From Honeymoon to Divorce:
Exploring the Dramatic Change in Turkey's Foreign Policy Towards Syria in 2011 Through Role-Theory

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The Arab Spring not only posed challenges for the states within which the protests occurred, but also placed pressure on other states to respond to the calls for democracy. The Syrian uprisings called for the removal of the authoritarian Assad regime, with whom Turkey had cultivated a close relationship. There was a transition from amity to enmity, with Erdoğan actively denouncing the Assad regime, proclaiming that "we will not stop until we rescue our brothers in Syria."[1] This paper explores this change and argues that mounting regional/international pressures following the Arab Spring served to highlight the incongruencies inherent within AKP foreign policy. Turkey was forced to confront the contradiction of acquiring international prestige for its democracy promotion while simultaneously reaping the benefits of developing close relationships with autocratic regimes. Ultimately, Turkey enacted a new role as "regional protector" and moved decisively against the Syrian regime.

In the years preceding the 2011 Syrian uprisings, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) cultivated an economic, political, and cultural relationship with Syria, highlighted by the fifty-one protocols signed by the two countries in 2011 that were based on a common destiny, history, and future. That same year, protests intensified in Syria and, after unsuccessfully attempting to persuade Bashar al-Assad to implement reforms, Turkey cut its ties with the Syrian regime. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkish Prime Minister, 2003-2014, and current President) explicitly called for Bashar al-Assad to resign, likening him to Mussolini, Hitler, and Gadhafi.[2] Yet, Turkey had several important stakes tied to the survival of the Assad regime, such as the containment of the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) in Syria. A failed state in Syria would inflame the Kurdish problem, as well as jeopardise the success of the AKP's "zero problems with neighbours" policy. While Turkey could not have predicted the violent and destabilising civil war, "its turn to active support for anti-Assad insurgents does not appear to be consistent with traditional realist calculations of threat."[34] So why then, did Turkey abandon its amity with Syria?

This study emphasises the utility of "role-theory" for understanding this transformation. Role-theory assumes that a state's foreign policy is enacted according to

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[1] Speech presented at the AK Party's Provincial Congress by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 24 March 2018, in Nilay Kar Onum, "Erdogan Vows to Rescue Syrian 'Brothers' from Terror," Anadolu Agency, accessed 1 April 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/erdogan-vows-to-rescue-syrian-brothers-from-terror/1098394>.

[2] Sebnem Arsu, "Turkish Premier Urges Assad to Quit in Syria," New York Times, 22 November 2011, accessed 3 May 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/world/middleeast/turkish-leader-says-syrian-president-should-quit.html>.

[3] Raymond Hinnebusch and Özlem Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 212.

[4] Traditional realist arguments understand foreign policy as the pursuit of rational interests (such as power, strategy, security, and economic wealth) derived from the anarchical international structure.

decision-makers' subjective conceptions of their state's role on the world stage. These role conceptions are influenced by varying components of both domestic and international politics. As a theory, its advantage chiefly lies in its ability to consider the systemic constraints and international expectations placed on states, while also allowing for consideration of domestic influences and political pressures. It has significant potential for incorporating multiple levels of analysis and negotiating the agent-structure dilemma.

Drawing from the literature on role-theory, this study captures the shift in Turkish foreign policy in 2011 through an analysis of Turkish role conceptions. Turkish foreign policy was transformed under the AKP, and it developed new roles in foreign policy. This paper finds that Turkey assumed two principal roles, acting both as an "example" state and as a "regional leader." In short, Turkey's example role was illustrated by its promotion of democracy and the prestige it was given as a model of a moderate Islamist democracy; for instance, "in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, many spoke of emulating the 'Turkish model.'"[5] However, the AKP also developed its regional leader role on the basis of its "zero problems with neighbours" strategy and successfully cultivated close relationships with its neighbouring, autocratic regimes. When the masses – within the countries that Turkey had developed amity with – began demanding democracy, there was an evident conflict between these two role conceptions.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 interrupted the status-quo and placed new "role expectations" on Turkey, both regionally and internationally. In the initial turmoil that ensued, Turkey began using a strategy of "role segregation," whereby it oscillated between trying to preserve its relationships with autocratic regimes and promoting democracy. However, when Assad ignored Erdoğan's calls for Syrian political reform and the domestic situation worsened, a new role conception emerged. Turkey resolved its inter-role conflict by merging together its regional leadership role with democracy promotion. The role of regional protector emerged, which became evident in the discourse and rhetoric of the AKP government. The AKP in 2018 underlined that:

> "As a human and moral responsibility, we have accepted our Syrian brothers and sisters into our country and will continue to do so until the Syrian conflict is resolved […] As an honest friend and neighbour, Turkey will continue to work for a free, fair, democratic and prosperous Syria."[6]

Addressing unexpected foreign policy change has long posed a challenge for International Relations (IR) scholarship. While there has been significant literature on role-theory, which analyses the causal relationship between roles and state behaviour, the process of "role change" has been somewhat neglected. Role change can lead to states altering their foreign policy behaviour. This study finds that there are two important elements that explain why Turkey began to enact the role of regional protector in 2011. Firstly, Turkey had an inter-role conflict between its two principal foreign policy roles, which led to incongruent expectations; thus, when these roles were merged, they combined

[5] Christopher Phillips, "Turkey's Syria Problem," *Public Policy Research* 19, no. 2 (2012): 137.
[6] "2023 Vision," AK Parti, http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision#bolum_>.

democracy promotion with regional activism. Secondly, the impact of the Arab Spring – which constituted a change at the international level – heightened the pressure on Turkey's foreign policy decision makers to resolve the contradictions within its roles and condemn Assad.

This paper proceeds in three parts. First, the role-theory framework is laid out and the ways in which the literature has approached Turkish foreign policy are examined. The second part contextualises the AKP's foreign policy and presents the AKP's primary role conceptions of regional leader and example. The third section examines the Arab Spring, the resultant role expectations on Turkey, and the development of its role as regional protector.

Theoretical Overview
Role-theory

Broadly, the idea of a role is borrowed from the theatre, where an actor is expected to follow her script and act accordingly. In role-theory, "roles consist of patterns of appropriate or expected behaviour that are drawn from the actor's social position in an organised group or the kinds of people it is possible to be in a given society."[7] In his foundational work, Kalevi J. Holsti integrated role-theory, from the field of sociology, with the study of foreign policy.[8] He focused on the idea that roles, as idealised self-conceptualisations, could shape the way a state acts within the international system. Resultantly, actors are actively involved in the process of categorising themselves and tend to conceive of several roles concurrently.

The concept of role contains several basic dimensions: "role conception," "role expectation," and "role performance." Role conceptions refer to foreign policy decision makers' perceptions of their state's position in the international system. Within the literature, speeches and statements of leaders are often considered as representative of national role conceptions. A role conception can be seen as a product of a state's socialisation process, influenced by its history, culture, and societal characteristics.[9] Thus, role conceptions are particular to each polity. The national role conceptions that a state holds are constituted by its own self-definition, but, crucially, roles are also impacted by the expectations of others. The expectations of others constitute role expectations, which are the "norms, beliefs and preferences concerning the performance of an individual in a role relative to individuals occupying other roles."[10] The state's role conceptions, combined with the role expectations of others, result in the state's role performance, i.e. state behaviour and action.

I find that there are three primary advantages of using role-theory to analyse foreign

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[7] Leslie E. Wehner and Cameron Thies, "Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation: The Domestic Contestation of Roles," *International Studies Review* 16 (2014): 414.

[8] Holsti analysed speeches from leaders of every country from 1965 until 1967 to derive his seventeen foreign policy roles. Kalevi J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1970): 233-309.

[9] Holsti, "National Role," 233-309.

[10] Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in Latin America," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 13, no. 3 (2017): 666.

policy. First, its concern with the interaction between agency and structure. Waltzian, third-image analyses – which privilege the system – have dominated IR. These theories are often insufficient when explaining change: they anticipate smooth transitions in foreign policy as states react to a systemic alteration in the international balance of power. If this were the case, as the shock of the Arab uprisings altered the international system, we would expect to see an according shift in Turkey's foreign policy. In reality, there was a clear interval of uncertainty and policy fluctuation. Changes within the international system can only set the basic parameters for state action: ultimately, "individual states will respond differently to the same structural incentives."[11] Meanwhile, an emphasis on agency has largely been associated with the subfield of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which focuses on the process of foreign policy decision making, rather than generalised theories.[12] Role-theory allows for actors to have the "capacity to create, modify, and violate expectations that emerge from and within relations with Others and from the limitations of structures."[13] By looking at the interaction between agent and structure, role-theory can offer a useful dialogue between FPA's largely agent-based theorisations and IR's system-based arguments.

Second, role-theory facilitates analysis between state-identity and behaviour. This is exceedingly useful for the research tradition on social identity: roles can link identity and action.[14] Emerging as a reaction against the neo-realist and positivist orthodoxy that has dominated IR, the constructivist turn has resulted in a proliferation of studies on state and national identity. Constructivism does not view state behaviour as the result of fixed national interests, but as part of a pattern of action that both shapes and is shaped by identities over time. Its ontology holds ideational or social-psychological factors as significant and independent variables in themselves.[15] However, analysing identity has opened the door to many analytical obstacles.[16] While constructivist arguments have agreed that identity "generates [the] motivational and behavioural disposition" of international actors,[17] it does not illustrate that identity directly determines individual foreign policy initiatives. Constructivism has tended to link identity to interests by using an identity-interest nexus; however, "interest" is a "slippery" concept when it is applied to real instances of state action.[18] Role-theory, however, provides the conceptual tools to operationalise state-identity, whilst also incorporating factors such as socio-economic demands, international

[11] Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, no. 1 (1999): 92.

[12] Valerie Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (2005): 1-30.

[13] Wehner and Thies, "Role Theory," 415.

[14] Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies* (2010): 662-681.

[15] Ji Young Choi "Rationality, Norms and Identity in International Relations," *International Politics* 52, no. 1 (2015): 114.

[16] Maja Zehfuss, "Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 3 (2001): 93-117.

[17] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 224.

[18] Kuniko Ashizawa, "When Identity Matters: State Identity, Regional Institution-Building, and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Studies Review* 10, no. 3 (2008): 577.

and domestic expectations, ideology, strategy, and geographic variables.

Role-theory's third major advantage lies in its capacity to span across different levels of analysis.[19] It concentrates on both the international and the domestic sphere, moving between the individual, the state, and the system as levels of analysis. Mainstream IR has often focused on the interactions between unitary state actors rather than looking within the domestic sphere. While IR has increasingly moved to study the role of domestic politics and decision making, it has largely failed to reconcile this movement with the years of work produced by FPA.[20] Despite the constructivist turn and the according proliferation in studies of state-identity and ideational factors, role-theory remains "largely unfamiliar" to IR scholars.[21] Role-theory could be incorporated into the wider IR literature and should be recognised as a way of crossing multiple levels of analysis.

Role-Conflict and Role Change

Role-theory can provide insight into what happens when there is a clash between a state's competing or non-compatible roles. According to the literature, two types of role-conflict can occur: inter-role (conflict between roles) and intra-role (conflict within a role).[22] Inter-role conflict occurs when actors find themselves with multiple role conceptions, which are incompatible or incongruous.[23] Foreign policy decision makers often face multiple (and sometimes conflicting) role expectations that come from both the domestic, regional, and global levels.[24] Intra-role conflict occurs when the enactment of a specific role is contested by the domestic and international actors.[25]

This paper finds that role change can occur as a result of a role-conflict. While role change has been analysed in the role-theory literature, it has often been portrayed as a "gradual" process.[26] Albeit, it has been acknowledged that more rapid change can occur when states experience "internal upheaval" (like a revolution).[27] However, the case of Turkey in 2011 offers an insightful example of a state altering its role conceptions following an external change in the international system (the Arab Spring). Unexpected, exogenous changes can lead to contrasting and varying role expectations for the actor,

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[19] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 233-309.

[20] Juliet Kaarbo, "A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory," *International Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (2015): 189.

[21] Cameron Thies and Marijke Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8 (2012): 1.

[22] Moch Faisal Karim, "Role Conflict and the Limits of State Identity: The Case of Indonesia in Democracy Promotion," *Pacific Review* 30, no. 3 (2017): 388.

[23] Tewes examines the role-conflict in Germany's foreign policy between enacting a role to deepen EU integration or a role regarding EU enlargement. Henning Tewes, "Between Deepening and Widening: Role Conflict in Germany's Enlargement Policy," *West European Politics* 21, no. 2 (1998): 117-133.

[24] Gauvav Ghose and Patrick James, "Third-Party Interventionism in Ethno-Religious Conflict; Role Theory, Pakistan and War in Kashmir, 1965," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17 (2005): 430.

[25] There has also been an increasing understanding that domestic role contestation can be fruitful in terms of explaining why certain roles emerge. Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[26] Glenn Chafetz, et al.,"Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime," *Political Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1996): 736.

[27] Chafetz, et al., "Role Theory," 736.

causing decision makers to re-prioritise and change their behaviour.[28] By analysing the impact of changes on the international level and the concomitant role expectations, this case-study has potential to offer fresh insight for the role-theory literature and enhances scholarly understanding of foreign policy change.

It is important to note that this work holds several assumptions. It argues that both international and domestic factors can impact a state's foreign policy behaviour; crucially, it holds that these factors are channelled through the foreign policy decision makers who subsequently "identify, decide and enact foreign policy actions."[29] This study assumes that Turkish decision makers can be representative of Turkey's national role conceptions. It should be clarified that, while roles may not be uniformly shared within a polity – and may be domestically contested – foreign policy is ultimately made by individual decision makers in the name of the state. This essay does not regard public opinion or domestic role contestation in Turkey as significant factors in 2011. Özgür Özdamar argues that domestic role contestation has been marginalised under the AKP as the party has successfully secured control over (Kemalist) state institutions.[30] Therefore, this paper will focus on the AKP's ideology and strategy, alongside how it has used foreign policy to consolidate its power, obtain the "elimination of effective role contestation," and develop new role conceptions.[31] I will largely consider Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu (Chief Foreign Policy Advisor, 2003-2009, Foreign Minister, 2009-2014, and Prime Minister 2014-2016) as Turkey's foreign policy decision makers. While there has been increasing work done on the impact of these leaders' personalities and of psychological variables in determining their perception of events, this is not addressed within the confines of this study; this would, however, make a valuable future avenue of research. This paper will draw upon Holsti's (1970) typology of role conceptions; it does not provide a comprehensive account of Turkey's historical national role conceptions, but rather concentrates on the specific roles that are relevant to the foreign policy decisions made in 2011.

Literature on Turkish Foreign Policy
Within the literature available on Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP, there have been two key debates. The first has been the role of ideational factors, specifically Islamism and neo-Ottomanism. One of the most recurrent themes is the role of political Islam in Turkey's foreign policy. The AKP's neo-Ottoman identity has also been discussed, with Alexander Murinson arguing that the AKP's rule has marked a clear transformation in

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[28] Spyros Blavoukos and Dimitris Bourantonis, "Identifying Parameters of Foreign Policy Change: An Eclectic Approach," *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 4 (2014): 483.
[29] Bülent Aras and Aylin Gorener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 74.
[30] Özgür Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach," in *Domestic Role Contestation,* 89-104.
[31] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources," 90.

Turkish history with the return of neo-Ottomanism.[32] The second key debate has been on the extent to which the AKP's rule constitutes continuity versus change. The new foreign policy under the AKP has been conceptualised as a shift away from the West and an axis shift.[33] Soner Cagaptay argues that Turkey has shifted from the West and its traditional Kemalist orientation, and instead has moved towards the Islamic world.[34] These claims have been challenged by thinkers such as Katerina Dalacoura, who argues that increased involvement in the Middle East does not by default mean that Turkey is turning away from the West.[35]

While this paper agrees that identity is important, it cautions against monolithic conceptualisations of Turkish identity. Much of the scholarship on recent Turkish foreign policy has referred to the AKP's "Islamist" identity as a way of explaining its deeper engagement with the Middle East. The crude narrative given is that, after the AKP attained power, Turkey's identity shifted from a pro-Western (Kemalist) identity towards an increasingly Islamist one. However, this narrative ignores the multiple foreign policy strategies enacted by the AKP. For instance, it does not provide an explanation for the AKP's "initial pro-European swing," nor why Turkey's membership of NATO has remained a key tenet of its foreign policy.[36] Furthermore, deterministic and static identity conceptions that emphasise Turkey's Islamic identity cannot explain Turkey's movement against the Syrian Ba'ath Party in 2011.

Despite the significant literature available on Turkish foreign policy, the Syria-Turkey relationship has been understudied. However, several key contributions to the literature should be noted. The normalisation of relations between Turkey and Syria has been explored by Marwan Kabalan[37] and Reem Abou-El-Fadl.[38] An essential contribution has been Raymond Hinnebusch and Özlem Tür's book, *Turkey-Syria Relations, Between Enmity and Amity* (2013), which presents a collection of essays that analyse the alignment changes.[39] This collection stands out in its inclusion of multifarious perspectives, bringing together different theoretical approaches with varying levels of analysis. The principle argument given in this book is that, in order to understand the alignment shifts, it is necessary to look at the interaction of identity and interests, exogenous and endogenous factors, regional and global dynamics. However, none of the essays explicitly address the question of what made Turkey change its traditional foreign policy of non-involvement

[32] Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 945-964.

[33] Ahmer Sözen, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transitions and Challenges," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 103-123.

[34] Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[35] Katerina Dalacoura, "Muslim and Modern: Why Turkey's 'Turn to the East' is No Slight to the West," *Juncture* 21, no. 4 (2015): 324-327.

[36] Lisel Hintz, "'Take It Outside!' National Identity Contestation in the Foreign Policy Arena," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 2 (2016): 336.

[37] Marwan Kabalan, "Syrian-Turkish Relations: Geopolitical Explanations for the Move from Conflict to Co-operation," in *Turkey-Syria Relations,* 27-39.

[38] Reem Abou-el-Fadl, "Turkey's Cold War Alliance: Nation-building and the Utility of the 1957 Syrian Crisis," *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 39-55.

[39] Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations*.

in Middle Eastern conflicts during the Arab Spring. This study hopes to help fill this lacuna by concentrating specifically on this foreign policy change.

While role-theory has been given considerable attention in the FPA literature,[40] only a limited number of works have analysed Turkey's role conceptions and their impact on its foreign policy.[41] While Özdamar, et al., contrast Turkey's foreign policy roles enacted before the Arab Spring with the ones enacted afterwards,[42] they do not use role-theory to explore the redirection of foreign policy in 2011.

The AKP in the Context of Turkish Foreign Policy

This study provides an analysis of the role change that occurred in 2011, and argues this change emerged due to an inter-role conflict between the roles of example and regional leader. Without an understanding of the specificity of these roles and their implications, it is difficult to explain both why and how the role of regional protector emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring. This section will contextualise the AKP and account for the development of its primary role conceptions.

National role conceptions are particular to each polity and are products of a nation's socialisation process, rooted in its history and culture. They are often shaped by a nation's "formative experiences" and its founding elites.[43] Ultimately, the Kemalist paradigm has had an enduring influence on Turkey's foreign policy. Mustafa Kemal founded the Turkish Republic on the basis of a commitment to secularism and the Westernisation of a society inherited from the Ottomans.[44] Islam was relegated to the private sphere, state institutions were secularised, and there were attempts to "westernise" culture; for example, in 1928, the Arabic script was replaced with the Latin alphabet. Significantly, the Kemalist paradigm was also enshrined by "an apparatus of institutional safeguards to prevent any deviation from the established line in years to come."[45] Kemalist foreign policy tradition emphasised "non-intervention, a Western orientation, and vigilance with regard to national sovereignty."[46] Turkey's foreign policy has remained largely Western-orientated: Turkey was a part of the Western bloc during the Cold War and it has also pursued membership in multiple Western organisations, such as the OECD, the Council of Europe, and NATO. Accordingly there has been a tradition of non-intervention in the MENA region; albeit, there have been some notable deviations from this. Under Turgut

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[40] Marijke Breuning, "Words and Deeds: Foreign Assistance Rhetoric and Policy Behaviour in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1995): 235-254; Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot, "Role Theory," 727-757; and Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," 662-681.

[41] Bülent Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey's Position* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 73-93; Emel Parlar Dal and Emre Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model' in The Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2014): 258-282; and Özgür Özdamar, et al., "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," *Uluslarasi Iliskiler* 11, no. 42 (2014): 93-113.

[42] Özdamar, et al., "From Good Neighbor," 93-113.

[43] Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 78.

[44] See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) for an in-depth analysis on the formation of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism.

[45] Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 78.

[46] F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003), 18-19.

Özal, who served as Prime Minister from 1983-1989 and President from 1989-1993, Turkey began to liberalise its economy. One of the major results of this was an economic opening within the Middle East as Özal stimulated Turkish commercial involvement in Libya, Iraq, Iran, and the Gulf states. [47] By consequence, its political relations with these countries in the region improved and Turkey's foreign policy became more multidimensional. However, the AKP would later challenge the Kemalist tradition in a far more comprehensive and multifaceted way.

Turkey's relationship with Syria over the years has largely conformed to Kemalist ideals. During the Cold War, Turkey's Western alignment and membership of the Baghdad Pact (a Cold War military alliance formed in 1955 between Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the UK) contrasted with Syria's pro-Soviet position. In the post-Cold War era, their relationship deteriorated when, from 1984, Syria gave support to the PKK and its leader Abdullah Öcalan. This became Syria's "political card" that it used against Turkey over water issues and sovereignty over Hatay. Their relations reached a crisis point in October 1998. Ankara pressured Damascus by placing ten thousand Turkish troops on the Syrian border, threatening an invasion if Damascus did not stop supporting the PKK and expel Öcalan.[48] This escalation to near-war may not seem in line with the Kemalist foreign policy tradition of distancing Turkey from the Middle East. Importantly, the times when Turkey did not conform to traditional norms were generally due to its attempts to "forestall provision of regional support to the PKK from states such as Iraq, Iran and Syria."[49] This period ended with the watershed Adana Accord (1998), commencing the normalisation of relations between Syria and Turkey and Syria's expulsion of Öcalan. However, although the accord historically marked the normalisation of relations, under the AKP, there began a movement "beyond simple normalisation, towards amity, even alliance."[50]

The AKP came to power in 2002, signifying a new era of Turkish politics and its foreign policy. The party was founded in 2001 and is a conservative democratic party that is Islamic-oriented, although not anti-capitalist or *de facto* anti-Western. Unlike its Kemalist predecessors – who emphasised secularism – the AKP brings Islamic values to the fore. Yet, unlike the former Turkish Islamist parties, the AKP does not denounce the world capitalist system and has reconciled itself "with Turkey's European orientation, which their predecessors had opposed and [the AKP has] prepared a liberal party programme."[51] There have been both continuations and alterations to traditional Turkish foreign policy; the AKP has maintained some roles while developing others. Thus its foreign policy has been multifaceted: it is a member of NATO, a candidate for EU membership, and a member of the OIC. Some of its foreign policy can be viewed as a continuation of the Kemalist tradition, such as its commitment to gaining EU membership. It has also developed its role in multiple regions: the Balkans, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central

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[47] Özal developed Turkish relations with Libya, Iraq, Iran, and the Gulf states by stimulating Turkish commercial involvement in the region. Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 128.

[48] F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (2007): 109.

[49] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources," 92

[50] Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 2.

[51] Yesim Arat, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey – Implications of a Democratic Paradox?," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 871.

Asia, Africa, Europe, and the US. It should be noted that "the objective is not to diminish the role of Turkey in one area so as to add strength to another, but to be active in all of them."[52] While the AKP has complied with many tenets of traditional Turkish foreign policy, it has increasingly turned from tradition, especially within the Middle East where the AKP has pursued a more active role.

The two primary role conceptions under the AKP have been that of example and regional leader. This study finds that the conflict between these two roles is fundamental for understanding Turkey's foreign policy change towards Syria in 2011. Having contextualised the AKP's foreign policy and introduced the key tenets of the ideology, these roles will now be analysed.

Role of Example

The role of example is one of the seventeen conceptualised by Holsti and it "emphasises the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies."[53] In 2008, Erdogan proclaimed that "Turkey, with its democracy, is a source of inspiration to the rest of the Islamic world."[54] Under the AKP, Turkey has undergone an ideological transformation, which could be depicted as "the Westernisation of political Islam."[55] The AKP projects a synthesis of traditionally conservative values with democracy and a free market economy.

The ideology of the government and the political needs of its leaders constitute sources of a state's role conceptions. As the AKP emerged, it emphasised its democratic credentials and strove towards EU membership by committing to political reforms. This foreign policy enabled the AKP to minimise the Kemalist institutions' influence.[56] The EU harmonisation packages reduced the influence of the military by reducing its role in the National Security Council, and ensured that military expenditures were placed under parliamentary scrutiny.[57] It is seemingly paradoxical that – in the process of enacting Kemalist ideals by becoming a part of Europe – the Kemalist institutions and the political influence of the military in Turkey have weakened. In emphasising its democratic leanings and pursuing EU membership, the AKP were able to achieve civil-military reform and thus further consolidate their power to have greater control over their foreign policy.

While committing to democratisation was used by the AKP to strengthen its rule, it also was used to acquire more prestige on an international level. The AKP globally advocated compatibility between Islam and democracy by promoting the "Turkish Model." This conception developed in conjunction with the democratic EU reforms

[52] Dalacoura, "Muslim and Modern," 326.

[53] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 268.

[54] Erdoğan speech, in Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 85.

[55] Bilal Sambur, "The Great Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: The Case of Justice and Development Party and Erdoğan," *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 121.

[56] Burhanettin Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and its Limitations," *Inside Turkey* 15, no. 1 (2013): 298.

[57] The military traditionally saw itself as "the custodian of the Atatürk legacy and has directly intervened three times when it felt democracy in Turkey was threatened." Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, xv.

that Turkey was pursuing. As an example, the "Turkish model" was promoted strongly by the decision makers during the AKP's first term in power.[58] Erdoğan declared "our democracy and modernity… have been inevitably making Turkey an example, a model as well as a partner."[59] The AKP projected an image of Turkey as a Muslim nation with a secular state and democratic regime, a vision received well internationally.[60] Moreover, Emel Dal and Emre Erşen also point to the influence of the US officials, who – especially after 9/11 – emphasised the Turkish model as an "alternative" to radical Islam.[61] The US was determined to fight against radicalisation and, in 2004, it developed the Broader Middle East and North African (BMENA) initiative, which was set up to promote economic development, human rights and good governance to the Middle East. Significantly, Turkey and the US became co-chairs. In addition, as part of the BMENA initiative, Turkey (alongside Yemen and Italy) became a co-chair of the Democracy Assistance Dialogue programme. Erdoğan, Gül, and Davutoğlu regularly referred to the concepts of democracy and human rights as values that Turkey disseminates within the region.[62] Turkey presented itself as a "modern role model" for other Muslim countries, especially within the MENA region.[63]

Importantly, Turkey continually emphasised the importance of democratisation as an internally driven process and argued against the imposition of democracy or violations of state sovereignty. Therefore, unlike the US and the EU, Turkey's development aid agency (the Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency: TIKA), does not have an explicit democracy promotion programme. Nevertheless, one of its key project areas is administrative and civil infrastructure and it is within this area that Turkey has promoted democracy.[64] TIKA was founded in 1992, but it was underfunded and focused predominantly on the newly independent Turkic states. However, under the AKP it received more resources and its geographic scope expanded considerably. The funding allocated to the MENA region began increasing from 2004. This increase in democracy promotion remained at a "micro" level in the sense that Turkey remained committed to non-imposition and respected the sovereignty of states.

One of the most elaborate vocalisations of Turkey's example role was made by Erdoğan at Harvard University in 2003. In this extract Erdoğan emphasises "gradual processes" and condemns the exceptionalism of the Middle East:

"Turkey is ready to do its fair share to promote democratization in the Middle

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[58] Melia Benli Altunışık and Lenore Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 574.

[59] Erdoğan, "Democracy In The Middle East, Pluralism In Europe: Turkish View," paper presented at Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, 30 January 2003, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2xvoX8NiM_wJ:www.belfercenter.org/files/erdogan%2520speech,%-2520full%2520-%2520english%2520version.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk&client=safari>.

[60] Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 85.

[61] Dal and Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model," 268.

[62] Daniela Huber, *Democracy Promotion and Foreign Policy: Identity and Interests in US, EU, and Non-Western Democracies* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 157.

[63] Crystal A. Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 1127-1127.

[64] Huber, *Democracy Promotion*, 151-152.

East and facilitate such a momentous transformation […] With the EU, more than forging cooperation, Turkey is on the path of integration. The decision by the EU to launch accession talks with Turkey will be the victory of the message that democratization is the starting point of the project of harmony of civilizations."[65]

Erdoğan's speech is evidence of Turkey's conformity to Holsti's example role: the state used its status as a democracy to augment its international prestige. It also emphasised the individuality of the "Turkish model" to suggest that Turkey can uniquely promote democracy in the Middle East as a Muslim country. In many ways, this role characterised the AKP's first term in power (2002 to 2007). It is however notable that, whilst the rhetoric of democracy promotion did not disappear completely, it diminished during the second term of AKP rule. The AKP argued that it was indirectly aiding democratisation through economic engagement with and supplying developmental aid to its neighbours, in addition to opening up its borders.[66] Nevertheless, it did not promote the "Turkish model" as strongly. This decline can be explained by the fact that, as Turkey's relations with its neighbouring autocracies deepened, it prioritised these relationships over democracy promotion.[67] This demonstrates the emerging tension that was between Turkey's role conceptions of regional leader and example.

Role of Regional Leader
This role conception refers to "responsibilities that a government perceives for itself in its relations to states within a particular region."[68] Under the AKP, Turkey positioned itself increasingly as a regional leader within the Middle East, by adopting policies like "zero problems with neighbours," and developing its relationships within the region. The sources for roles are often numerous, including geography, economic resources, socio-economic demands, and ideology.[69] Turkey's activism in the Middle East was rooted in historical memory, economic growth, the AKP's ideology, and Turkey's geo-strategic position.

Central to the development of this role was Davutoğlu, who strongly influenced the AKP's foreign policy and has been regarded as its intellectual architect. His foreign policy doctrine was outlined in his book *Strategic Depth*, which places great value on the geo-strategic location of Turkey. The core five principles of "strategic depth" are: (1) a balance between security and freedom, (2) a new diplomatic style, (3) rhythmic (adaptable) diplomacy, (4) zero problems with neighbours, and (5) a multi-dimensional foreign policy. Davutoğlu emphasised the legacy of the Ottoman Empire from which, he argues, Turkey has inherited a geographical and historical depth that places it at the centre of many areas of influence and necessitates its engagement with the region. He wrote that:

"[Turkey] should be seen neither as a bridge country which only intersects two

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[65] Erdoğan, "Democracy In The Middle East."
[66] Emiliano Alessandri and Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Unfinished Transitions: Challenges and Opportunities of the EU's and Turkey's Response to the 'Arab Spring,'" *Global Turkey in Europe*, working paper no. 4. (2013): 6, http://www.iai.it/ content.asp?langid=2&contentid=833>.
[67] Huber, *Democracy Promotion*, 157.
[68] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 261.
[69] Holsti, National Role Conceptions," 246.

points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country which sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West [...but as a] central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character."[70]

He coined the term "tarihdaş" – meaning people who share the same history – in order to refer to the links between the nation and people living in the former Ottoman territories.[71] In doing so, Turkey's sphere of interests in the MENA region are historically legitimised.

According to Kemalist tradition, Turkey viewed the former Ottoman territories from a "defensive" perspective.[72] Thus, "strategic depth" is a clear departure from the previous Kemalist alienation from the Middle East. This also signifies a movement away from the "bridge" role conception that was used increasingly in the 1980s under Özal, which emphasised Turkey's geographical location as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East. This developed under "strategic depth," moving from bridging continents to bridging civilisations.[73]

The geopolitical thinking conceptualised by Davutoğlu has been used to reappraise Turkey's role in the region. There have been clear efforts at diplomacy and at enacting a multi-dimensional foreign policy. For instance, Ankara has sought to solve political problems with neighbouring countries. This was evidenced by Turkish mediation between Syria and Israel, as well as Turkey's active role in resolving the international dispute on Iran's nuclear activities. It has also demonstrated its willingness to take a regional stand. This was seen in 2009, when Turkey strongly criticised Israel's attack on Gaza.[74] Erdoğan strongly condemned Israel for the brutality of this operation and also for conducting it at a time when promising developments were being made in the Turkish-mediated Israel-Syria peace talks.[75] The crisis culminated in Davos, when Erdoğan criticised Israel in front of the World Economic Forum and the international media.

The principle of "zero problems with neighbours" became a motto for Turkey's foreign policy. Since enacted, the policy has achieved much success; Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria were normalised, which was especially significant given the former hostilities between the countries. Indeed, the poster child of its success was Turkey's rapprochement and amity with Syria. In 2004, Assad made a landmark official visit to Turkey and, by 2009, Syria and Turkey removed visa requirements. Their economic relationship also developed considerably. In 2007, a free trade zone was introduced. As a result of improved relations and the visa and free trade agreements, Turkish-Syrian

[70] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkish Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 78.
[71] Cenk Saraçoğlu and Özhan Demirkol, "Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2015): 311.
[72] Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, "Nationalism and Foreign Policy, 312.
[73] Lerna Yanik, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: Bridging Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War," *Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 533.
[74] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources."
[75] Ilker Aytürk, "The Coming of an Ice Age? Turkish-Israeli Relations since 2002," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 677.

trade rose rapidly from $796 million USD in 2006 to $2.5 billion USD in 2010.[76] Another benefit for Turkey incurred from deepened ties with Syria was cooperation on the containment of PKK activities; PKK separatist claims had long constituted a central threat to Turkey's nation-state.

The role of regional leader was thus rooted in economic and strategic needs, the AKP's ideology, historical memory, and geography. There was an inherent contradiction between the "zero problems with neighbours policy" and the role of example that had been emphasised during the AKP's first term. In 2009, the Iranian regime used violence and repression to suppress protests during the Green Movement. This movement had arisen following the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to president for a second term, which the protestors viewed as fraudulent. However, Erdoğan immediately congratulated the new Iranian president on his election. Moreover, President Gül visited Tehran at the peak of the oppression and did not raise the issue or demonstrate support for the protestors. This illustrates the primacy of the regional leader role during the AKP's second term and makes Turkish support for the Arab Spring more mystifying. What made Turkey sacrifice its "zero problems with neighbours" policy?

Turkey's Role Change Following the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in late 2010 and triggered similar protests across the region in Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Yemen, and Syria. The Arab Spring was an epochal moment – a regional phenomenon with international implications. Within these countries, popular movements rose up against their respective authoritarian regimes and – drawing from the principles of universal rights and good governance – and called for regime change. The Arab Spring challenged long-established regimes and any analysis of Turkish foreign policy in 2011 needs to acknowledge that the uprisings created an environment that was both "uncertain and volatile."[77] These uprisings necessitated a response from the AKP to an unexpected and changing situation.

Role of Regional Protector

During the international conference on "The Arab Awakening and Peace in the New Middle East; Muslim and Christian Perspectives," Davutoğlu boldly proclaimed that "Turkey is a protector of those oppressed in the Middle East."[78] The emergence and development of the role of regional protector in Turkish foreign policy was one of the key factors that explain why there was a movement to enmity and why Erdoğan publicly called for President Assad to step down. In Holsti's typology, the role of regional protector encompasses "special leadership responsibilities on a regional or issue-area basis [with an] emphasis on the function of providing protection for adjacent regions."[79]

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[76] Huber, *Democracy Promotion*, 160.

[77] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 49.

[78] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey is a Protector of Those Oppressed in Middle East," speech presented at the International Conference Arab Awakening and Peace in the New Middle East: Muslim and Christian Perspectives, Istanbul, 7-8 September 2012, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/foreign-minister-davutoglu-turkey-is-a-protector-of-those-oppressed-in-middle-east.en.mfa>.

[79] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions," 262.

Resultantly, rather than just trying to augment its regional influence, Turkish foreign policy has increasingly embraced an "order instituting role."[80]

During times of pressure, foreign policy decision makers are forced to reconcile contradictions or competing demands of their identity and roles.[81] The Arab Awakenings had this effect on Turkey and underscored the inter-role conflict of Turkish national role conceptions. There had been a chronic tension between the way in which Turkey had pursued its role of regional leader while maintaining its example role as a democracy. Tensions between democracy promotion and amity with autocratic regimes obviously pre-dated the Arab Awakenings, as evidenced by the Iranian 2009 Green Movement. However, the scope of the 2011 demonstrations, where the masses demanded democracy within regimes that Turkey had developed close relations with, heavily underscored this contradiction. Consequently, there was increased pressure applied from regional and international role expectations. The Arab Spring alone, understood as change to the system, cannot explain in itself why Turkey's relations with Syria broke down completely by the end of 2011. There was no smooth and predictable adjustment of foreign policy, and there were remarkable fluctuations and hesitations within Turkish deviating responses. Furthermore, the rhetoric of protecting the oppressed has its roots in both the "strategic depth" doctrine and Turkey's democracy promotion. This is where role-theory demonstrates its explanatory power.

Role Expectations during the Arab Spring

Role expectations in role-theory are important because the appropriateness of a state's behaviour is significantly determined by what others in the community expect from it.[82] By consequence, they are a major repertoire of state behaviour. I find that there were significant regional and international role expectations that were placed upon the AKP. These expectations were filtered through the decision-makers, who then went through the process of role change, before a new role conception emerged. An actor's foreign policy is largely shaped by internal factors, ideas, and processes, but it also responds to the expectations of others.

The role expectations that were placed on Turkey made it apparent that the Western-oriented international society did not think Turkey was enacting its role of "example" appropriately. There was systemic pressure from "the interests of the global powers such as the United States and Western-centred international society."[83] The globally dominant, liberal norms of "democratisation" and "humanitarian protection" put pressure on Turkey.[84] There was dissatisfaction amongst the international community and it largely moved to stand against Assad's regime. This is evidenced by the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Syria's repression of civilians: in 2011, 122 voted

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[80] Aras and Gorener, "National Role Conceptions," 83.

[81] Michael Barnett, "Institutions, Roles and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System," *International States Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1993): 274.

[82] Dal and Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model,'" 261.

[83] Özden Oktav, "The Syrian Uprising and the Iran-Turkey-Syria Quasi Alliance: A View From Turkey," *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 203.

[84] Marwa Daoudy, "The Structure-Identity Nexus: Syria and Turkey's Collapse," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 3 (2016): 1082.

in favour, thirteen against, and forty-one abstained. Furthermore, many states either deported the Syrian ambassadors or announced that they were unwanted, including, Australia, France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain, Canada, and the US.[85] One of the fundamental cornerstones of Turkish foreign policy since its conception has been its Western orientation and Turkey feared losing its credibility.

Expectations were not only placed on Turkey from the Western-centred international society, but from within the region itself. Following the Iraq War, regional politics in the Middle East were increasingly marked by bipolarity, which has been characterised as the "new regional Cold War."[86] The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and the US can be placed on one side with Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas on the other. Turkey originally eschewed entry into the regional Cold War and the AKP deliberately tried to avoid being drawn into this regional conflict. For example, through "zero problems with neighbours," Turkey developed amity with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, but did not abandon its relationship with the US. However, the Arab Spring reinforced the region's bipolarity and sharpened its sectarian Sunni-Shia divide. The US and GCC supported the Syrian opposition in the hope of limiting Iran's influence, which firmly aligned with Assad. There was a clear movement to try and inhibit Iran's ideological and political expansion in the Middle East.[87] Turkey, who had helped mediate the Iranian nuclear weapons crisis and was thanked in 2010 by Ahmadinejad for its "clear and frank" stance on the issue, was no longer seen as a "neutral country."[88] Prior to the Arab Spring, Turkey had promoted itself as an independent power that could develop relationships with both Sunni and Shi'ite regimes. Nevertheless, the hardening of the regional conflict made it increasingly difficult for Turkey to be opposed to conflicts that are "based on religious and sectarian polarisation."[89] The Syrian uprising altered the regional balance of power amongst the two poles and Turkey shifted towards the US axis.[90] These new regional expectations on Turkey constrained the AKP's "zero problems with neighbours" policy further.

Turkish officials feared losing both international and regional credibility if they did not condemn the regime. The dynamic interplay between Turkey's own national role conceptions and the expectations of others is evident. The Arab Spring constituted a change in the international system, which placed new role-expectations on Turkey. This necessitated that Turkey recognise its inter-role conflict, which had not yet been resolved. From this conflict, the new role of "regional protector" emerged, which had its roots in the AKP's primary roles of regional leader and example. This will be examined in the following section.

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[85] Thowhidul Islam, "Turkey's AKP Foreign Policy Toward Syria: Shifting Policy During the Arab Spring," *International Journal on World Peace* 33, no. 1 (2016): 30.

[86] Melia Benli Altunışık, "Explaining the Transformation of Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Regionalist Perspective," *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 184.

[87] Islam, "Turkey's AKP Foreign Policy," 27-28.

[88] Oktav, "The Syrian Uprising," 201.

[89] Oktav, "The Syrian Uprising," 203.

[90] Daoudy, "The Structure-Identity Nexus," 1080.

Responding to the Role-Conflict

There are various approaches that an actor can adopt when confronted with a role-conflict: denial, segregation, or merger.[91] The denial strategy is to simply do nothing to resolve the contradiction and dilemma. This had been the AKP's approach until the Arab Spring made it impossible to ignore. During the AKP's second term in power, its role of example diminished in favour of its role as regional leader. Yet, it did not abandon its democratic credentials and this remained a firm part of Turkish state identity. Thus the tension between its role as an exemplar of democracy and its "zero problems with neighbours" strategy predated the unanticipated Arab uprisings. When the Green Movement occurred, Turkey did not confront its role-conflict; this was most likely because there was not the international pressure or mandate to act. Until 2011, Turkey was reaping the benefits – both strategically and economically – of its zero problems strategy, while acquiring international prestige for its democracy. It had been possible for Turkey to put forward one set of credentials without abandoning the others.[92] Therefore, Turkey may have portrayed itself as a model democracy, but it did not actively challenge its neighbours for their autocratic methods.

Role segregation refers to a strategy where, in place of solving the role-conflict, the state "oscillates between roles in order to avoid role change, that is, the completely new inception of its international role."[93] As the Arab Uprisings began, Turkey vacillated between promoting democracy (its example role) and hastening to preserve its relationships with the regimes (its regional leader role). In Egypt, Turkey spoke out and was one of the first states to openly back the demonstrations and support the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. Contrastingly, when the uprising began in Libya, Turkey was a reluctant participant in the NATO intervention and assumed a generally passive position. There were serious economic interests at stake, including comprehensive trade and investment linkages that had developed under the AKP and its Strategic Depth doctrine.[94] In Libya, "it was becoming increasingly complicated for Turkey to pick and choose sides, and as a result, the government began experiencing mounting pressure over expectations created by recent activism and discourse at home and abroad."[95] However, following the uprisings in Libya, there was increasing international pressure as "norms relating to social justice, human rights and accountability disseminated regionally, which necessitated a response from Turkey."[96] As the Syrian uprisings began, Erdoğan called on Assad to initiate reforms, but Turkey did not yet assume an active stance against the regime. The diplomatic ties between the two countries were weakened, but it was clear

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[91] These three approaches are rooted in the role-theory of micro-sociology, which has charted the ways that an individual can deal with a role-conflict. Tewes finds the approaches of denial, segregation and merger applicable to understanding the role-conflict in Germany, 1990. Tewes, "Between Deepening and Widening," 123-124.

[92] Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics," 92.

[93] Tewes, "Between Deepening and Widening," 125.

[94] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest," *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 46.

[95] Ahmet K. Han, "Paradise Lost: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy and the Case of Turkish-Syrian Relations," *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 67.

[96] Daoudy, "The Structure-Identity Nexus," 1081.

that Turkey was still conflicted and did not openly support the rebels. It would maintain this position for several months.

However, there was a marked shift when Erdoğan and Davutoğlu called for Syrian regime change in October 2011. A role merger occurred following the Syrian uprising, with the role of regional protector emerging out of the regional leader and example role conceptions. Assuming the role of regional protector, Turkey could no longer allow for amity with oppressive regimes, nor could it passively respond to the crisis. The amount of Turkish development aid given to Libya, Egypt and Syria increased. While the AKP's previous democracy promotion (under the example role) had emphasised the importance of respecting sovereignty, Turkey's commitment to non-intervention diminished. Erdoğan publicly denounced Assad and even moved to actively pledge military intervention while calling on the international community to introduce sanctions. By October 2011, Turkey had imposed its own sanctions on Syria and it began to host the anti-government Free Syrian Army in Turkey. This strongly differs from the democracy promotion that Turkey had enacted during the AKP's first term in power: Turkey now directly confronted the regime by "public naming and shaming."[97]

Attached to Turkey's promotion of democracy was a sense of shared civilisation and regional responsibility. The idea of fraternity was tied to their discourse, emphasising the idea of a shared civilisation with Syria. Erdoğan claimed that, "The Syrian question is our internal affair […] We have ties of kinship, history and culture. Therefore, we cannot passively watch what is happening."[98] This is where the merger between example and regional leader is most clear: decision-makers directly supported the uprisings by emphasising Turkey's regional responsibility.

In June 2011, as the AKP won the general election, Erdoğan boldly claimed:

> "Today the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey. We will become much more active in regional and global affairs. We will take on a more effective role. We will call, as we have, for rights in our region, for justice, for the rule of law, for freedom and democracy."[99]

The idea of civilisation remained central. During the 2012 Party Congress, Erdoğan used the term "civilisation" fourteen times, but only used the term "conservative democracy" twice.[100] "Civilisation" denotes a sense of belonging to the Middle East region, while simultaneously demonstrating their commitment to humanitarian values, which are seen as linked to Western civilisation. The civilisational discourse that the AKP have used following the Arab Spring has combined its linkages to so-called "Western" ideals of democracy and human rights with its historical linkages to the Middle East region. The role of regional protector

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[97] Huber, *Democracy Promotion*, 157.
[98] Erdoğan, in Jakub Pilch, "Turkey's Recent Role Conceptions and Shifts in its Foreign Policy," (MA diss., Central European University, 2012): 28.
[99] Erdoğan, in "Mandate for a New Turkish Era," *New York Times*, 16 June 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/world/europe/16iht-M16-TURKEY-POLICY.html?mtrref=r.search.yahoo.com&gwh-=9991CD9A0344134F074E39BCE1D856DC&gwt=pay>.
[100] Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics," 93.

emerged in 2011 as a synthesis of the AKP's regional activism and its democracy promotion. This role change thus explains why Turkey ultimately moved against Syria; international expectations provoked Turkey to confront its inherent role contradictions and consequently it merged the role conceptions of regional protector and example together.

Conclusion

This paper set out to demonstrate the explanatory power of role-theory when analysing Turkey's foreign policy change towards Syria in 2011. The Arab Spring provoked a serious test for Turkey's foreign policy and challenged the role conceptions that it had developed. As demonstrations intensified within Syria, a continuation of Ankara's previous strategy became increasingly difficult. However, its response to the shift was inconsistent and the decision to condemn Assad cannot be seen as a clear response to Turkey's national interests, given the economic linkages between the countries and the security benefits of the relationship. Nor was it a direct, smooth foreign policy change that came only from the systemic shock of the Arab Spring. This case study underlines that foreign policy change should not be regarded as a simple consequence of structural dynamics in the international system, but needs to be explained by the interaction of the agent with the structure.

The AKP and the role conceptions it developed are an essential part of explaining the foreign policy change. In its first term, the AKP actively engaged with the EU accession process and reconfigured the domestic political environment in order to give it increasing liberty in its foreign policy. It internationally promoted itself as a role-model democracy and used its liberty to enact new role conceptions. Ankara's foreign policy also increasingly emphasised the historical and civilisational linkages between Turkey and the former Ottoman countries. The AKP's pursuit for regional leadership through its "zero problems with neighbours" policy was an unprecedented strategy in Turkish foreign policy. This role conception contrasted with the Kemalist opposition, which "did not see Turkey as part of, much less a leader in, the Middle East."[101] Clearly, the AKP's own national role conceptions of Turkey and their concomitant implications for foreign policy matter.

Turkey assuming the role of regional protector in 2011 represented a clear foreign policy change. Turkey had developed incongruent foreign policy roles and the Arab Spring necessitated a reconciliation. The Arab Spring placed new demands on the AKP and they had to grapple with regional and international role expectations. At a time of democratisation and conflict in a region that the AKP had emphasised its shared history and destiny with, Turkey had to confront its own contradictions. The increasing role expectations that Turkey was placed under – both regionally and internationally – eventually led to a role merger. The regional protector merged Turkey's regional activism with its democracy promotion. Erdoğan, as he visited Damascus, claimed that "he could not distinguish the Turkish and Syrian faces in the audience and referred to the Syrians as brothers."[102] This emphasis on kin and fraternity is rooted in the Strategic Depth

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[101] Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations*, 213.
[102] Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations,* 210.

doctrine that had formed the basis of its regional leader role conception. The adoption of the regional protector role was rooted in internal conditions of the state, its interactions, and systemic influences.

When Turkey moved against Assad's regime, it anticipated a regime change and could not have foreseen the current, devastating situation. The subsequent Syrian quagmire has provoked many issues for the AKP, including the influx of millions of Syrian refugees, the persisting Kurdish problem, the upsurge of the extremist Islamic State, and an annual economic loss of an estimated seven to eight billion USD.[103] Moreover, the Gezi Park protests and the 2016 Turkish *coup d'état* illustrate the significant domestic unrest that has arisen; Turkey's model democracy seems to have been in decline. Indeed, the AKP's harsh response to the Gezi Park demonstrations, the aftermath of the attempted coup, and the 2017 constitutional referendum have diminished its credibility as a model democracy.[104] The impact of Turkey's response to Syria in 2011 on its role conceptions and the subsequent shifts in its foreign policy is beyond the scope of this study. However, the continuing impact of the Syrian crisis underlines the importance of studying Turkey's foreign policy shift in 2011. Moving forward, this study has demonstrated that role-theory can help generate further insights into foreign policy change, specifically following exogenous shocks to the international system. Despite Holsti's seminal work and the development of role-theory within the foreign policy analysis literature, the great potential of role-theory has yet to be realised. With its capacity to span multiple levels of analysis, negotiate the agency-structure dilemma, and operationalise identity, role-theory has significant explanatory power and holds compelling promise for the future of IR.

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[103] Daoudy, "The Structure-Identity Nexus," 1083.
[104] Dal and Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model,'" 272.