

OPENING THE BLACK BOX OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: AN EXAMINATION OF AKP'S NEO-OTTOMAN SHIFT

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Abstract: *The meteoric rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since the turn of the century has catalysed a significant metamorphosis in Turkish politics. Prevalently conceived as 'neo-Ottomanism', this paper will seek to examine the causes behind the party's geopolitical shift. Overall, it will argue that President Erdoğan capitalised on a rare 'window of opportunity' created by the diminishing Kemalist military and Western bloc. Particularly, it will demonstrate how Erdoğan's psychology was crucial in manipulating domestic structures and how his expansionist character filtered into his foreign policy. In doing so, it will offer an original model putting Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) at the centre. This model will be applied longitudinally, scrutinising the structure-agency dynamic determining 'neo-Ottomanist' foreign policy from Turgut Özal (1989-1993) to Erdoğan's second term (2007-2020). It will find that the Turkish military, the country's Western dependence and its parliament have acted as centripetal forces to change, with the psychology of leaders determining the success and extremity of 'neo-Ottoman' shifts. The principal contribution of the paper lies in uniting psychology and structure within a single framework, advancing the thin literature on foreign policy change and extending its scope beyond the narrow geographical and conceptual focus of much existing work.*

Foreign policy has a long tradition of being interpreted as the simple outcome of impersonal forces. Yet, even Kenneth Waltz (1959), the pioneer of neo-realism, conceded that individual leadership—the 'first image'—could spark conflict, though in a system he maintained was ultimately defined by structural anarchy. Similarly, Henry Kissinger, whose career was grounded in Realpolitik, admitted that "when you see it in practice, you see the difference personality makes" (Çuhadar et al., 2020:1). Leadership, in this sense, is consequential. It shapes how constraints are interpreted, how opportunities are perceived, and how far policy is pursued within or against existing boundaries, sometimes even generating entirely new ones. Of course, as with much of the Realist scholarship, Waltz and Kissinger caution against a psychological focus. To preserve systemic clarity, the discipline traditionally leaves the 'black box' of the state sealed – its static, unitary stature serving as a convenient simplification. To pry it open risks opening a Pandora's box, unleashing a multitude of variables—psychological, bureaucratic, cultural—that threaten neat systemic models. Yet, their own reflections highlight the limits of this abstraction. Building on this, psychological approaches within foreign policy analysis (FPA) have demonstrated that individual-level traits are central in conditioning decision-making. They show that these variations should be regarded as

traits with profound and measurable implications for the trajectory of foreign policy, not just anecdotal quirks.

The case of Turkey, with its historically personalistic political tradition, illustrates this dynamic with unusual clarity. This is especially true of the past two decades, where the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has repeatedly cast the nation as the heir to a civilisational mission that transcends its modern borders (İletişim Başkanlığı, 2024; AK Parti Resmî Sitesi, 2022; Medyascope, 2025). Within this, the invocation of the Misak-ı Milli (National Pact) has become a recurrent motif. For instance, Erdoğan described Syria as a “domestic matter” in 2011, later insisting that Turkey’s deep involvement was natural because “we are the successors of the Ottoman state... the descendants of the Seljuks and Ottomans” (Al-Habib, 2025). In 2018, he went further still, declaring northern Syria part of the Misak-ı Milli and dismissing the Damascus regime’s legitimacy by claiming Turkish presence was sanctioned by “the invitation of the Syrian people” (Al-Habib, 2025). These examples reveal a consistent rhetorical strategy: Ottoman memory repurposed to legitimise contemporary interventions. More lightly, this strategy has been particularly evident in Turkey’s outreach to the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Turkic states, where appeals to shared ethno-religious and linguistic identities have reinforced a sense of civilisational kinship. The literature has widely characterised this orientation as a ‘neo-Ottoman’ turn, noting its resonance with Ottoman-era pan-Islamist and pan-Turkic ambitions, as well as its expansionist undertones (Hoffmann, 2019; Haugom, 2019; Akca, 2019).

This geographically overreaching discourse has likewise been matched with a notable orientation away from a strict Western posture. One of the most emblematic moments in this broader recalibration occurred on 29 January 2009, at the World Economic Forum in Davos. In a heated exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres over the latest Gaza offensive, Erdoğan vociferously condemned Israel’s actions before storming off stage (Kesgin, 2020). While some dismissed it as spectacle designed for domestic consumption, the episode resonated far beyond the panel itself. Indeed, Davos crystallised a semiotic break from Erdoğan’s self-fashioned image as a conciliatory ‘Western democrat’, inaugurating a more confrontational posture towards Western powers and its pivot in the Middle East (Koç, 2011). Since then, this frictional style has grown more systematic. Erdoğan has castigated the United Nations for privileging the five permanent members of the Security Council, repeating the refrain that “the world is bigger than five” (Aral, 2020). His critiques have extended to the European Union (EU), which he has labelled “fascist and cruel,” and to Germany, where he accused policymakers of “Nazi practices” (Sanchez, 2017). While such provocations may appear as theatrical invective, their function is more strategic. They form part of a deliberate scheme to construct the West as the moral antithesis against which Turkey positions itself as a ‘virtuous power’ (Langan, 2017).

Though the world stage has become well-accustomed to Erdoğan’s international conduct, it is worth reminding that this ‘neo-Ottoman’ challenge to Turkey’s Westernised status-quo was far from evident at the advent of AKP. One might easily forget that Erdoğan was once devoutly, or seemingly so, committed to Western ‘modernisation’, with many labelling Turkey during this time as an Islamic beacon of democracy and a

theory-busting specimen for Huntington's (1996) 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis (Akyol, 2009). However, the puzzle here is not restricted to the stark metamorphosis of Erdoğan from a Western democrat to a somewhat caricatured image of an "Ottoman Caliph" (Ayesh, 2018). Indeed, this religion-infused shift is seemingly perplexing given Turkey's historically secular, broadly isolationist and rigidly Western architecture – which was coercively maintained by the powerful Kemalist military since the Republic was created. The vitriolic stance towards the EU is likewise baffling given Turkey's dependence on the organisation as a trading partner and as a crucial financier for its debilitating refugee issue. The simple question here, then, is: 'what explains AKP's 'neo-Ottoman' shift?'

In addressing this, it will be argued that Erdoğan not only exploited a 'window of opportunity' for change but actively widened it. Indeed, by deftly manipulating the barriers to geopolitical autonomy—most notably the weakening of the Kemalist military—Erdoğan exploited the structures that had long preserved the status quo (Kingdon, 1984). Specifically, by employing Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), it will be shown that Erdoğan's political aptitude and his world view were vital in not only achieving foreign policy change (FPC), but making it distinctly 'neo-Ottoman'. To demonstrate this, considering that Erdoğan is not the only 'neo-Ottoman' leader in Turkish history, a longitudinal analysis will be adopted to contrast times of change and stability, thereby capturing the constitutive structure-agency dynamic of AKP's geopolitical project. Accordingly, the paper will begin by conceptualising and providing a brief history of 'neo-Ottomanism' – categorising it by the ideology's inception (1989-1997), decline (1997-2007) and rise (2007-2020). It will then provide a theoretical overview of the integrated models proposed in the FPC literature, drawing on cyclical, structural-constraint, and checklist approaches, and modifying them through the incorporation of LTA. Finally, before concluding with a brief discussion, this novel framework will be applied to the phases of 'neo-Ottomanism', looking at the international and domestic constraints, as well as the psychological traits of leaders in interacting with these structures and catalysing FPC.

Conceptualising Neo-Ottomanism and Foreign Policy Change (FPC)

In assessing the causal mechanisms behind Turkey's 'neo-Ottoman' shift, it is imperative to disambiguate this nebulous term. Though becoming a somewhat grating buzzword across certain policy and media circles, as expansively as possible, neo-Ottomanism should be understood to be a movement away from the country's strategic vision from Kemalism, an isolationist stance best-captured in its 'peace at home, peace abroad' motto (Bein, 2017). Of course, given its geostrategic position, it has hardly had the privilege of replicating Finnish or Swiss isolationism. Indeed, though Turkey was able to remain neutral for most of the Second World War, the Soviet expansion on its borders reformed its isolationism, pushing it into an almost perfect geopolitical alignment with the West (Yavuz, 2016). Still, besides certain exceptions like the 1974 Cyprus invasion, its international engagement was passive during this period – with Kemalists limiting Turkey's geopolitical involvement to spring-boarding NATO operations (Murinson, 2006). With this former outlook in mind, neo-Ottomanism must first be understood as a break from its insularity towards a more independent, engaging geopolitical

orientation (Yavuz, 2016). Particularly, one which draws upon ethno-religious, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Ottoman empire, in an attempt to construct a collective geopolitical identity with its neighbourhood and beyond (Haugom, 2019). The haziness surrounding the concept beyond this arises from the Ottoman empire's subjective character. After all, the principles that neo-Ottomanism is built upon are determined by how the empire is conceived by leaders and how this transposes onto Turkish foreign policy (Danforth, 2014).

Some caution that this fluidity has made neo-Ottomanism a 'misnomer', inflated by sensationalist readings that obscure the pragmatic dimensions of Turkish foreign policy (Danforth, 2020; Hartmann, 2013; Piotrowska, 2017; Çağaptay, 2010). And there is value to these observations. Erdoğan's geopolitical strategy is defined above all by pragmatism, with neo-Ottomanism functioning less as an autonomous, abstracted project than as one of its most effective tools and expressions. Nonetheless, in defining the concept in an analytically productive way, three distinct 'images' of the Ottoman empire have usefully been outlined by Wastnidge (2019), delineating how this imperial heritage has been mobilised in constructing 'neo-Ottomanism'. The first perceives the Ottomans as an Islamic empire, accordingly picturing neo-Ottomanism as a pan-Islamist foreign policy seeking cohesion amongst Muslim states (Wastnidge, 2019; Dönmez, 2010). Wastnidge (2019) also outlines a more cultural element that can be rearticulated from the Ottoman Empire, specifically its image as an 'apex of civilisation'. This notion denotes an inherited duty to continue the historical role of the Ottomans as a cultural leader, not only reinvigorating ethno-linguistic and religious values in the region, but also diffusing these principles across the globe (Westnidge, 2019). The final visualisation pictures the Ottomans as a cosmopolitan, multicultural empire which lacks antagonism, conceiving itself from the economic and cultural liberalism of the empire's 'Golden Age' (Westnidge, 2019). What emerges, then, is an understanding of neo-Ottomanism as a deliberately elastic construct. One that derives its force from the ability to discursively reconfigure the Ottoman legacy—whether Islamic, civilisational, or cosmopolitan—into forms suited to contemporary foreign policy agendas.

Foreign Policy Change (FPC)

Before turning to the historical development of the ideology, it is important to clarify what is meant by foreign policy change (FPC). The literature on FPC is extensive and at times diffuse, yet Hermann's (1990) four-level typology remains useful in providing analytical clarity. At its most limited, an adjustment change involves shifts in the scope of geopolitical engagement without altering the underlying orientation of policy. The next stage, program change, refers to modifications in the instruments, strategies, or methods through which foreign policy goals are pursued. At the third level, problem change captures transformations in the very objectives of foreign policy, marking a departure from prior purposes. Finally, Hermann identifies the most far-reaching form, international orientation change, in which the entire set of geopolitical alignments is restructured, signalling a fundamental redefinition of a state's place in the international system. Taken together, this typology provides a graded framework for evaluating both the scale and nature of shifts in foreign policy.

Brief History of Neo-Ottomanism

Inception (1989-1997)

The beginnings of neo-Ottomanism can be traced back to Turgut Özal (1989-1993), whose break from Kemalist insularity, though impressive, was limited to an 'adjustment' and minor 'program' change. In terms of his vision, Özal sought to reinterpret Turkey as a cosmopolitan, multicultural power (Çandar, 2021). A significant branch of this was a focus on engaging its Turkic neighbours, pushing the idea that the coming century would prove to be 'the century of the Turk' (Makovsky, 1999). This was principally pursued through means of soft power, like organising the first Ankara summit between Turkic states in 1992 (Winrow, 1997). Though Özal also pursued military involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh, he failed to attain the necessary parliamentary approval for such an intervention (Çakir, 2014). More successfully, he organised an emergency meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), coalescing support to push the Security Council towards military involvement in Bosnia (Hintz, 2018).

Importantly, although Özal was a devout Muslim, he particularly honed his Ottoman inspiration from the 'Golden Age' (Yavuz, 2020). Indeed, as well as cosmopolitanism, Özal stressed the European character of this era, seeing the empire as a southern European, Western force (Ocak, 2003). Combined together, he viewed a Western-orientation as something necessary to propel Turkey as a liberal, democratic and economically powerful nation (Yavuz, 2020). This pro-Western departure from Kemalist isolationism was seen most explicitly in Özal's support of the Americans in Iraq, amassing troops on the border and leading the sanctions from its Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline – though he was ultimately restrained from opening a second war front against Hussein (Çakir, 2014). Another crucial relationship that was struck up to fortify this pro-Western activism was with Israel, basing this on a mutually beneficial military and economic partnership (Makovsky, 1999).

Erbakan's premiership, which concluded in 1997, offered a markedly different vision. His government explicitly re-invoked the Ottoman legacy through a decidedly 'Islamic' lens, advancing a foreign policy grounded in the anti-Western ideological positions he had championed as a cleric since the 1970s (Makovsky, 1997). Indeed, Erbakan explicitly positioned himself against NATO, the EU, and what he characterised as American imperialism, as well as its Israeli proxy. Both during the 1995 election campaign and once in office, he pledged to terminate Turkey's participation in Operation Provide Comfort in Iraq and to annul the country's existing defence agreements with Israel (Makovsky, 1997). This was coupled with a distinct, pan-Islamist vision towards the East, intending to form an economic and military collective with Muslim states, with the so-called 'D-8' providing an alternative to NATO and the G-7 (Makovsky, 1997). This ambitious attempt at an 'international orientation' change ultimately failed to materialise, and with Erbakan's forced departure from office under military pressure, 'neo-Ottomanism' entered a period of decline.

Decline (1997-2007)

The succeeding Ecevit government (1997-2002) was indeed devoid of such neo-Ottoman rhetoric, unsurprisingly so given the leader's membership of the secular Kemalist flank

(Laçiner, 2010). The alignment with the West was also reinstated, though Ecevit was not afraid to dip outside of this. For instance, despite taking the first concrete steps towards the European accession process, his stance towards the union became assertive following its refusal of official candidature in 1997 (Park, 2000). This hostility was deepened in 1999, where Turkey was offered the acceptance of its application in what was perceived to be an insultingly conditional form (Park, 2000). Besides this, there was no real active involvement in geopolitics, owing to the economic crises of the period and Ecevit's contentment with the Kemalist status quo (Aydin, 2000).

Likewise, the first term of the incoming AKP party (2002-2007), led by Erdoğan, was limited in its international engagement. The only substantive attempt to do so was joining the American military coalition in the 2003 Iraq War, which failed to obtain the necessary parliamentary approval (Kesgin and Kaarbo, 2010). The vital Incirlik base was offered for US operations into Iraq, however, and the American alignment was fortified in economic and military partnerships during this period (Kesgin and Kaarbo, 2013). Besides this, the 2004 Annan Plan, intended to assuage Turkey's quarrels in Cyprus and its accession bid, was the furthest AKP could deviate from Kemalism (Kalyoncu, 2005). Overall, the focus of the party was internal, implementing dozens of reforms in line with the Copenhagen Criteria and providing considerable improvements in the livelihood of Kurds and religious minorities in Turkey (Goff-Taylor, 2017). Some observers have read the preceding reforms of democratisation and pluralism as reflecting a liberal, multicultural reimagining of the Ottoman legacy (Wastnidge, 2019). Yet there was no clear articulation of these policies as constituting a fundamental geopolitical reorientation. Rather, the Europeanisation project now appears more plausibly understood as a strategic effort to curb the entrenched influence of the Kemalist military—an objective that proved pivotal in paving the way for the subsequent emergence of a more explicitly Islamic-oriented 'neo-Ottomanism' (Çağaptay, 2020).

Rise (2007-2020)

The contemporary 'neo-Ottomanism' of the AKP has been characterised by a conscious departure from strict adherence to the Western metropole, reframing Turkey's role from that of a peripheral "wing country" (kanat ülke) to asserting its 'rightful' historical claim as a "central power" (merkez ülke) (Sözen, 2010: 112). This 'apex of civilisation' image is firmly lined with an Islamic conception of the Ottomans, drawing on the reign of Abdülhamid II as the virtuous defender of the ostracised periphery against the West (Yavuz, 2020). This geopolitical 'us and them' demarcation is mostly exercised through 'soft power' and 'win-win' situations with its Islamic in-group, like providing humanitarian relief across the Middle East and Africa (Maziad and Sotiriadis, 2020). Despite ongoing friction, this religious affinity can also be seen in AKP's rapprochement with Iran during the 2010s, most prominently by advocating for its nuclear programme during that time (Görener and Uçal, 2011). This departure from the West was also observed in its collaboration with Russia, specifically with its Astana alliance in Syria and the acquisition of S-400 missiles (Matsumoto, 2021). With the EU accession process being firmly shelved, Erdoğan has also pursued an antagonising approach in the Mediterranean, defying UN convention and creating its own 18.6 nautical mile maritime boundary (Neset et al., 2021). Less intensely, Turkey has turned East with its 'Asia Anew' initiative, becoming a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in

2013 (Islam, 2020). Overall, however, despite clearly marking an adjustment, program and problem change, these various shifts do not amount to a fundamental shift. Turkey is still considerably Western facing and has not rescinded its Western membership, as is frequently sensationalised by the media (Oğuzlu, 2012). Such a move would require something astronomical – like leaving NATO, not just being a problematic partner of it (Haugom, 2019).

Theoretical Overview

Although ‘neo-Ottomanism’ has recently been in the limelight, change is an area in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature in which there is a substantial deficiency, especially in non-Western countries like Turkey (Hudson, 2008; Alden, 2017). Still, the transient scholarly attention this branch has received understands the phenomenon as multi-causal, demarcating the need for an integrative approach (Goldmann, 1982; Hermann, 1990; Carlsnaes, 1992; Rosati, 1994; Gustavsson, 1999). Nonetheless, not only has there been no attempt at this in Turkey, many integrative FPC models are lacking in their theoretical construction. In seeking to propose an updated model and apply it to the ‘neo-Ottoman’ shift, the paper will review the dominant integrative frameworks in the FPC literature, demarcating it along Gustavsson’s (1999) examination and classification of integrative models. Overall, it will identify the greatest potential in the checklist framework, while recognising the value of enriching it with elements of cyclical and structural-constraint models.

Structural-Constraint Models

Structural-constraint models interpret foreign policy change (FPC) largely in terms of the obstacles that prevent it. Goldmann’s (1982) influential ‘input–output’ framework traces how external or internal pressures for change are filtered through decision-making mechanisms before becoming policy outcomes. At each stage, stabilisers—cognitive, international, political, and administrative—intervene to blunt transformative impulses (Carlsnaes, 1993). For Goldmann, these stabilisers, rather than the sources of change themselves, are decisive. Their durability explains why FPC is infrequent, typically occurring only when stabilisers erode. Skidmore (1996) extends this logic by combining realist and institutionalist traditions. Realism allows for incremental, ‘evolutionary’ adjustment as states respond to shifts in international structure, while institutionalism highlights domestic inertia, producing more ‘sporadic’ change. Skidmore argues that evolutionary change is most likely when states are externally weak but domestically strong, enabling them to adapt to international shocks while containing internal resistance. Change, then, arises when external resilience shields states from pressures but weak domestic institutions leave them vulnerable to internal blockages.

Together, structural-constraint models reframe FPC as the product of constraint. Yet, this prioritisation of structures comes at a cost. Skidmore (1996), in particular, reduces the state to a monolithic unit, leaving little room for the interpretive agency of decision-makers. Goldmann (1982; 2014) is more attentive to how ‘sources’ exert pressure, but his interactive mechanisms remain convoluted, especially regarding ‘administrative stabilisers.’ Moreover, despite his emphasis on ‘ideas’ and ‘rethinking,’ the role of individuals is marginal, confined to the organisations they inhabit. Goldmann (2014:

23) explicitly limits psychological approaches, prioritising “organisational rather than individual thinking”, thereby neglecting the introspective influence of singular decision-makers (Carlsnaes, 1993).

Cyclical Models

Contrastingly, cyclical models emphasise the longitudinal evolution of foreign policy, highlighting the oscillating interactions that shape change over time (Gustavsson, 1999). Carlsnaes (1993) addresses the agency–structure problem directly, presenting FPC as the outcome of reciprocal interaction between individual decision-makers and systemic constraints. To illustrate this, he adopts Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycle, a three-step, temporally linear but cyclical progression model. Structures initially condition agents (T₁), who then engage and interact with those structures (T₂–T₃), ultimately reshaping them into new forms that launch a fresh cycle (Newman, 2019). Applied to foreign policy, this framework captures how decision-makers and systemic factors continually reconstitute one another, producing gradual change across time. Rosati (1994), by contrast, offers a more straightforward dialectical reading of twentieth-century American foreign policy. He divides the century into long periods of stability, punctuated by short transitional phases when foreign policy fails to adapt to systemic shifts in the international, institutional, or domestic spheres (Gustavsson, 1999). These moments of crisis compel adjustment and restore stability.

The strength of cyclical models lies in their ability to capture the incremental character of FPC, offering historical accounts that exceed the snapshot explanations of other models. Yet this breadth comes with limitations. Carlsnaes' (1993) framework, while theoretically sophisticated in linking structure and agency, is too intricate to serve as a practical tool for empirical analysis and has rarely been applied. Rosati's model, though far more accessible, suffers from vagueness in specifying how agents actively generate change—perhaps a consequence of the century-long timeframe it seeks to cover (Roberts, 1994).

Checklist Models

Finally, checklist models adopt a linear, tripartite process: identifying factors that trigger FPC, examining how these are filtered through decision-making, and tracing how this interaction produces change. Hermann's (1990) influential model typifies this approach, categorising leaders, bureaucracy, and domestic and international restructuring as distinct ‘sources’ of FPC (Haar and Pierce, 2021). These sources are channelled through a seven-stage decision-making sequence, beginning with problem diagnosis and culminating in the implementation of a new policy orientation (Hermann, 1990). Similarly, Holsti (2015) distinguishes external, domestic, historical, and cultural factors as inputs into the decision-making machinery, with intervening variables—such as leadership personalities or bureaucratic dynamics—acting as constraints on how far these drivers can reshape policy (Haesebrouck and Joly, 2021).

Crucially, neither Hermann nor Holsti present predictive theories. Rather, they offer flexible analytical frameworks for examining specific cases of FPC (Carlsnaes, 1993). This broad applicability remains one of the checklist model's strongest assets (Gustavsson, 1999). Yet the approach carries clear limitations. By conceptualising decision-making

primarily as a filtering mechanism, checklist models sharply restrict the scope for individuals to shape policy as active agents (Carlsnaes, 1993). This critique may be overstated in Hermann's case, since his framework does contain references to direct authoritative action by leaders and bureaucrats (Hermann, 1990: 10). Nonetheless, even where agency is acknowledged, its role is largely reduced to providing external stimuli for an otherwise static decision-making unit, rather than constituting an integral and dynamic part of the process (Carlsnaes, 1993).

Modifying the Checklist Model

To address this neglect of cognition and agency, Gustavsson (1999) advances a modified checklist model. While retaining the view that structural movements are the primary sources of change, he inserts an independent stage explicitly centred on the individual. Leaders are seen as interpretive agents, whose perceptions determine whether structural shifts are recognised as legitimate drivers of FPC. Only once filtered through this interpretive lens do developments proceed into the decision-making arena. Importantly, individuals remain active here as well, engaged in the political “pulling and hauling” required to persuade bureaucratic and collective actors to endorse policy change (Gustavsson, 1999: 84). If successful, this culminates in FPC, with the potential for agentic feedback effects that reshape domestic and international structures. Anticipating critiques of vagueness regarding timing, Gustavsson conceptualises decision-makers as “policy entrepreneurs” who exploit structural “windows of opportunity” (Kingdon, 1984; Barnett, 1999). Overall, Gustavsson's (1999) revision significantly strengthens the checklist model by embedding agency more centrally into the process, without sacrificing structural sensitivity. It is this more balanced framework that provides the foundation for the following model, albeit with key adaptations.

Towards an Integrated Model

The proposed framework builds on Gustavsson's (1999) model but expands it in several important respects. First, while Gustavsson originally designed his model to account for singular instances of FPC, here it will be applied longitudinally to trace the diachronic evolution of ‘neo-Ottomanism.’ In this respect, the model incorporates insights from cyclical approaches, emphasising how foreign policy unfolds across time through periods of continuity and rupture. This adjustment allows the framework to capture not only episodic instances of change but also broader trajectories of transformation. Second, the model integrates Carlsnaes' (1993) structure–agency dynamic, recognising that foreign policy is shaped by the continual interaction between systemic pressures and decision-makers. This means that shifts in Turkey's international and domestic standing—such as the balance of power in global politics, the role of NATO and EU accession processes, or fluctuations in civil–military relations—must be considered alongside the interpretive agency of leaders in determining the direction and scope of change. Here, Skidmore's (1996) internal–external power thesis provides additional nuance. The model foregrounds how Turkey's relative strength or vulnerability in the international system intersects with its domestic institutional capacity to produce shifts in foreign policy. In practical terms, this means the model will situate the rise of neo-Ottomanism within regional and global geopolitical currents, as well as the backdrop of domestic institutional reconfigurations – especially the weakening of the Kemalist military and the consolidation of parliamentary authority.

Third, and most crucially, the role of the individual will be substantially deepened. Gustavsson (1999) already assigns leaders an interpretive function, but here this is enriched through the incorporation of Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA). LTA enables systematic assessment of leaders' personal characteristics which shape how they perceive structural pressures, identify opportunities, and pursue change. Within this model, LTA is used to determine who qualifies as a 'policy entrepreneur', their capacity to exploit 'windows of opportunity,' and the style through which they advance foreign policy reorientation. This integration of LTA into FPC, at such a comprehensive level, is, to the best of my knowledge, novel. The only prior attempt to combine the two has been Yang's (2010) comparative analysis of Clinton and Bush's China policies, which concentrated on differences in conceptual complexity. While an important contribution, the scope of that study was necessarily confined. By contrast, the proposed model incorporates a broader set of LTA characteristics, allowing for a more complete picture of how leadership psychology interacts with foreign policy change over a considerable historical period.

Methodology

To briefly outline how this model will be applied, the temporal structure will reflect the three phases of neo-Ottomanism previously delineated – its inception, downfall and rise. This sequential form will allow for a broad comparison between times of change and stability, allowing an insight into the evolving structure-agency dynamics determining FPC (Carlsnaes, 1993). In this chronological organisation, the international and domestic contexts will begin the analysis in each phase, following Gustavsson's (1999) model. The international dimension will encompass geopolitical power configurations, as well as patterns of military and economic capacity and dependency. Put differently, a window of opportunity for change is expected to emerge when the international environment presents an opening—most likely in the form of a structural shift or crisis. As a traditionally tame country seeking more influence, Turkey is hypothesised to be more sensitive to these changes (Skidmore, 1996). The exploitation of such openings will depend on Turkey's comparative advantages in military or economic strength, which may encourage a more assertive regional role.

Correspondingly, an 'Eastern' orientation is most likely where Turkey demonstrates greater economic and military independence from the West, or where its national interests come into fundamental conflict with Western priorities. The domestic arena, in turn, will be evaluated through the distribution of parliamentary power and the strength of institutional actors—most notably the military, which has been a decisive force in the Turkish context. In line with Skidmore's (1996) thesis, the expectation is that the greater the electoral dominance of a governing agent, and the greater its leverage over the military, the more likely it becomes that a foreign policy change will materialise. Building on this structural assessment, LTA will then be applied to examine the psychological profiles of leaders within their respective periods, focusing on how they behave with and within these international and institutional constraints.

LTA

At this stage, a comprehensive summary of LTA is in order. The framework rests on the premise that verbal expressions—whether written or spoken—offer systematic insight into the cognitive and personality traits of political leaders (Hermann, 2005). To operationalise this, textual material is compiled, coded and processed through the ProfilerPlus software, which generates psychological profiles of the leaders under study (Kesgin, 2020). The profiling identifies seven core characteristics, each operationalised through specific patterns of discourse, as outlined below:

Trait	Description	Coding Guidelines
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	Extent to which leaders perceive themselves as capable of shaping or directing the political environment.	Measured through the proportion of verbs expressing action, intention, or planning attributed to the leader or their group.
Need for Power (PWR)	Inclination to gain, maintain, or reinforce personal or group power.	Calculated from verbs that imply exerting influence, directing others, advising, or protecting one's reputation.
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	Capacity to recognise, differentiate, and interpret the nuances of political situations.	Derived from the relative frequency of nuanced language (e.g., 'approximately', 'possibly', 'likely') versus absolutist terms (e.g., 'certainly', 'irreversible').
Self-Confidence (SC)	Perceived sense of self-importance and belief in ability to act effectively in political contexts.	Indicated by the proportion of self-referential pronouns (e.g., 'I', 'me', 'myself', 'mine') that convey authority, initiative, or claims to credit.
In-Group Bias (IGB)	Tendency to see one's own group as central to political life and superior to others.	Identified through references that emphasise group strength, success, or unity (e.g., 'capable', 'defend our borders', 'decide our policies').
Distrust of Others (DIS)	Degree of suspicion, scepticism, or concern about the intentions of actors outside one's group.	Tracked by the use of nouns signalling misgivings, hostility, or perceived threats from outsiders.
Task Orientation (TASK)	Focus on achieving objectives and problem-solving, as opposed to relationship-building.	Reflected in words tied to instrumental aims (e.g., 'plan', 'proposal', 'accomplishment') versus relational terms (e.g., 'collaboration', 'appreciation', 'amnesty').

Table 1: LTA Personality Characteristics. Adapted from Çuhadar et al. (2020: 25)

More than their individual parts, the combination of these characteristics is considered crucial for the foreign policy behaviour of individuals.

1. *Response to Constraints (BACE × PWR)*

The first such interaction is Response to Constraints (BACE × PWR), which considers the relationship between a leader's Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE) and their Need for Power (PWR). This pairing reveals how leaders position themselves vis-à-vis institutional, domestic, or international constraints. Leaders with low scores on both traits function as Constraint Respectors, working within established parameters, emphasising compromise and privileging consensus-building. By contrast, those with high scores on both dimensions are Optimum Challengers, combining direct and indirect methods of influence to actively reshape their environments and achieve objectives. A low PWR–high BACE configuration produces Direct Challengers, who favour open and explicit strategies, approaching constraints with clarity and assertiveness. This can be effective in contexts that reward decisiveness, though it may be excessive or reduce opportunities for behind-the-scenes adaptation. Conversely, leaders with high PWR but low BACE emerge as Indirect Challengers, adept at exerting influence behind the scenes. In the context of neo-Ottoman policy entrepreneurs, we would expect them to fall predominantly within the challenger categories—optimum, direct, or indirect—given the centrality of resisting and transforming constraints in advancing this foreign policy orientation.

		Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	
		Low	High
Need for Power (PWR)	Low	Constraint Respector: works within established limits to achieve objectives. Emphasises compromise and consensus-building.	Direct Challenger: Challenges constraints openly and explicitly, relying on direct use of power.
	High	Indirect Challenger: Challenges constraints but tends to do so indirectly. More comfortable exerting influence behind the scenes.	Optimum Challenger: Challenges constraints, demonstrating skill in both direct and indirect influence.

Table 2: Leaders' Orientation to Constraints. Adapted from Çuhadar et al. (2020: 26)

2. Openness to Information (CC × SC)

The second interaction is Openness to Information (CC × SC), which combines a leader's Conceptual Complexity (CC)—the capacity to recognise and integrate multiple perspectives—with their Self-Confidence (SC), or the degree of trust placed in their own judgement. The balance of these traits determines whether leaders adopt an open or closed orientation toward information. Leaders whose conceptual complexity exceeds their self-confidence tend to remain open, carefully weighing external input and alternative viewpoints. By contrast, when self-confidence outweighs conceptual complexity, leaders exhibit a closed orientation, dismissing or filtering information through rigid assumptions. Similarly, when both traits score above average, leaders are generally open to new information, whereas low scores on both dimensions are associated with an unresponsive style. It follows that those with higher conceptual complexity than self-confidence are best positioned to identify windows of opportunity and, in turn, catalyse foreign policy change.

Complexity and Confidence Traits	Orientation Toward Information
Conceptual Complexity > Self-confidence	Open
Conceptual Complexity < Self-confidence	Closed
Both traits above average	Open
Both traits below average	Closed

Table 3: Openness to Information. Adapted from Çuhadar et. al (2020:27)

3. Motivation (IGB × DIS × TASK)

The last combination to consider is the interplay between ingroup bias and distrust of others, which determines a leader's basic orientation toward the international environment. Relatedly, Task Focus reveals how the resulting worldview is operationalised. In-group bias signals the degree of emotional attachment to the leader's own group, while distrust captures the extent of suspicion toward external actors. These two traits define whether the international environment is imagined as open, uncertain, competitive, or outright hostile. Task Focus then inflects this orientation, distinguishing leaders who pursue their aims through problem-solving from those who privilege loyalty and relationship maintenance.

Leaders low in both in-group bias and distrust perceive the world as pragmatic and opportunity rich. For those high in Task Focus, this becomes a platform for policy

entrepreneurship: coalition-building and a willingness to harness cooperation for concrete problem-solving. With low TASK, the same benign worldview is refracted through the imperatives of recognition and prestige, producing leaders who treat the international stage as a space for cultivating alliances, exchanging gestures of goodwill, and reinforcing reputational standing. When distrust is high but IGB remains low, leaders imagine the environment as precarious and conflict-prone. High Task Focus here produces a technocratic vigilance, where monitoring adversaries, strengthening intelligence, and devising defensive strategies become central. By contrast, low TASK in this setting generates a more relational caution, with leaders relying on carefully managed partnerships and symbolic demonstrations of reliability to navigate uncertainty.

At the opposite pole, leaders with high IGB but low distrust see the world as competitive yet rule governed. Those high in TASK seek to advance the group's power within institutional and legal frameworks, using rules and regimes as instruments of rivalry and advantage. Those low in TASK stress solidarity and loyalty, foregrounding ceremonial affirmation of the in-group and status cultivation within alliances. Finally, when both in-group bias and distrust are high, leaders embrace a starkly adversarial worldview, in which global politics is framed as a moralised struggle against implacable foes. With high Task Focus, this generates an uncompromising, mission-driven style of leadership that sets concrete goals for confrontation and accepts risk in pursuit of them. With low TASK, the same hostility is channelled into relationship terms. The emphasis falls on honour and cohesion, producing confrontational strategies justified as moral commitments to the group's integrity and survival.

		Distrust of Others (DIS)	
		Low	High
Ingroup Bias (IGB)	Low	Worldview: World seen as non-threatening. Conflicts are situational; cooperation and flexibility are valued.	Worldview: World seen as conflict-prone. Adversaries exist but are not implacable; vigilance is required.
		High TASK: Pragmatic entrepreneurs who use cooperation to advance concrete agendas and solve problems.	High TASK: Technocratic problem-solvers who invest in intelligence and monitoring to manage threats.
	High	Low TASK: Prestige and recognition-seekers who treat cooperation as a stage for reassurance and loyalty.	Low TASK: Cautious relational managers who rely on selective partnerships and trust-building to offset risks.
		Worldview: System seen as zero-sum but bound by norms. Competition is accepted, threats managed within frameworks.	Worldview: World defined by hostile adversaries, framed as moralised, zero-sum struggle.
		High Task: Institutional competitors who exploit rules, institutions, and legal regimes to enhance group power.	High Task: Mission-driven confrontational leaders who set concrete objectives against enemies and accept risk.
		Low Task: Status cultivators who stress solidarity, prestige, and ceremonial affirmation of the in-group.	Low Task: Honour-bound mobilisers who rally followers through loyalty and moral commitment, sustaining cohesion in adversarial confrontation.

Table 5: Conceptualisation of the World

4. Final Typology

Importantly, these three combinations—Response to Constraints (BACE × PWR), Openness to Information (CC × SC) and Motivation (IGB × DIS × TASK)—then overlay one another, determining an overarching characterisation of leaders, as outlined in table 6.

Data

The quantitative component of this paper takes the form of a meta-analysis, predominantly anchored in the dataset produced by Çuhadar et al. (2021). With over half a million data points, this corpus provides exceptionally robust measures for Özal,

Responsiveness to Constraints (BACE/PWR)	Openness to Information (SC/CC)	Motivation (TASK/IGB/DIS)	
		Problem focus	Relationship focus
Challenges constraints	Closed to information	<i>Expansionistic – priority placed on enlarging the sphere of control of the leader; government, or state</i>	<i>Evangelistic – priority placed on persuading others to adopt the leader's mission and rallying supporters around a central cause</i>
Challenges constraints	Open to information	<i>Actively independent – priority placed on safeguarding room for manoeuvre and flexibility in a world perceived as restrictive</i>	<i>Directive – priority placed on preserving reputation and legitimacy on the world stage through visible engagement</i>
Respects constraints	Closed to information	<i>Incremental – priority placed on step-by-step gains in security or economy, carefully working around obstacles</i>	<i>Influential – priority placed on elevating status and recognition by cooperating with others in ways that enhance prestige</i>
Respects constraints	Open to information	<i>Opportunistic – priority placed on weighing what can realistically be achieved given the context and the demands of key constituencies</i>	<i>Collegial – priority placed on consensus-building, reconciling differences, and sharing responsibility with partners</i>

Table 6: Final Classification

Erbakan and Ecevit. Yet, like Görener and Ucal (2011) and Kesgin (2020), it does not extend into the later years of Erdoğan's two-decade rule, making primary analysis a necessity. The analysis of this period is particularly valuable, given the intensified engagement of Turkey on the global stage and the specific 'neo-Ottoman' contours of it, especially after the coup and the subsequent transition to a presidential system.

Validity

Though there might be intuitive apprehensions about an analytical model which relies absolutely on the words of politicians, LTA stands on a mountain of empirical analysis attesting to its methodological cogency (Yang, 2010). The complete automation of the coding process is a substantial part of this, essentially eradicating all intercoder reliability issues (Preston, 2001). Further, the 'at-a-distance' construction of LTA, focusing on the frequency and type of words used by individuals, rather than rhetoric of political statements negates potential deception. The framework's resistance to translation issues have also been empirically verified (Hermann, 2005). Nevertheless, a valid issue is the question of authorship. After all, much of the public statements attributed to leaders are heavily directed by political personnel. This does not pose a debilitating blow to the analysis that will follow, however, as the data utilised are predominantly drawn from 'natural' settings like interviews, where speech of leaders are overwhelmingly organic (Çuhadar et al., 2021).

Still, there is a pressing conceptual concern that has been levelled against LTA—one that calls for revisiting its origins. The psychological turn in foreign policy analysis began as a corrective to realism's mechanistic assumptions, which treated states as uniform 'black boxes' mechanically responding to systemic pressures. Psychology shifted the lens, insisting that decision-makers are individuals whose personalities colour geopolitical behaviour. LTA arose from the effort to pin down these qualitative traits, to make them measurable and usable in systematic modelling. Yet, within this very construction lies the persistent critique. In seeking to codify cognition, LTA can itself take on a mechanised quality. Crucially, to assuage this, the numerical indicators will be tested against the historical record, referenced directly to geopolitical events and the ways in which they were approached in practice.

Of course, alternative approaches do offer more qualitative ways of examining psychology, whether through heuristic analysis or semiotic readings of political discourse. Ideally, a more comprehensive account of cognition would integrate such perspectives, situating them alongside structural, international, and domestic analyses

across time. Yet the scope of this paper does not permit such an expansive undertaking. For present purposes, LTA offers a convenient and measurable tool for assessing cognitive characteristics, allowing for a longitudinal perspective that would otherwise be unfeasible outside of a book-length study.

Application and Analysis

Inception of Neo-Ottomanism (1989-1997)

Structural Analysis

In the sense of fundamentally shifting power dynamics, the end of the Cold War was a 'crisis' which greatly influenced the scope for FPC. The expansive reach of the Soviet Union had vanished, creating many structural opportunities to break with its Kemalist isolationism. Much of this arose from the countries going through the arduous process of state-building, with gross domestic product (GDP) nearly halving across the post-Soviet nations (Mitra and Solowsky, 2002). This vulnerability extended to its Middle Eastern competitors on its border with the halting of Soviet financial assistance and top-of-the-line military gear greatly contracting their coercive power (Makovsky, 1999). This vulnerability also extended to Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbours, whose coercive capacity was significantly reduced following the suspension of Soviet financial assistance and advanced military equipment (Makovsky, 1999). In contrast, Turkey boasted significant military strength across the 1990s. During a global period of declining military spending, it doubled its budget to nearly \$7 billion (Makovsky, 1999). Further, it updated its archaic M-47 tanks, produced for the Korean War, as well as acquiring Cobra attack helicopters, top-of-the-line submarines and radar systems (Makovsky, 1999). Overall, this comparative strength afforded Turkey new opportunities for regional activism, yet these remained firmly circumscribed by its Western orientation. After all, the collapse of Soviet power confirmed the United States as the unchallenged global hegemon, making alignment with Washington not only attractive but effectively unavoidable, as the costs of deviation from the Western bloc outweighed the potential gains of independent manoeuvre. At the same time, Turkey's capacity was severely constrained by its troubled economy throughout the 1990s, marked by persistent current account deficits and an average inflation rate of 76 percent (Görmez and Yigit, 2009).

Domestically, this opening remained narrow for both Özal and Erbakan, with the most significant constraint emanating from the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). Individuals vying for change during this time had to consider the existential complications of pushing the military to its limits. Not only was there historical precedent for a military takeover, seen across the coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980, the TSK's right to do so was constitutionally codified under Article 35 of the Internal Service Act (Zürcher, 2004). The military junta of 1971 also granted the army considerable influence over budget allocation and policy formulation, legislating itself to be completely independent from the Ministry of Defence and thereby insulating itself from government influence (Karaosmanoglu, 2000). Further, the TSK also had an institutionalised position in foreign policy through the National Security Council (NSC) (Sakallioglu, 1997). Civilian representation within the ultimate decision-making authority was limited to the Prime

Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the President—the latter holding only a formal chairmanship (Çakır, 2014). To make matters worse, both Özal and Erbakan headed coalition governments, meaning that the civilian decision-makers alongside them were leaders of other parties. This proved especially constraining for Erbakan, whose President and Deputy Prime Minister were staunchly pro-Western, secular figures (Çakır, 2014). Electoral fragmentation further strengthened the parliament's constraining role, a challenge felt most acutely by Özal, given that his foreign policy dealt with international conflict. Indeed, he was significantly limited by Article 92 of the constitution, enshrining an explicit requirement of parliamentary authorisation for any armed deployment abroad (Hale, 2016). All in all, both the parliament and the military were fervently opposed to direct involvement in Iraq and Nagorno-Karabakh, not to mention Erbakan's 'Islamic NATO' proposals (Çakır, 2014). To sum up, although the international environment offered certain favourable dynamics—albeit largely within a Western orientation—the formidable domestic constraints overwhelmingly curtailed the scope for meaningful foreign policy change.

Psychological Analysis

Despite these odds, Özal was able to extract a deviation from Kemalist isolationism, albeit at a minimal magnitude, whilst Erbakan left office empty-handed, having been ushered out with a 'bloodless coup' (Taspinar, 2007). In these near-identical structural contexts, the disparity can be traced to their contrasting psychological profiles. The roots of Erbakan's failure lay in the interaction of his motivational traits. His distrust of others (DIS .144) was slightly above the world leader norm (.130), while his in-group bias (IGB .135) was noticeably higher than Özal's (.116). Taken together, this combination generated an adversarial worldview in which politics appeared as a moralised struggle pitting his Islamic community against the ontologically 'evil' forces of the military and the West (Çuhadar et al., 2021). Compounding this, his task orientation (TASK .537) was well below the mean (.630), meaning that he filtered this adversarial stance through a relationship-maintenance lens. Rather than pursuing pragmatic problem-solving, he sought loyalty, affirmation, and group solidarity, reinforcing the dichotomous framing of politics and limiting his capacity for cooperative interaction — which, given the structural context, was arguably essential for foreign policy change.

Other traits deepened this rigidity. His need for power (PWR .278) exceeded the norm (.260), but his belief in ability to control events (BACE .340) fell just below average (.350). This left him desiring authority but doubting his efficacy. Rather than engaging directly with the military or carefully manoeuvring through parliament, this configuration encouraged an indirect form of constraint challenging. Erbakan pressed against structures obliquely, through sweeping ideological initiatives and rhetorical defiance. The D-8 project and his pan-Islamic appeals embodied this style: bold in symbolism but lacking the institutional levers to reshape outcomes. His conceptual complexity (CC .529) and self-confidence (SC .317) were both below norms (.590 and .360), coding him as closed to information and unable to heed the 'red lines' repeatedly articulated by the military. This profile aligns with the Evangelistic style which, predictably, maps onto the historical record. Despite repeated warnings from the TSK that Islamic reform or confrontation with the West would not be tolerated, Erbakan pressed ahead and ultimately faced the consequences of a 'modern coup' (Çakır, 2014).

By contrast, Özal's motivational configuration was markedly different. His distrust (DIS .134) was close to the norm (.130), while his in-group bias (IGB .116) was lower than Erbakan's, making him less susceptible to rigid 'good versus evil' frames and more open to pluralist readings of politics. Crucially, his task orientation (TASK .656) was above the mean (.630), enabling him to operationalise this relatively balanced worldview through a problem-solving style. Instead of framing politics in terms of loyalty and solidarity, he treated it as a field of pragmatic opportunities. This was reinforced by complementary dispositional traits: his need for power (PWR .229) was below the norm (.260), but his belief in control (BACE .371) exceeded it (.350), producing a leader confident in steering outcomes without being driven by raw ambition. This configuration inclined him to challenge constraints in a relatively direct manner — willing to press his case openly in institutional arenas — though tempered by a pragmatism that prevented overreach. Combined with very high conceptual complexity (CC .651) and above-average self-confidence (SC .453), Özal was coded as open to information: receptive and tactically flexible. This profile aligns with the Actively Independent style. This allowed him to channel distrust into pragmatic measures rather than ideological crusades. He persuaded the military on Iraqi sanctions by cutting budgets and applying measured pressure in the NSC, and secured backing from his Prime Minister and deputy despite their doubts (Çuhadar et al., 2021; Çakir, 2014). As an effective entrepreneur, he recognised limits, shelving plans for Iraqi intervention once resistance hardened, thereby maximising the potential for incremental foreign policy change (Hale, 2016).

Leader	Responsiveness to Constraints (BACE × PWR)	Openness to Information (CC × SC)	Motivation (IGB × DIS)	Classification
Özal	Direct Challenger (BACE .371↑ / PWR .229↓)	Open to Information (CC .651↑ > SC .453↑)	Problem-focused (Pragmatic) (IGB .116↓ / DIS .134≈ / TASK .656↑)	Actively Independent – pragmatic, flexible
Erbakan	Indirect Challenger (BACE .340≈ / PWR .278↑)	Closed to Information (CC .529↓ / SC .317↓)	Relationship-focused (Maintenance) (IGB .135↑ / DIS .144↑ / TASK .537↓)	Evangelistic – ideological, identity-centred

Table 7: LTA Scores – Özal vs Erbakan

Decline of Neo-Ottomanism (1997-2007)

Structural Analysis

Turning to the period of 'neo-Ottoman' decline, the principal international factor shaping both change and continuity was the resolution of post-Cold War balancing dynamics. By the turn of the century, the post-Soviet states had largely stabilised, narrowing Turkey's international room for manoeuvre and constraining its scope for independent policy-making (Çakır, 2014). This regional recovery coincided with a decline in Turkey's own economic and military capacity, undercutting its ambitions to assume a neo-Ottoman 'big brother' role. The Ecevit government, in particular, was in no position to pursue an active foreign policy, having been battered by twin credit crises in 1997 and 2001 and a devastating earthquake in 1999, which inflicted an estimated \$4.5 billion in damage (Bibbee et al., 2000). Rehabilitation was made possible only through Western financial assistance, most notably IMF loans of \$11.4 billion and EU contributions of €450 million, further deepening Turkey's dependence on the West (Ural, 2016). Although the AKP later restored economic stability through stringent fiscal discipline, this recovery came at the expense of military capacity, with the army reduced by almost 20 percent (World Bank, 2019). In parallel, Turkey's alignment with the West persisted, reinforced by the continued dominance of the United States. Strategically, Ankara facilitated American objectives in the Middle East, while Washington reciprocated by supporting Turkey's

stance on the 'Kurdish problem'—a relationship crystallised in the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 (Weiner, 1999).

Contrastingly, there was a distinct change in the EU's stance towards Turkey during this period. Again, related to the relative stabilisation of post-Soviet states, the Central and Eastern European countries constituting this pack were seen to be a better fit for integration, given their historical, sociocultural and geographic ties to the continent, pushing Turkey down the pecking order (Çakır, 2014). These states—collectively branded the 'A-10' countries—were granted official candidacy at the 1997 Luxembourg summit, while Turkey's own application was rejected and only later accepted under heavily conditional terms in 1999 (Pieters, 2021). Although the accession process initially moved forward with some momentum, full membership negotiations did not open until 2005 and quickly lost traction, whereas the 'A-10' states had already achieved full integration by 2004 (Pieters, 2021). Though these consecutive, humiliating rejections may have reasonably catalysed a move away from the EU, neither Ecevit nor Erdoğan had the power to take such a leap in this timeframe. Besides the dependencies outlined above, Turkey was now a part of the European Common Market, with the union making up 60 percent of its trades (Allesandri, 2010)

These international constraints on individuals were further layered domestically, with the power of the army not experiencing a substantial change. In fact, in response to the rekindled insurgency of the PKK in 1996, its involvement was on the rise (Çakır, 2014). More prominently, the 'modern coup' that had ousted Erbakan in 1997 demonstrated to leaders that the iron-clad grip the TSK still had over Turkish politics, despite the reluctance of the parliament in conforming to its agenda (Çakır, 2014). Interestingly, the military continued to enjoy broad popular support, with polls indicating nearly 80 percent approval compared to just 21 percent for politicians (Mohammed, 2014). Nonetheless, the Copenhagen Criteria attached to the EU accession process, which required curbing military oversight, posed the first real challenge to its dominance (Emerson, 2004). A pivotal reform was the 2003 amendment to the Law on Public Financial Management, which progressively diluted the martial presence within the National Security Council (NSC) by introducing civilian members (Çakır, 2014). The same legislation also curtailed the NSC's financial autonomy, placing its expenditures under parliamentary scrutiny (Çakır, 2014). While significant, these changes fell short of fundamentally altering the military's de facto power.

Electoral dynamics further shaped the scope of leadership agency. The Ecevit government, hamstrung by the constraints of a tripartite coalition, had little capacity to pursue transformative policies (Çakır, 2014). By contrast, Erdoğan's AKP entered office with a commanding majority, securing 363 parliamentary seats—more than double the threshold for a single-party government (Carroll, 2004). Thus, while both Ecevit and Erdoğan faced structural limits, they were constrained to very different degrees, particularly in terms of their political authority.

Psychological Analysis

Still, the domineering structures did not completely cripple the agency of these individuals, with both Ecevit and Erdoğan exhibiting degrees of defiance consistent

with their LTA profiles. The clearest instance of Ecevit's defiance was his threat to sever relations with the EU following the Helsinki decision in 1999 (Çuhadar et al., 2021). He also pushed back against the US Senate's Armenian Genocide resolution, demonstrating a readiness to challenge entrenched expectations when supported by his coalition (Çuhadar et al., 2021). Ecevit's political aptitude stemmed less from raw belief in control and more from his openness to information, reflected in his conceptual complexity (CC .617) and self-confidence (SC .505), both above the LTA norms (.590 and .360) (Çuhadar et al., 2021). This configuration codes him as open to information — perceptive, attentive to multiple perspectives, and capable of identifying 'windows of opportunity' in foreign affairs. His task orientation (TASK .664), likewise above the mean (.630), anchored this openness in a problem-solving orientation rather than relationship-maintenance.

Yet motivation in LTA also depends on in-group bias and distrust. Ecevit's in-group bias (IGB .143) was just below the average (.150) but still higher than Erdoğan's (IGB .101), reinforcing his attachment to the secular-Kemalist in-group. His distrust (DIS .090), significantly below the norm (.130), meant that he did not view the international environment as inherently threatening, but he did maintain a somewhat contentious posture towards Islamists and sometimes the West. Taken together, his motivational configuration — low distrust, moderately high in-group bias, and high task orientation — produced a worldview that was competitive but not conspiratorial, channelled through pragmatic problem-solving. Overall, this roughly maps onto the Actively Independent style: challenging constraints, open to information, and problem-focused. Still, his belief in ability to control events (BACE .320) was below the norm (.350), and his need for power (PWR .257) about average (.260), which meant his approach towards structures was marginal and indirect, and was contingent on coalition backing rather than unilateral assertion. Thus, his Actively Independent style manifested less as bold autonomy and more as flexible manoeuvring within coalitions.

Erdoğan's psychological configuration produced a different variant of independence. His belief in ability to control events (BACE .345) sat just below the norm (.350), while his need for power (PWR .271) was slightly above it (.260). This combination positioned him as an Indirect Challenger: willing to contest constraints, but inclined to do so behind the scenes, relying on strategic manoeuvres and proxies rather than constant open confrontation. His conceptual complexity (CC .592) was just above the norm (.590), while his self-confidence (SC .349) remained just under it (.360). This balance coded him as open to information — receptive to multiple perspectives, even if not especially assertive in imposing his own judgements. His task orientation (TASK .633) was essentially at the mean (.630), situating him firmly in the problem-focused camp rather than the relationship-focused one.

Where Erdoğan diverged most sharply from Erbakan was in his motivational base. His in-group bias (IGB .101) and distrust (DIS .110) were both below norms (.150 and .130), giving him a worldview neither tightly bound to a particular in-group identity nor predisposed to see adversaries everywhere (Çuhadar et al., 2021). Coupled with a problem-solving Task orientation, this produced a pragmatic independence, far less moralised than Erbakan's. It helps explain why, in his early years, Erdoğan embraced EU accession — a move that weakened the military under the cover of democratisation

(Rogenhofer, 2018). His motivational profile allowed him to cloak defiance in pragmatism. This was also evident during the 2003 Iraq War, when he orchestrated an en bloc AKP vote and deployed threats to secure discipline (Çuhadar et al., 2021). At times, his assertiveness misfired — as in his failed effort to overturn the headscarf ban — but his Indirect Challenger style, defined by low distrust, low in-group bias, and problem orientation, gave him the flexibility to contest entrenched structures subtly, using coalition politics, EU leverage, and tactical ambiguity. In this sense, he was able to test limits without provoking outright rupture, which explains why a fully fledged ‘neo-Ottoman’ turn had yet to materialise.

Leader	Responsiveness to Constraints (BACE × PWR)	Openness to Information (CC × SC)	Motivation (IGB × DIS)	Classification
Ecevit	Coalition-Based Indirect Challenger (BACE .320↓ / PWR .257≈)	Open to Information (CC .617↑ / SC .505↑)	Problem-focused (IGB .143≈ / DIS .090↓ / TASK .664↑)	Actively Independent – perceptive, pragmatic, but coalition-dependent
Erdoğan	Indirect Challenger (BACE .345≈ / PWR .271↑)	Open to Information (CC .592≈ / SC .349≈)	Problem-focused (IGB .101↓ / DIS .110↓ / TASK .633≈)	Actively Independent – pragmatic, flexible, receptive.

Table 8: LTA Scores – Ecevit vs Erdoğan

Rise of Neo-Ottomanism (2007-2020)

Structural Analysis

Finally turning to the rise of neo-Ottomanism under the second AKP rule, the international setting in which this shift occurred was arguably the most turbulent it had been since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the increasingly multipolar nature of geopolitics, combined with the numerous conflicts arising in its neighbourhood, created many opportunities that Erdoğan had to react to. Fundamentally, the Arab Spring created a window for Turkey to project its influence on states under reconstruction, much like the end of the Cold War (Neset et al., 2021). However, this era differed in the prominence of other regional powers. For example, the Saudi coalition, joined by Bahrain and Egypt, contested Turkey across the East Mediterranean, North Africa and the Gulf, whilst the ‘Shia Crescent’, powered by Iran, did so throughout the Middle East (Neset et al., 2021). Still, Turkey developed a powerful defence industry in this period, exporting an impressive \$1.6 billion in 2014 (Bakeer, 2019). Further, unlike the rest of the region, it left the 2008 crisis relatively unscathed, with a mere 4.6 percent contraction in 2009 followed by an impressive 8.8 percent growth in 2010 (Jarosiewicz, 2013).

This era of multipolarity also incentivised Turkey to greatly diversify its economic relations. Primarily, a significant economic relationship was developed with China, actively partaking in its Belt and Road initiative and the value of their bilateral trade doubling during this timeframe (Ding, Ning and Zang, 2018). Coupled with this, the utility provided by the ‘strategic relationship’ between Turkey and the US declined. The US began shifting its focus towards Romania and Bulgaria in acting as channels into the Black Sea, for example, as well as diverting some of its air force concentration from Turkey to Greece (Neset et al., 2021). Interests have collided most substantially over Syria, with the American assistance of Kurdish paramilitaries seen to directly boost the strength of Turkey’s most potent threat to its national security. As such, Erdoğan re-orientated and found an unlikely ally in Russia, creating an uptick in relations. Economically, the country rapidly became Turkey’s third largest trading partner in 2015,

behind China and Germany (World Bank, 2015). Besides economic ties, this relationship controversially led to Turkey adopting the Russian S-400s, following the Americans withdrawing their Patriot defence systems in 2015. In retaliation, based on American anxieties about Russian surveillance of its F-35s, the jet fighters were withdrawn and sanctions applied on its defence industry (Yegin, 2019). Likewise, relations with the EU have soured amidst increasing human rights concerns, with integration talks being shelved for good following the post-coup authoritarian decline (Çakir, 2014).

Despite these shifts in relations, enduring structural constraints have prevented a full-scale reorientation. Above all, even within an increasingly multipolar environment, the United States remains the pre-eminent global power by every conceivable metric, from military expenditure to the global reach of its bases. Turkey's reliance on the European Union also persists, most visibly in the management of the refugee crisis, while Germany and the United States continue to rank among its most significant trading partners (Altay, 2018). Moreover, although the Turkish economy performed relatively well throughout the 2010s, the following decade has been marked by acute turbulence, with successive currency and inflation crises undermining Ankara's international leverage (Aytaç, 2021).

Paralleling the changes internationally, there were seismic structural shifts in the domestic context, especially with regards to the military. The first visible cracks in its power were seen in 2007, when the military released an online memorandum threateningly protesting Erdoğan's Presidential nomination, Abdullah Gül, on grounds of his Islamic ideologies (Bardakçi, 2013). The military also objected to AKP's proposed electoral reforms and their increasingly religion infused politics, calling on the Turkish Constitutional Court to banish the party. This materialised to be a feeble attempt, with the courts deeming that AKP did not pose a fundamental threat to the republic's secular architecture (Lenore, 2008). On the back of this, the party won the 2007 election with another comfortable majority, Erdoğan continuing as Prime Minister and Gül as the new President. The prestige of the military took another mighty blow in 2010 when a document dating back to 2003 was leaked, supposedly outlining an intricate plot against the newly elected AKP (Rodrik, 2011). Operation Sledgehammer, as branded by the military, allegedly planned the bombing of two mosques in Istanbul and the downing of a Turkish aircraft over the Aegean—acts to be blamed on Greece to justify the declaration of a state of emergency and a subsequent military coup (Rodrik, 2011). This scandal sent the TSK into disarray, with 300 of its senior command being sentenced to prison (BBC, 2011). The public opinion plummeted accordingly, by around a factor of 30 percent (Mohammed, 2014).

This crisis was followed by another successful constitutional referendum in 2010, which removed the political immunity of the military and gave the right for the president to appoint almost the entirety of the Constitutional Court (Herzog, 2010). The biggest overhaul of domestic constraints, however, came following the coup in 2016 (Neset et al., 2019). Utilising the state of emergency, the military was cleansed by the thousands, with Erdoğan placing himself as the army's Commander-in-Chief (Neset et al., 2019). More importantly, the state of emergency was used to push through a constitutional referendum on a presidential system in 2017. Though this passed marginally and under much controversy, it radically weakened parliamentary power, granting a

potent executive, legislative and judicial power to the President (Tas, 2015). This has naturally transposed onto the foreign policy decision-making process, which has been monopolised within the presidency. Indeed, with no legal framework or harmonisation laws present, most geopolitical decisions are now made exclusively through Presidential Decrees (Neset et al., 2019).

Psychological Analysis

In Erdoğan's second term, the easing of these domestic and international constraints allowed his psychological profile to manifest with greater force. His belief in control (BACE .435 vs .345) rose above its earlier level, while his need for power (PWR .280 vs .271) also edged upward. Taken together, this growing self-assurance encouraged him to move beyond accommodation and to experiment with strategies aimed at reshaping the political environment. Whereas in his first term he challenged constraints largely through indirect means, cloaking defiance in pragmatism, by his second term the convergence of higher efficacy and power motivation made him an optimised challenger — one capable of deploying both direct and indirect approaches as circumstances required, choosing the method that best secured his policy goals. His self-confidence (SC .500 vs .349) also rose significantly, while conceptual complexity (CC .497 vs .592) fell well below it, re-coding him as closed to information. This meant that his growing sense of assurance was now accompanied by a diminished receptiveness to competing perspectives, narrowing the range of inputs he was willing to entertain. The motivational profile reinforced this turn. Both in-group bias (IGB .160 vs .101) and distrust (DIS .170 vs .110) climbed, with IGB now above the global mean (.150). This gave him a more adversarial and identity-centred worldview, increasingly framed in Manichean terms.

Operationally, Erdoğan's TASK score, though slightly lower than in his first term (.624 vs .633), remained around the mean (.630), keeping him problem-focused. With stronger efficacy, higher confidence, and an uptick in power motivation, this configuration converged into an Expansionistic style. Adversaries were recast as obstacles to be actively confronted, opportunities as challenges to be seized. The 2008 constitutional ruling, which secured his party's survival, marked this inflection. Initially, he relied on indirect strategies, such as aligning with the Gülen movement to delegitimise the military. But as his adversarial worldview hardened and his confidence grew, he increasingly employed direct strategies, dismantling the Gülenists and the military's political role outright to centralise authority.

Comparing the two terms highlights the evolution. In his first, his psychological configuration produced a pragmatic worldview channelled into indirect, problem-focused independence — exemplified in his embrace of EU accession as a means to weaken the military under the cover of democratisation. By the second, rising PWR, elevated BACE, and stronger SC combined with heightened IGB to produce a more identity-centred, mission-driven posture, enacted through optimised indirect and direct confrontation. This transformation illustrates a reciprocal relationship between structure and personality. Loosening constraints gave Erdoğan greater latitude to act on his evolving psychological configuration, with the same configuration playing a role in eroding those very constraints. In this sense, structural openings and personal dispositions reinforced one another. As constraints receded, his traits came to the fore,

and as those traits shaped bold actions, they further weakened the very institutions that had once checked him.

Leader	Responsiveness to Constraints (BACE × PWR)	Openness to Information (CC × SC)	Motivation (IGB × DIS)	Classification
Erdoğan (2002-2007)	Indirect Challenger (BACE .345≈ / PWR .271↑)	Open to Information (CC .592≈ > SC .349≈)	Problem-focused (IGB .101↓ / DIS .110↓/ TASK .633≈)	Actively Independent – pragmatic, flexible, receptive.
Erdoğan (2007-2020)	Optimum Challenger (BACE .435↑ / PWR .280↑)	Closed to Information (CC .497↓ < SC .500↑)	Problem-focused (IGB .160↑ / DIS .170↑ / TASK .624≈)	Expansionistic – assertive, identity-centred, focused on enlarging control

Table 9: Erdoğan (2002-2007) & Erdoğan (2007-2020)

Discussion

What this analysis primarily shows is that FPC is an incredibly demanding geopolitical phenomenon. It entails not only the correct international and domestic context creating a pathway for change, but also the presence of policy entrepreneurs able to capitalise on, or actively shape, these structural openings. In short, AKP's neo-Ottoman shift was determined by this perfect convergence. In earlier phases, either domestic or international factors, or both, heavily restricted the scope for FPC — though leaders still attempted change with varying degrees of success. Interestingly, all the leaders considered in the analysis fit the requirement of a 'policy entrepreneur'. Of course, as outlined, the expected 'policy entrepreneur' must not only challenge structures but do so effectively, as well as holding a 'neo-Ottoman' philosophy. Erbakan epitomises the limits of zeal without efficacy. Despite his fervent ideological commitment, his below average BACE (.340) and moderately high PWR (.278) curtailed his ability to steer outcomes directly. Instead, this configuration encouraged a more indirect mode of constraint challenging — pressing against entrenched structures through sweeping ideological gestures rather than through direct institutional manoeuvring. Crucially, his low self-confidence and subpar complexity compounded the problem, leaving him rigid and poorly attuned to subtle openings. So, his orientation made him willing but ill-equipped to challenge structures, which helps explain the brevity of his evangelistic tenure. Lacking the dexterity to turn openings into gains, his ineptitude emboldened the military and the secular elite – hardening the very barriers he sought to break.

Ecevit, conversely, possessed traits that made him adept at navigating constraints but without the ideological ambition to drive a neo-Ottoman turn. His conceptual complexity (CC .617) and self-confidence (SC .505) were both above normal, marking him as open to information and receptive to multiple perspectives. Coupled with a strong task focus (TASK .664), he displayed a problem-solving style that allowed him to push EU relations in actionable directions after Helsinki. Yet, his weak efficacy beliefs (BACE .320) limited his capacity to drive change independently, leaving him reliant on coalition consensus. Here, personality again interacted with structure in a mutually reinforcing way. Ecevit's pragmatism allowed adaptation within constraints, yet his modest sense of agency meant those constraints were rarely weakened. In any case, lacking a neo-Ottoman worldview, his policy innovations remained tethered to secular-Kemalist objectives, rather than any fundamental revisionism.

This leaves Özal and Erdoğan as the leaders most capable of marrying aptitude and

vision, which corresponds to the historical record. Özal's cognitive configuration exhibits a high BACE (.371) and moderately low PWR (.229), equipping him to press against structures directly, while his above-average SC (.453) and very high CC (.651) coded him as receptive to competing perspectives. His distrust (DIS .134) sat close to the global mean, cautious but not conspiratorial, while his in-group bias (IGB .116) reinforced a pluralist orientation. Crucially, his TASK (.656) was above the mean (.630), situating him firmly in the problem-focused camp and allowing him to channel this pluralist worldview into pragmatic, opportunity-seeking strategies. Yet, structurally, he faced severe political and economic constraints. But here, again, reciprocity is present. Yes, Özal's personality profile may have helped him adapt to those constraints but, at the same time, it defined them by limiting how far he could or would push back. The outcome was a liberal, Europe-compatible version of neo-Ottomanism that resonated but did not translate into any radical transformation.

Erdoğan's trajectory, by comparative design, is more dynamic. In his first term (2002–2007), his BACE (.345) was around the mean, SC (.349) below norm, and CC (.592) slightly above. Combined with low IGB (.101) and DIS (.110), this placed him in the category of leaders open to information, more pragmatic than ideological. His traits both adapted to and subtly reshaped constraints, providing the tools to weaken structural barriers – illustrated aptly in his EU accession strategy. By his second term (2007–2020), both Erdoğan's profile and the structural environment had shifted. His belief in control (BACE .435) climbed higher while his need for power (PWR .280) crept above the mean, improving him from an indirect challenger into a more optimised one — capable of pressing against structures with both direct and indirect strategies. At the same time, his self-confidence (SC .500) rose above the mean, while his conceptual complexity (CC .497) fell below it, producing closure to information: a greater certainty in his own judgement, but less receptiveness to competing perspectives. His in-group bias (IGB .160) and distrust (DIS .170) also increased, reinforcing an adversarial and identity-driven worldview. Finally, his task orientation (TASK .624) stayed close to the mean (.630), sufficient to channel this outlook into problem-focused execution. This new configuration encouraged more assertive and identity-centred policies, reflected in AKP's drive for regional autonomy and a readiness to confront the West more directly.

Of course, these changes cannot be purely read as simple personal evolution. Far from operating in a vacuum, these traits became pertinent because of various international developments, not to mention the fact that the military's political weight had already been undermined. In this sense, the differences in Özal's and Erdoğan's foreign policy outcomes are at least partly attributable to the constraints. Özal's opportunity, created by the end of the Cold War, was tempered by a fractious coalition and the enduring power of the military. Erdoğan, meanwhile, benefitted from a parliamentary majority, reduced dependence on the West, and a weakened military establishment. Yet, it would be misleading to suggest that this change was likewise solely structural. After all, Erdoğan's tactical use of power was central to gaining popular support and weakening constraining structures. By exploiting alliances—most notably with the Gülen movement—and later dismantling them, whilst simultaneously pushing legal mechanisms against entrenched elites and democratic institutions, he indeed directly facilitated the erosion of almost all inhibitive authority.

From this perspective, Erbakan's failure and Erdoğan's eventual success represent two ends of a spectrum, defined certainly by structural openings but also by how personality traits shape, and are shaped by, those openings. Erbakan's weak efficacy left him reinforcing the very barriers he sought to dismantle, Erdoğan's rising confidence and tactical assertiveness actively undercut them. Özal illustrates how cosmopolitan traits could adapt to but not overturn constraints, while Ecevit shows how openness and pragmatism may facilitate adaptation without transformation. Yet, the key point here is not to draw a deterministic causal chain. Personality did not predetermine foreign policy outcomes, nor did structure alone dictate behaviour. Instead, leadership traits and the permissive environment interacted recursively. Erdoğan's early pragmatism and dexterity were mutually shaped by structural openings, just as his growing confidence both enabled and was enabled by the weakening of institutional constraints. As those constraints receded, his worldview gained greater traction — not as an inevitable progression, but as the product of this continual interplay.

	Responsiveness to Constraints	Openness to Information	Worldview	Operationalised Worldview	Overall Typology
Erbakan	Indirect Challenger (BACE .340≈ / PWR .278†)	Closed (CC .529 ↓ / SC .317 ↓)	Manichean (IGB .135† / DIS .144†)	Relationship-Focused (TASK .537↓)	Evangelistic – moral absolutist, adversarial worldview
Özal	Constraint Challenger (BACE .371† / PWR .229↓)	Open (CC .651↑ > SC .453†)	Competitive (IGB .116↓ / DIS .134≈)	Problem-Focused (TASK .656†)	Actively Independent – entrepreneurial, opportunistic, pragmatic
Ecevit	Constraint Challenger (BACE .320↓ / PWR .257≈)	Open (CC .617↑ > SC .505†)	Cooperative (IGB .143≈ / DIS .090↓)	Problem-Focused (TASK .664†)	Actively Independent – adaptive within coalitions, secular-Kemalist aims
Erdoğan (2002-2007)	Constraint Challenger (BACE .345≈ / PWR .271†)	Open (CC .592≈ > SC .349≈)	Cooperative (IGB .101↓ / DIS .110↓)	Problem-Focused (TASK .633≈)	Actively Independent – pragmatic, used EU process tactically
Erdoğan (2007-2020)	Constraint Challenger (BACE .435† / PWR .280†)	Closed (CC .497↓ < SC .500†)	Manichean (IGB .160† / DIS .170†)	Problem-Focused (TASK .624≈)	Expansionist – confrontational, identity-centred executor

Table 10 : LTA Results Summary

Conclusion

This study has sought to show the structure–agency dynamics which have shaped Turkey's striking geopolitical reorientation. In doing so, Gustavsson's (1999) FPC model has been revised, specifically by incorporating LTA into its otherwise ordinary conceptualisation of the individual and situating this alongside cyclical and structural models. With this, it has moved into the cognitive 'black box' of four Turkish leaders, examining how they were constrained and how they interacted with international and domestic confines. Özal's agility in exploiting the post-Cold War 'window of opportunity' was shown, demonstrating his navigation of the economic, parliamentary and military restraints he encountered. Resultantly, the paper suggested how he articulated the Ottomans as a more Western-oriented, cosmopolitan empire. Erbakan's clumsy attempts at Islamic reformation were seen as a further contrast to Özal's relative dexterity, highlighting the significance of political aptitude when pursuing FPC – especially when confronting the entrenched power of the Turkish military. The era following this transient inception of 'neo-Ottomanism' offered little structural scope for deviation, and Ecevit's republican commitments made him an unlikely candidate for pursuing such a course.

Structural constraints were equally important in tempering Erdoğan's first term, limiting the expression of his more ambitious impulses and presenting him instead as a democratic reformer. Even so, his implicit use of power in this era was pivotal in laying the groundwork for his eventual ascendance. By his second term, the configuration had shifted. With greater efficacy, rising confidence, and a stronger drive for power — now sharpened by in-group bias and closure to information — Erdoğan met a more permissive environment with bolder, more assertive strategies. Simultaneously enabled

by a multipolar geopolitical context and a weakened Kemalist military, he pushed through a more confrontational, identity-orientated vision that contrasted markedly with his measured first term.

So, in summary, the 'neo-Ottoman' shift was in many ways an alignment of the stars, a freak occurrence ensuring the temperate conditions for AKP's 'neo-Ottoman' shift. But, at the same time, it was a calculated act of a cunning 'policy entrepreneur', biding his time, chipping away at the foundations and pouncing at the opportune moment. As such, the thesis is in agreement with the literature that substantial FPC is an inordinately scarce phenomenon, though its study is as necessary as it is fascinating. Still, the paper proudly deviates from the scholarship's aversion towards the adequate consideration of human psychology in explaining change. In this sense, its biggest contribution is the construction of the LTA-FPC framework, which will prove applicable far and beyond the Turkish case. Specifically, it would be curious to see its application in other nations with prominent military institutions, Western dependencies and personalistic leaders creating comparable variables. In this regard, Brazil might be a potential candidate.

A further application would be longitudinal analysis. Leaders who remain in office for extended periods — and especially those who recalibrate their style — should be studied at intervals to capture changes in their psychological profile. Erdoğan offers a striking illustration, with measurable shifts across his terms underscoring how traits and strategies evolve over time. Finally, some refinements to the model are worth underscoring. Hermann (1990) long ago suggested that leaders may recalibrate their style depending on the audience, behaving one way at home and another abroad. This insight has been applied to Erdoğan, but remains largely neglected in other cases (Kesgin, 2020). Probing these divergences could open a promising line of inquiry, not only further illuminating the mechanics of the 'neo-Ottoman' shift but also sharpening the psychological model writ large.

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