newspaper, June 6, 2011.

199 Assafir Newspaper, March 28, 2011.

200 See for example: Robert Fisk, Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?, Independent, May 30, 2011.

Soner Cagaptay, A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?, Hurriyet Daily news, July 3, 2011.

201 Robert Fisk, Who cares in the Middle East what Obama says?, Independent, May 30, 2011.

neither Syria nor the region can shoulder, if things in Syria deteriorate into 'massacres', we will be obliged to do what must be done.²⁰² But what is it that must be done?

- Turkish President Abdullah Gul stated that Turkey, will take its own measures if developments in Syria move toward the worst-case scenario. On the same day, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan exclaimed that he did not, want to see the Hama massacre occurring again in Syria. He warned that such an eventuality would force the international community to take a position against Syria, affirming that his country would take the same position in such a case.²⁰³

Erdoğan warned President Bashar Al Assad from the repercussions of what he termed as, continuing to kill civilians, warning that, Syria will not rise again if such massacres take place, asking that, the demands of the freedom-aspiring Syrian people be listened to, and noting that President Assad, has not taken serious steps to achieve reforms so far.²⁰⁴

- Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reiterated his commitment to keep the borders open to all Syrian brothers, saying that, Al Assad is underestimating the situation and insists on using brutality against his people; the Syrian case is completely different from the Libyan one. Erdoğan explained that the Turkish government perceives the matter as a Turkish domestic affair that is vital for Turkey. Erdoğan also reasserted his attempt to communicate with Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to reach a resolution for the political crisis in the country, but he noted that Assad was not responding to the reform demands and was not performing what was agreed upon with the Turkish government.²⁰⁵

- The Turkiye newspaper reported, quoting the Kuwaiti al-Ra'i newspaper, that Syrian President Bashar Al Assad has confirmed to the residents of Hama and Dar'a

202 Assafir Newspaper, May 2, 2011.

203 Al Akhbar Newspaper, May 4, 2011.

204 Al Akhbar Newspaper, May 4, 2011.

205 Akhbar Al-Alam, June 10, 2011.

that he is prepared to give up power. Al Assad said, I will leave the seat of power if I am convinced that the people do not want me to remain in the Presidency, Al Assad promised the locals to prosecute all those who ordered the shooting of protestors, or who practiced torture on detainees.²⁰⁶

- Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan directed a message to Syrian President Bashar Al Asad warning of an escalation of the situation in Syria. The letter included the following: that Assad halts all military operations, provides a safe environment for the citizens, listens to the demands of the opposition, announces a reform plan, and imposes security in the country. In a previous statement, Erdoğan had asserted that he had run out of patience regarding the escalation of events in Syria.²⁰⁷

- The Hurriyet newspaper reported on some of what went on during the meeting between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the envoy of the Syrian President General Hasan Turkmani in Ankara (June 16, 2011). Erdoğan reportedly said that the images emanating from Syria, are extremely worrisome for the entire Turkish people. Erdoğan warned that Ankara is also concerned due to the repeated waves of displacement of Syrians into Turkey, if things do not change course, the international community cannot be prevented from taking measures against Syria. There is nothing left for us to do. The responsibility is now on your shoulders, and you must cease violence immediately.²⁰⁸

5- The existing challenges

The political discourse in Turkey focuses on the existence of serious fears of events in Syria reflecting on Turkey's national security, especially on the sectarian and ethnic fronts. Turkey fears sectarian and ethnic clashes, or even a civil war, and things could evolve into a potential division of the country, which might also spread into Turkey. These are scenarios which are often discussed by Turkey, whose leaders express fears regarding them; however, Turkey's practical demarche sometimes appears as if Turkey

²⁰⁶ Turkiye Newspaper, Istanbul, June 16, 2011.

²⁰⁷ Turkiye Newspaper, Istanbul, June 17, 2011.

²⁰⁸ Assafir Newspaper, June 18, 2011.

is laboring for the realization of these scenarios! The Turkish position on this front can be summed up in the following points:

- Domestic reforms must be hastened, regardless of the nature of the political system that will emerge, in order to prevent developments that which would be difficult to control, such as the flaring of communal, sectarian, or ethnic clashes.
- The Turks fear that events in Syria might evolve toward the division of the country; Erdoğan said that he shared this worry with President Bashar Al Assad during his latest visit to Damascus, exclaiming: Turkey does not want to see any form of secession in Syria, and Syria must not allow any attempt that prepare the way for secession or division.²⁰⁹
- The current events in Syria could fuel a number of domestic conflicts in Turkey, especially on the sectarian front (Sunni-Alawite) and on the ethnic or nationalist front (Turkish-Kurdish).
- On the other hand, there are direct Kurdish developments in Turkey that are not related to the Syrian question, such as Erdoğan's receiving of stern warnings launched by Aysel Tuğluk, vice chair of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party, who said that, the Kurds will make their decision, and if it was not possible to establish democracy through the state, then the Kurds will establish their democracy, adding that, the present situation will change. However, the greatest threat came from Abdullah Öcalan, head of the Kurdish PKK, who said: until today I have not fought, I used to manage the war. But after June 15, 2011, I shall withdraw from this mission (managing the war)²¹⁰. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received strong criticisms from the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, which issued a statement condemning what it described as: incitement for hatred between believers, and practicing politics through the use of ethnic and sectarian mobilization. This statement criticized Erdoğan for, remaining silent in front of the crowds that he addresses, and who hurl shouts of resentment every time Alawis are referred to in his speeches. The statement also included that, no permanent civil peace can be

209 Al Watan Online, May 2, 2011. And Assafir Newspaper, May 16, 2011.

210 Assafir Newspaper, June 1, 2011.

established if the Turk did not defend the right of the Kurd, and the Kurd the right of the Turk, the Sunni the right of the Alawi, and the Alawi the right of the Sunni.²¹¹

- Turks are pondering whether coordination will resume between Syria and the PKK. Could the Kurdish party launch operations inside Turkey as a form of repayment for Syria who supported the party in the past? Many specialists admit that, the resumption of coordination is a weak possibility, but it cannot be discounted.²¹² A Turkish intelligence service report (mentioned at length above) said that Syria –after the recent events- has halted its intelligence cooperation with Turkey in the field of combating terrorism, and that it is offering support to the PKK, and has begun hosting some of its leaders as the situation was before 1999.²¹³

G. The potential scenarios of the Syrian crisis (from Turkey's perspective)

Commentaries on the events in Syria focus on several tracks and their potential evolution, headed by the potentialities of the Turkish position. However, we will still be discussing a secondary track of the events, even if Turkey's presence on the Syrian scene has considerable weight, for the principle arena is in Syria, and the main agency remains in the hands of the Syrians. Here, the following notable scenarios –from the Turkish perspective- can be listed:

The first scenario: reform

The reform scenario conforms with the political discourse in Turkey and to Turkey's notion of becoming a model in the region. Numerous statements and demands were made by Turkish politicians in this regard, perhaps since reform would be a guarantee of political stability in a country that now has close links with Turkey, and it is difficult to imagine events evolving in Syria without affecting Turkey, let alone events of the magnitude of the ongoing wave of change in the Arab region. The notion of reform

211 Assafir Newspaper, May 27, 2011.

212 Turkiye Newspaper, May 15, 2011.

213 Turkish intelligence report on terrorism: Israel is the best cooperating partner despite the crisis, Assafir Newspaper, August 30, 2011.

includes changes that respond to popular demands, most importantly –as the Turks always asserted- political pardon, the release of the detainees from all sides, laws for parties, media, elections, the combat of corruption, and agreeing to the principle of the rotation of power. The Turkish position includes broad propositions such as:

- Arranging the Syrian scene along the Iraqi experience, such as adapting the distribution of seats in the parliament, the electoral system, the parties' laws, the judiciary, and national security to the sectarian and ethnic diversity of Syria. Thus, the country would not be vulnerable to centrifugal dynamics that could threaten its peace and stability.
- Settling the dossier of internal repression, and placing the responsibility on specific individuals who can be prosecuted and punished. Here, it is necessary to sacrifice individuals who may be very close to the political regime.
- Real partnership and political opening toward the Muslim Brotherhood and other currents of political Islam.
- The Turks continually repeat that they are prepared to offer their available expertise and advice in support of reform; but they also focus on adopting the role of the adviser and the exclusive agent in judging the quality and authenticity of the reforms, which is very unfamiliar in international relations, and may be seen as offensive and as a brand of guardianship and arrogance.
- Reform should take place in the shadow of the regime itself, but the channels and the framework for change should be prepared, to the point where the regime could change completely, but through electoral ballots, and President Bashar Al Assad must accept the idea of becoming a former President.

The second scenario: preparing an alternative regime

The scenario of the alternative regime assumes the deterioration of the situation in Syria, or the failure to reach a resolution for the current events, or a sabotaging of the track of internal reform. These outcomes could make the Turks lean toward seeking an alternative to the existing regime, or to lend its support to specific alternatives, such as sponsoring the formation of framework committees and executive and leadership structures for the opposition.

This option is already being enacted, despite the Turks' relative preference for the first scenario, but political pragmatism has led them to this path, for other purposes that may not include the removal of the political regime, but its weakening in order to dominate it, or to gain favor with the regime by intervening with the opposition in favor of a settlement –but this remains a distant possibility with no active realistic indicators supporting it.

Turkey says that it hosts –and in reality it sponsors- the Syrian opposition not in order to conspire against the regime, but because of the requirements of Turkish democracy. Turkish officials add that Turkey's relationship with the opposition is meant to prevent it from turning toward violence, or in order to ease mediation, etc. which are all political and pragmatic justifications that could be employed whenever needed.

In reality, what Turkey is doing resembles what took place in Libya: preparing the ground for the existence of an organized, active, and strong opposition that could launch its activities from Turkey itself, or from a specified safe haven, or even from within a zone of activity inside Syria in a manner resembling a Syrian Benghazi; and this fact is not a secret anymore.

Ankara is not far –despite denying it- from organizing this opposition by hosting its conferences in Istanbul and Antalya and preparing for the formation of a transitional national council, and all that has been accompanied with the imposition of American and European sanctions against figures in the Syrian regime, including Al Assad, as well as Security Council resolutions that would provide a legitimate international cover to stifle and unseat the regime. Even though the Turks do not prefer this scenario as a first choice, they do not oppose it if it were the only remaining proposition, especially that Turkey has gained expertise in hosting opposition movements, including the Libyan opposition²¹⁴.

214 Mohammad Nureddine, Turkey and Syria: three scenarios, Al-Sharq Newspaper, June 4, 2011.

The third scenario: chaos or civil war

Turkey faces numerous potential threats if Syria descends into chaos and civil war, or if it turns into a failed state. The Turks are highly sensitive to the existence of major threats to the security and stability of their country, due to Turkey's propensity to shoulder the fall-out of Syrian strife; that is because the racial, religious, sectarian, and cultural composition of the two countries is similar, and Turkey has dynamics of division and internal struggle that could explode, especially on the ethnic and sectarian fronts.

The electoral developments, polarization, and internal tensions before and after the elections led to the rise of the level of the domestic threats emanating from the Kurdish question –as Erdoğan fails to reach a settlement with the Kurds, choosing in fact to antagonize them, especially in what relates to the conditions of the detention of Abdullah Öcalan, and Erdoğan's attempts to revoke the parliamentary membership of elected Kurdish MPs in favor of candidates belonging to the Justice and Development Party. These escalations may lead to acute security developments if no serious compromises or settlements are reached.

However, since Turkey is not a passive receptor of the effects emanating from Syria, it actively works to engineer certain developments through:

- Communicating with the opposition in Syria, which provides Turkey with a strong influence over the opposition's political choices.
- Venturing and intervening on the ground with armed groups and active elements in regions close to the border, and raising Turkey's stature among the different factions of the opposition by showing its support which will undoubtedly affect their future decisions.
- Planning to establish safe havens in specific areas in Syria²¹⁵ in order to prevent the flow of large numbers of refugees if events escalate into chaos or civil war.
- This scenario depends on Turkey's actions, since no chaos can take place without foreign intervention, or without scheming and arrangements by the outside; and this could not happen against Turkey's will or without its participation.

215 See for example: Soner Cagaptay, A Turkish Buffer Zone Inside Syria?, Hurriyet Daily news, July 3, 2011.

- Safe havens require a national security resolution or a NATO decision, and it would constitute a prelude for Syria entering the stage of the Libyan scenario: no-fly zone, preemptive military actions, followed by military action under the banner of humanitarian intervention, etc.

What is the active, or likely, scenario?

It is natural for crisis situations to have numerous scenarios entangled and overlapping, or parting from very similar assumptions and rules. This, in theory, helps in determining the low limits and the high limits of a crisis; but in reality, the multitude of potentialities complicates matters. It appears that Turkey is working on all potential scenarios, not in order to realize them on the terrain of reality, but in order to perpetually choose between them, control them, and make them a potential practical possibility. Chaos may not be the track sought by Turkey, but it must be a potential track that can be arranged; i.e. the objective is not to fragment Syria, but to place it at the edge of disintegration – which is an extremely sensitive and dangerous endeavor, but the Turks feel that the conditions are suitable for them to remain in control.

At the same time, the escalating tone of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gul indicates that Ankara may not remain inactive. A Turkish intervention in Syria or the establishment of a buffer zone, which the Turks deny, could prepare the ground for a broader action led by NATO, with Turkey being a member, as soon as things settle – even relatively- in Libya and Yemen.²¹⁶

The reinvigoration of Turkish-Israeli relations is an important indication to predict the coming phase. It is Turkey and Israel's agreement over specific paths for the crisis in Syria that helped Syria bypass –existing or potential- international and regional reservations regarding the next regime of rule in Syria, if events develop along the Libyan model. Indicators exist on this front, such as the appearance of Ali al-Bayanuni (and before him Abdulhalim Khaddam) on Israeli television, as well as the emergence of signs in the Hamas movement in favor of achieving an understanding with Israel, or recognition of the Israeli state, with Turkish mediation. Erdoğan has reportedly told Barack Obama that he has favor with Khaled Mish'al!²¹⁷ Commenting on the conference

²¹⁶ Hazem Saghiyeh, Where is the conspiracy?, Al-Hayat Newspaper, June 14, 2011.

²¹⁷ Al-Qabas Newspaper, Kuwait, June 26, 2011.

to support the Syrian opposition, organized in Paris by pro-Israeli intellectual Bernard Henry-Levy, Mulhim al-Durubi (the external relations coordinator of the Muslim Brotherhood) said that the Brothers have no red lines in their quest to bring down the regime of President Bashar Al Assad, adding we participate in all activities and conferences supporting the Syrian people, regarding of who initiates them or organizes them.²¹⁸

American President Barack Obama agreed with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on pursuing political, economic, and military pressures on Syria.²¹⁹ Obama told Erdoğan that the American intelligence predicts the fall of Bashar Al Assad's regime in four to six months. But that is dependent on the persistence of pressures against the regime in Syria, and is not a possibility that is solely dependent on domestic developments. The matter also relates to the persistence of Turkish, American, European, and other efforts to aid the Syrian opposition abroad (and inside Syria) to form organizational, political, and media structures (and perhaps, military as well) that would be capable of becoming an alternative to take charge of the country and prevent it from turning into a failed state, or to bring down the regime of President Bashar Al Assad.

H. Conclusions and remarks

In his first speech after the June 12, 2011 elections, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that his electoral victory was a victory in Ankara and Damascus, Izmir and Beirut. From Istanbul the General Supervisor of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Riyad al-Shaqfa, declared his battle to bring down the regime in Syria. Al-Shaqfa said, we are very grateful for the positions of Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The real question now is: have the Turks reached the stage of actively working to undermine the regime of President Bashar Al Assad?

The features of the Syrian scene are not clear, and the picture remains incomplete, with a great amount of obscurity and uncertainty. Attaining more solid information requires the knowledge of what is taking place backstage between the two parties, which is

²¹⁸ Assafir Newspaper, July 6, 2011.

²¹⁹ Al-Qabas Newspaper, Kuwait, June 26, 2011.

impossible and unpredictable. The fear is that we might witness, again, new wagers that are unrealistic or miscalculated. There are some in Syria who are still hoping that the coming phase will carry a new opportunity, while indicators of an imminent rupture between the two sides accrue. Erdoğan's rhetoric on the assignment of deadlines, the direction of warnings, the distribution of booklets and directives, and his demands to change specific security and military leaders (such as removing General Maher Al Assad, etc.) are all actions that mean that Erdoğan has surpassed all limits in the relation with the political regime, and with President Bashar Al Assad personally.

Will the political regime in Syria survive the shock of the Turkish position?

It appears that what Syria has previously given Turkey naively and out of conviction will not be extended again easily. Turkey has a long and complicated history of wagers and concessions, but the problem is that the political regime in Syria gave Turkey everything that is possible in politics, maintaining no pressure cards, negotiation items, or safety measures for the instances of crisis and need –as is usually the case with high-level policies and strategies.

Turkey maintained close relations with NATO, Europe, the United States, Israel, the Arab states, and even the Syrian opposition, while Syria gave up the most potent pressure cards against Turkey: the Kurds, the water, the borders, Arabs in Turkey, etc. In fact Syria's relations with its Kurds have themselves deteriorated, as well as its relations with Iraq's Kurds. The same applied to the neglect or weakening of Syria's relations with Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Bulgaria, and even Russia!

The main conclusions on Syrian-Turkish relations, their transformations and overall wagers –and not only in terms of the ongoing Syrian crisis-, can be summed up in the following points:

- The notions of transformations and wagers for Syria and Turkey are becoming more complicated, due to the relatively large and increasing sphere of the unpredictable in regional and international politics; as well as the latent uncertainties in the dynamics of Syrian-Turkish relations and their political, social, and official conduits.
- Regional policies are witnessing continual transformations and wagers which are supported by dynamics that act on various levels. The dynamics of infiltration or

penetration are among the active and influential factors in drawing regional policies²²⁰, or at least in affecting their course and evolution. Taking these elements into consideration could help explain the sudden or unexpected turns in Syrian-Turkish relations, with the ongoing shifts relating to the current Syrian crisis being one of them, and perhaps the most important.

- Developments and counter developments, or wagers and counter wagers in Syrian-Turkish relations are linked to an intentional will at the higher levels of decision making, as well as varying degrees of personal influences in politics. This would explain the shifting of positions in a manner that cannot be explained through politics alone, which sometimes pushes the observer into one of two perilous paths: either to resort to guessing and fortune telling –out of frustration and curiosity- to help explain events, or to adopt –out of expediency and intellectual laziness- conspiracy theories that are capable of explaining facts. These two options are strongly present in the cultural environment of the region and are, in fact, among the sources of knowledge in the Arab world.

- It appears that both sides focused in the last decade on highlighting the aspects of cooperation and coordination, claiming repeatedly that their relations have become a model for relations between states. However, both sides also neglected (out of an intentional wager, or miscalculation, or bad intentions, etc.) the elements and factors of discord in their bilateral relations, perhaps because both parties realized that digging into the pages of history and past crises requires burdensome work and plenty of patience. Among the points of dispute between the two sides are some that are impossible to resolve or to surpass in the current conditions, which prompted those managing relations to exert great efforts to quarantine a number of those issues, and perhaps to delay them or silencing them indefinitely as long as that would be beneficial for this or that party. Otherwise, it would be easy for realities and wagers to change, and in a surprising manner, as is taking place between Syria and Turkey today – making the legacy of rapprochement a part of the past, or a point of departure for new transformations and wagers.

220 This requires an examination of the influence of parties such as the United States in the developments of the Syrian-Turkish October 1998 crisis, both in terms of escalating and calming the conflict; the dynamics of this case could apply to the ensemble of existing and potential wagers and transformations between Syria and Turkey. See for example: Mahfudh, *Syria and Turkey*, p. 459.

- It appears that Syria and Turkey have worked intensively to build their alliance during the last decades, but events are leading them today to work on undermining it. The situation could be likened to the behavior of pre-Islamic Arabs, some of whom would construct idols out of dates, and who would consume their idols as soon as they finished their prayer. What is taking place between Syria and Turkey today is not only an undermining, degradation, or disassembling of their previous alliance based on factual realities; it is also a reflection of Turkey restructuring and redirecting its priorities and policies based on active wagers by the decision makers –with all that is required in terms of the ability and preparedness to back track and turn against past policies in favor of new wagers. As a reaction or as a matter of fact, Syria is likely to take similar actions, which means that Syrian-Turkish relations are confronted by a critical point of transformation and active historical bets that may greatly surpass those invested in the October 1998 crisis.

Conclusion

Over several years, Syria and Turkey have engaged in glorifying or exaggerating the expected outcomes from the policies of rapprochement between the two countries, while in tandem increasingly quarantining the factors or policies of discord. That was done through practical measures on the ground as well as a political rhetoric that shaped the social and political imagery (or went along with it). Thus, many issues were concealed, while they should have been exposed and disassembled by Turkey and Syria together in order to build sustainable relations which could contain existing and potential challenges that might emerge in the face of their relations –as is currently taking place with the ongoing Syrian crisis.

The concepts of the point of transformation and historical bets may be controversial, but they permit us to surpass the impositions of reality, memory, and history. They are an opportunity to interpret interests and to enter into mutual wagers, without necessarily having an effective transformation in the deep layers of politics.

The will of rapprochement in Syrian-Turkish relations has shown an extreme ability to produce its events and interactions at a quick pace, and to cover relations with a wide ideological umbrella (official and popular). The matter relates to ideologized cultural and cognitive dimensions that, sometimes, make these relations appear as if suspended between two eras: that of the future, whose influence on the relations occurs in a

selective manner and through retrospective interpretations; and the time of the future that is seen as an historical bet and an aspiration that is extended indefinitely.

During waves of rapprochement (as in the past) and discord (currently) work should continue to distinguish between the moments of rapprochement and discord in the Syrian-Turkish phenomenon on the one hand, and between the factors of the emergence of each and their causalities on the other hand. That is because a space exists between these two levels that can only be interpreted through the existence of some form of wagers.

Things began to change with the flaring of the current Syrian crisis, which is another reversed foundational event or a reversed point of transformation, which take relations toward discord instead of rapprochement. However, this critical juncture is –as the previous one- not fully developed and crystallized. It remains conditioned to what could be termed as historical bets, since only through the enactment of such wagers can these junctures express their existence and meaning in full, with each (point of transformation – historical bet) becoming a condition and a guarantee for the other.

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