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Turkish *AK Parti*'s Posture towards the 2003 War in Iraq The Impact of Religion amid Security Concerns

Alberto Gasparetto, PhD*

* *The Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies, University of Padua. alberto.gasparetto@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Turkey's foreign policymakers' attitudes in the context of the 2003 US decision to wage war against Iraq. The main goal is to assess and downplay the impact of religion in relation to security-related concerns. Drawing on official speeches, interviews, declarations by key figures in the foreign policy process, the paper argues that religion is nothing more than an intervening factor in the case of Turkey's approach to the 2003 war in Iraq. Therefore, notwithstanding the role of Islamist elites in the foreign policy decision-making of Turkey, Turkey's foreign affairs were rather inspired by realist behaviour, driven by pragmatic considerations, aimed at pursuing rationalist goals.

Introduction

At the time of the 2003 war in Iraq, Turkey was under the rule of brand-new Islamist elite which gained the upper hand in the November 3, 2002 elections. However, "Islamism" is a considerably broad category. The Turkish way to combine politics and religion must consequently receive a careful definition. According to Daniel Philpott's insights (2007), two concepts are worthy of note: "differentiation", which "describes how religious and political authority is related" and "political theology", which stands for how religious leaders view and interpret the foundations of legitimate political power (Philpott, 2007: 505). Differentiation may vary not only in degree (high-differentiated versus low-integrationist) but also in kind (consensual versus conflictual). Drawing from modern sociologists of religion (Berger, 1967; Martin, 1978), Philpott elaborates an all-encompassing framework to describe specific relationships between politics and religion within the most various states. Two examples are worthwhile for the present discussion, Iran and Turkey. According to Philpott's scheme, Iran is a typical case of "low-integrationist" and "consensual" state. Iranian political institutions and religious bodies not only exhibit a low level of mutual autonomy "in their foundational legal authority, that is, the extent of each entity's authority over the other's basic prerogatives to hold offices, choose its officials, set its distinctive policies, carry out its activities, in short, to govern itself" (Philpott, 2007: 505) but also show a high consensus, meaning that both parties are poised to preserve the status quo. In turn, Turkey (that of Kemal in Philpott's framework, but even that of 2003 can serve the same purpose) is best described as a "high-differentiated" and "conflictual" case. In this state, institutions and religious bodies have always engaged in fierce competition over the issue of legitimate authority.

To better manage such concepts and properly apply them to the Turkish case, it can be helpful to introduce a short comparison with another important Muslim state, which in turn shows totally different aspects in its state architecture. The clerical elite had governed Iran for almost two and half decades prior to the events this paper is focused on; it had been built up as a theocratic state where there is no room for effective political competition (in spite of some sort of democratic institutions, which will be outlined below). In contrast, Turkey has been a living example of a secular Western-style regime founded along a deep rift between a secular establishment holding the reins of government and a society where religious movements and parties have thrived to the extent that, at the dawn of the 21st century, a religiously-oriented party[1] ran for political power and finally won the elections. Therefore, according to Philpott, while Iran shows a low-integrationist and consensual system, Turkey has historically been based on a high-differentiated and conflictual one. If Philpott's scheme helps the reader have a clear painting of the current institutional situation in Iran and Turkey, the historical trend was quite different. Birol Baskan found that each country in question has elaborated its own specific pattern towards secularisation, while adopting its own different kind of relations between political authority and religious institutions, especially after the state-led industrialisation process in the Seventies (Baskan, 2011, 2014). While Iran has consistently presented a highly structured set of religious institutions, to the extent that state action has always encountered limitations, religious actors in Turkey have been much weaker, a feature that enabled the state to take over crucial functions historically managed by religious institutions directly. If Iran's path towards secularisation was limited by strongly resilient independent religious institutions that have continued to provide social services (education, health, legal services, wealth redistribution), Turkish secularisation was instead state-driven and augmented the power of state institutions vis-à-vis less autonomous religious actors, incorporating them into the state structure itself.

The Argument, the Research Design and the Methodology

This paper focuses on Turkey's foreign policy-makers attitudes in the context of the 2003 US decision to wage war against Iraq. The main goal is to assess and downplay the impact of religion in relation to security-related concerns. Notwithstanding the role of Islamist elites in the foreign policy decision-making of Turkey, the main argument here is that religion is nothing more than an intervening factor. By taking side with IR realist approaches in explaining Turkey's foreign policy, I argue that even in the case of the 2003 Iraq war, Ankara's ruling elite adopted realist behaviour to pursue rationalist goals which stem from rather pragmatic considerations. For Turkish foreign policymakers, what was at stake was the United States' request to gain logistical support to militarily invade Iraq from Turkey in order to topple the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein.

Nevertheless, within the main debates about the real nature of Turkey's foreign policy, some scholars are used to highlighting the role of ideological forces such as religion rather than pragmatic and material ones. For example, Ankara's foreign policy under the AK Parti has been depicted as follows:

> *guided by an Islamist worldview, it will become more and more impossible for Turkey to support Western foreign policy, even when doing so is in its national interest. Turkish-Israeli ties – long a model for how a Muslim country can pursue a rational, cooperative relationship with the Jewish state – will continue to unravel. [...] The AKP, however, viewed Turkey's interests through a different lens -- one coloured by a politicised take on religion, namely Islamism. [...] The AKP's foreign policy has not promoted sympathy toward all Muslim states. Instead, the party has promoted solidarity with Islamist, anti-Western regimes (Qatar and Sudan, for example) while dismissing secular, pro-Western Muslim governments (Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia). [...] Turkey's experience with the AKP proves that Islamism in the country's foreign policy may not be so compatible with the West, after all (Cagaptay, 2009).*

Contrary to these interpretations and by taking the role of religion "seriously" (Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003), this paper aims at restoring an image of Turkey as a rational actor pursuing pragmatic goals in foreign policy, focusing in particular on the 2003 war in Iraq. I, in fact, share some realist assumptions which see Ankara as rather driven by a nationalistic agenda (Taspinar, 2011) and a search for strategic autonomy (Kardas, 2011). Religion is just a tool of a more pragmatic agenda to pursue other goals. Hürsev Tabak has recently tried to overcome the weakness of a debate focusing on whether Turkey's foreign policy is Islamic or not, by arguing that "Islam has a constitutive role in both the formation and conduct of certain of Turkey's foreign policy practices". According to him, to understand the role of religion in Turkey's foreign policy, Islam should not be treated as a "foreign-policy-determining ideology" anymore, but "as a vernacular

practise with confident, multiple, yet contradictory representations and manifestations in foreign policy" (2017: 87). His argument goes on to say that Turkey's foreign policy swings between two main practices, "Islamic internationalism" which is meant to deepen relations with Muslim communities in the world, and "Turkish Islam" which represents a "synthesis between tradition and modernity". In particular, "Turkish Islam" is intended to balance radicalism and extremism such as Wahhabi Islam to the extent that even the Kemalists interpret it as a "secular practice [...] thanks to Atatürk's restructuring religious affairs" (2017: 94) by the institution of the Diyanet.

Many scholars argue that stressing the importance of religion does not entail it is the only independent variable to explain dynamics in international politics nor the only relevant one. In this regard, Jonathan Fox states: "There are few, if any, important political events that are purely motivated by religion. Most are motivated by complex factors" (Fox, 2001: 53-54). His insights are helpful for the work presented below. He investigates how religion could influence foreign policy. This can occur in three ways:

> *First, foreign policies are influenced by the religious views and beliefs of policymakers and their constituents. Second, religion is a source of legitimacy for both supporting and criticising government behaviour locally and internationally. Third, many local religious issues and phenomena, including religious conflicts, spread across borders or otherwise become international issues (Fox, 2001: 59).*

Based on Fox's insights into how religion and foreign policy are related to each other, this paper is based on a cognitive model designed within *foreign policy analysis* (FPA). More specifically, it draws on British scholar Michael Brecher's study of Israel's foreign policy in the late 1960s (Brecher et al., 1969). Brecher takes into account a group of ten variables belonging to what he calls the "operational environment". Five of them belong to the domestic sphere, while the others to the external one (either regional or international). Nevertheless, Brecher's model will not be applied in its entirety for a few reasons. First, the international structure has substantially changed from the time he built up this model to the present day. In fact, the international system is no longer divided into two opposing camps. After the "unipolar moment" (Huntington, 1999), the United States (US) has increasingly faced different challenges, while international politics has become more and more fluid. Secondly, not all the variables will appear in the subsequent analysis but some of them have been merged together due to a need for simplification.

In order to assess the role of religion in Turkey's foreign policy-making, great emphasis will be put on the foreign policy-makers' perspectives and belief systems. According to Brecher, such items are contained within what he calls the "psychological environment" that is formed by both the "images" and the "attitudinal prism" (Brecher et al., 1969: 86). While the latter refers to a set of psychological predispositions consisting of societal factors such as ideology, tradition and idiosyncratic factors, the former pertains to the pre-existing beliefs every policymaker holds about the external environment. In this regard, it is worth sharing Brecher's claim: "decision-makers act in accordance with their perception of reality, not in response to reality itself" (Brecher, 1972: 12).

Hence, the variables considered herein will be the following. Regarding the external environment: 1) the *global system* (G), made up of organisations such as the United Nations (UN), and the *dominant bilateral relations* (DB), and they will be treated as one to simplify matters; 2) the *subordinate system* (S), that is the Middle East, and *other bilateral relations* (B) such as Iraq – and they will also be treated as one to simplify matters as well; 3) the *other subordinate system* (SO), which is the European Union (EU). With regard to the domestic environment, they are 4) *military capabilities* (M); 5) *economic capabilities* (E); 6) *political structure* (PS), and the role of *competing elites* (CE), which will be merged together; 7) *interest groups* (IG), among which a great importance is given to *public opinion* (PO) and the constituencies of the country in question. Such an emphasis on public opinion allows for making Brecher's model match with Fox's above-mentioned insights about the possible relations between religion and foreign policy and, in particular, regarding the influence of local constituencies on foreign policy-makers. Since Fox's categorisation also considers religion as a "cross-border issue", the same argument is equally valid for constituencies living in foreign countries. Therefore, in the case studied in this paper, Iraq's population will be regarded as a powerful foreign constituency (considered in its major ethnoreligious segments: Kurds, Sunni and Shiites), capable of influencing the worldview and behaviour of Turkey's foreign policy-makers.

In general, religion can be considered either as a foreign policy goal or as a foreign policy tool. In the former case, it is treated as the very aim of the decision taken by the policy-makers. However, under this light, and for the purposes of this paper, it is deemed irrelevant. According to Fox, social and human phenomena are indeed never motivated by only one factor. In the latter case, religion is seen as an instrument to pursue other goals. By conceiving it as such, we can try to assess to what extent it influences Turkey's foreign policy decision-making. In order to make these assessments, I will elaborate a scale of five degrees of influence which allows the creation of an index of relevance[2]: a) *not relevant at all*, i.e. when religion does not intervene in the foreign policymaking; b) *not so relevant*, when there is just some room for influencing foreign policy but not so much to pursue foreign policy goals: constraints prevail over opportunities; c) *quite relevant* or *facilitator*, when it helps or facilitates the pursuit of the main foreign policy goals, although it is not a necessary element and it coexists with other factors; d) *relevant*, when it is prominent in the attitudinal prism[3] of foreign policymakers; e) *decisive* or *crucial*, when its presence is fundamental in the formation of any foreign policy decision, meaning that without it a specific foreign policy goal cannot otherwise be reached.

All the categories will be given a score ranging from 1 (not relevant at all) to 5 (crucial) in order to calculate an average rate to assess the weight of religion on the attitudinal prism of Turkey's foreign policymakers. Compared to Brecher's model, each score of such a scale of values will not directly correspond to each material variable. Instead, each score will refer to the weight of religion on each material variable.

As far as the elites are concerned, a restrictive definition of foreign policy will be taken into account, as it seems more suitable for the purposes of this study. According to scholars such as Walter Carlsnaes (1980) and Jonathan Wilkenfeld (1980), such a concept of "foreign policy" will mainly focus on statements, declarations and actions put in place by the main figures involved in the foreign policy process, namely Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In this sense, foreign policy is the activity of government officials or individuals who are officially legitimized to act directly on behalf of the state. This restrictive conceptualisation is far from the broader one established by Eugene Meehan, who defines "foreign policy" as any activity implemented by any individual, even beyond state jurisdiction and legitimacy (Meehan, 1971). Here the focus is not on legitimacy, rather on the action. Such an extensive definition is rejected in this paper. In other words, it means that this research will analyse declarations, statements, press releases and speeches made by Turkey's chief of government, the President of the Republic, the Foreign Minister and, when necessary, the heads of the military. All these have been collected on official websites, such as that of the Foreign Ministry, but also from newspapers, mostly from the Hürriyet Daily News and Today's Zaman (before it was shut down on May 2016). As just mentioned, Erdoğan and Gül are the figures whose speeches I mostly took into account, due to the fact that they were the two top political decision-makers involved at the time of the case considered. Thus, they represent the core unit of analysis. Beyond that, I also drew on several secondary sources such as monographs and journal articles in order to put my analysis into the right historical, political and international context.

It is worth making some further considerations on the methodology adopted in this paper. In fact, one can object that the task of issuing ratings lacks objectivity, being a personal one. That is an interesting critique. However, according to Brecher,

> *"reality" is a term which may be applied to the analyst's observations of the operational environment. It can be questioned whether the social scientist is capable of more accurate perceptions of that environment than the participating decision-maker is. This will vary in degree with the analyst and the decision-maker. Generally, the decision-maker has superior access to sources of information that can enhance his insight into reality. The social scientist is, however, normally less involved and therefore likely to be more objective. Moreover, he possesses skills which enhance his objectivity and accuracy (Brecher et al., 1969: 81, note 6).*

These insights are equally suitable for the psychological environment. It must be acknowledged that this kind of analysis may entail unavoidable aspects of subjectivity – as recognised above – but the matter in question cannot be overcome that easily. Probably, the best way to soften such a methodological constraint might be that of subjecting all the cases at issue to as many scholars as possible, in order to obtain as many different views and approaches as possible. The results should then be put together to evaluate an average of all the scores given by each scholar in order to share the largest possible level of objectivity (Weberian *Werturteilsfreiheit*). It goes without saying that this is a very tough challenge. Therefore, a social scientist

should, by all means, be satisfied with his work, being fully aware of the limits related to the in-depth study of the influence of perceptions on decision-making[4].

Before delving into the next part, it is worth recalling some of the above-mentioned ideas to provide the basic definition of religion used in this paper. Although not all scholars will agree on the same meaning of religion (Marty, 2000, quoted in Haynes, 2007: 11), this task is most. According to Anthony Gill (2001: 120), the most commonly assumed definition is summarised by Smith (1996: 5): "religion is a system of beliefs and practices oriented toward the sacred or supernatural, through which the life experiences of groups of people are given meaning and direction". According to Jeffrey Haynes (2011: 13), "for purposes of social analysis, religion may be approached a) from the perspective of a body of ideas and outlooks (i.e. as theology and ethical code), b) as a type of formal organisation (e.g. the ecclesiastical Church) and c) as a social group (e.g. religious movements)". Integrating Haynes' first meaning with Jonathan Fox's definitions, and exploiting Michael Brecher's lexicon, religion will be operationalised herein as a set of ideas, perspectives, images and belief systems that concretely affects foreign policy decision-making.

Turkey's Foreign Policymakers Approaching the War in Iraq: A Case Study

Shortly before the Third Gulf War, Turkey's domestic politics had just experienced a government change. On November 3, 2002, the AKP won a landslide victory and set up the first single-party government in the previous 15 years. The AK Parti could rely upon a large majority of 363 out of 550 seats in the new Parliament (Yavuz, 2009: 79). Making a soft appeal to Islamic identity, the new government elite was already prepared to declare a staunch commitment to democracy and secular politics. As stated by the AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "We included in our program that we are not a religious-oriented party [...] Our future practices will show it clearly. We are fed up with such questions and giving answers" (Hürriyet, November 6, 2002).

Moreover, both before and after the Election Day, AKP officials were prudent to swear publicly not to shift away from the Turkish historical pro-Western inclination. Erdoğan and his party elite knew that they also had to rely on US' support in order to politically survive within the secular framework of Turkey. It is noteworthy that the country has been a staunch US ally for most of its modern history and benefited from its support against the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Celik, 1999; Hale, 2000; Robins, 2003).

Before the AKP came to power, Turkish and American officials held an important meeting in Ankara on July 14, 2002. They had preliminary discussions about the renovation of some airbases and harbours built in Turkey. They also talked about the possibility of an American invasion of Iraq to prevent Saddam Hussein from using the WMD he was suspected of holding, as well as to fight Al-Qaeda (Olson, 2004: 166). This entailed that Turkey would allow some 80,000 US troops to pass through its own state territory. After that, several other meetings took place in both the US and Turkey. Washington tried to ensure Ankara's pledge to provide all the required assistance to ease any military operation against Baghdad's regime. At the Washington meeting on December 10, 2002, Erdoğan committed to grant full support to the US (Robins, 2003: 561).

The Turkish officials adopted a prudent stance in approaching an imminent US-led military operation. They avoided making any binding pledge – as proved by several declarations released by the AKP deputy chairman Abdullah Gül, who was then Prime Minister till March 14, 2003 and Foreign Minister afterwards:

> *We have historical and cultural relations. Iraq and Turkish people have many common points. Moreover, Turkey and Iraq have economic, trade interests. The last Gulf Crisis cost Turkey more than $40 billion for which we have not been compensated for despite all the pledges. Egypt and Syria have been compensated for their loss, but not Turkey (Hürriyet, September 2, 2002).*

Some months later, Gül added what follows:

> *Developments concerning Iraq have reached a serious point. We have brotherhood and kinship with the people of Iraq. Not only Turkey but no country in the region can stay aloof from Iraq. We have to be prepared in the face of all possible scenarios and developments that would concern us. Our government's preparations should be considered in this respect. We are not preparing for war. Turkey is not to engage in a war or any armed conflict (Hürriyet, December 25, 2002).*

A few days later, he added that:

> *We do not want war but if war breaks-out despite our efforts and we cannot prevent it then we will also play a role and we will not be sidelined. [...] there is no immediate threat of war. We are not an active part of a conflict but we are making preparations (Hürriyet, December 31, 2002).*

The three reported excerpts from Abdullah Gül's speeches might sound contradictory. Such an ambiguity is a result of two conflicting efforts by the AK Parti's decision-makers. On one side, a serious concern for Turkey's security in terms of economic costs and social disorder was coming out of a military campaign. On the other side, a deep awareness to stay committed to the alliance with the US. During the months preceding the war, Turkey had been exploring alternatives and consulting neighbouring states such as Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. As for its geographical contiguity with Iraq, Turkey was frightened of the political, economic and security-related consequences of a military conflict. The Turkish officials' main concern regarded the possible disintegration of Iraq. Such an outcome would bring about economic losses, a flow of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees and would feed Kurdish aspirations for independence in Northern Iraq. As stated by Gül, "[a]ccepting disintegration of Iraq would destabilise the entire geography. It would lead to unforeseen risks emerging in the long run" (Kanli and Eksi, 2002).

As put by Gül's words reported above, Turkish officials' carefulness is best underlined not only by their continuous search for peaceful alternatives to the growing crisis but also by their open declaration to give the US full cooperation if the war became inevitable. Erdoğan had the chance to convey such a twofold yet apparently contradictory idea during his meeting with US President George W. Bush in early December 2002: "Naturally Turkey's preference is for war to be the last resort [...] However, if Saddam's administration continues to protect developments that threaten world peace, then Turkey will give the necessary support for the last UN resolution" (Hürriyet, December 11, 2002). Gül expressed a similar thought a few weeks later: "We do not act upon orders from anyone or a fait accompli. Our decision will aim at protecting the interests of our country and people. We will do our best for peace in our region" (Hürriyet, December 25, 2002). Such statements reveal that in the AKP officials' view, the awareness of dangerous risks related to any possible conflict in Iraq should be put into context within historical Ankara-Washington ties. This also mirrored Turkey's unavoidable need for US support. This was best underlined by Gül during his joint speech with US Secretary of State Colin Powell, early in April 2003:

> *I would like to state that Turkish-American relations are based on very strong foundations. They are deeply rooted and they are based on half a century of friendship. And our friendship with the United States has also been mentioned in our consecutive government programs. Our friendship has begun with the Korean war effort, and it has continued up to the situation in Afghanistan [...] The cooperation that has been conducted with the United States is within the framework of the Turkish constitution and undertaken upon the decisions of the government [...]the cooperation between Turkey and the United States will continue. The cooperation - the means for further cooperation -- with the United States have been discussed in today's talks, and foremost the issue of humanitarian assistance was taken up. Other means of cooperation were also looked into, and the cooperation in northern Iraq was also taken up. This cooperation between the United States and Turkey will continue with regards to the future of Iraq as well. And new doors will open for us in the future. The model nature of Turkey with its democracy, its free markets economy, is a model for all in the region. This reciprocal assistance will continue. Finally, I would like to express that the visit of Secretary Powell has strengthened our relations, and it has increased the opportunities for future cooperation between both nations. I would like to state that this visit has also helped to dispel all issues with regards to the relations between both countries (Joint Press Conference, April 2, 2003).*

Any eventual disintegration of Iraq would bring about the following consequences: a) the bid for independence by a large Kurdish population living within the socio-economically underdeveloped South-eastern Turkey; b) a dispute regarding the future status of the oil-rich region of Mosul and Kirkuk; c) a potential flow of Iraqi refugees, and d) economic suffering resulting from such devastation, as Turkey experienced after the 1991 NATO intervention in Iraq.

In fact, for decades, the Turkish political elite had been worrying about the Kurdish issue with regard to Turkey's national and political integrity. The aftermath of the Second World War and the subsequent Western-led development of new geography in the Middle East have been conditioning the perspective and

belief-system of Turkey's ruling elites up to this day. Such a view is best known as the "Sevres syndrome"[5], which stands for a deep fear of partitioning and dividing the state territory due to Western political influence and domination. This helps explain why the Turkish political establishment has historically been distrustful and worried about Euro-American power projection beyond Western borders. It was often seen as an attempt not only to dominate the Middle East but also to shrink Turkish sovereignty. To date, the Sèvres syndrome is still at work in the Turkish people's psychology despite Turkey's engagement with Western powers – and especially with the US. Such an allegiance reflected the necessity to protect the country from other more intimidating threats like the Soviet Union (Hale 2000; Robins 2003; Walt 1987).

A Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was indeed already established in 1992 under the leadership of Massoud Barzani, who led the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) until his resignation in October 2017. The KDP was one of the two prominent political players along with Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Since 1992, an ethnically based federation in Iraq has represented the main political goal that both the KDP and the PUK had been looking for. The main pillars of this political design were as follows: the KRG's power over its zone would be enforced, and Kirkuk would be the capital; the future Kurdish state would retain control of the Kurdish armed forces (known as *Peshmerga*); and, last but not least, the eventual right to secede from Iraq and declare independence. All these provisions had been taken into account under a draft of the constitution the two Kurdish parties sent in 2002 to the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which in turn rejected it entirely (Park, 2004: 20).

Commenting on this issue, Abdullah Gül stated:

> *I reiterated it many times we are in favour of Iraq's territorial integrity, this is our state policy. Iraq's territorial integrity should be protected, to ensure stability and security in the region's economic relations in the region [...] but we also should take some measures to prevent a refugee crisis. We had 500,000 refugees in one night in the Gulf War (Hürriyet, January 8, 2003).*

Even if US Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz admitted that "some degree of federalism or federation is probably going to be inevitable" (Park, 2004: 23), Ankara demanded clear guarantees from Washington that the Kurdish populated area of Kirkuk and Mosul would fall under strict control of a strong Iraqi state (Hale, 2007: 96).

The economic situation was another big issue the Turkish policymakers were concerned about in the upcoming crisis. They showed their disappointment over the aftermath of the 1991 intervention in Iraq. As Ferruh Demirmen (2002) reported,

> *Estimates of Turkey's cumulative economic loss in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War are between $40-$60 billion, including indirect costs. Higher estimates have been quoted. There is no knowing what Turkey's next loss would be, but a figure of $38 billion has been mentioned by Government officials. Thus, the $3.5 billion that the US has reportedly promised for aid is little cause for comfort for Turkey. Most of this amount would be destined for military purposes and the rest would be a low-interest credit. Turkey has asked for a $20 billion aid package and the expunging of its military debt.*

Turkey's officials were seriously worried that after the forthcoming conflict, their country would not be compensated for economic suffering in the same way as, they claimed, had occurred in the aftermath of the 1991 war. In this regard, Abdullah Gül argued:

> *Turkey and Iraq have economic, trade interests. The last Gulf Crisis cost Turkey more than $40 billion, which we have not been compensated for despite all the pledges. Egypt and Syria have been compensated for their loss, but not Turkey. Besides other factors, the Gulf War losses of Turkey contributed as well to the current economic crisis in the country (quoted in Kanli and Eksi, 2002).*

Another factor the AKP elite had to bear in mind was the increasing influence of the Turkish public opinion in domestic politics (Robins 2002: 323-325. See also: Hale 2016; Kennedy and Dickenson 2013). This gives, *inter alia,* the measure of progress Turkey had been making regarding political pluralism and democracy as of the introduction of the 1982 Constitution. Not only does a mature and informed public opinion increase government accountability by bestowing a public role upon intellectuals, journalists and civil society associations. But it also grants a government the power to exert influence on the foreign policy-making

process. Moreover, the case in question underscores a calculated strategy the AK Parti had been pursuing since winning the November 2002 elections to flatter their grassroots constituency and engage the EU to open formal access negotiations (Yavuz, 2009). Even before coming to power, Erdoğan had set off on a series of visits around Europe to promote the idea that Turkey's Western and European orientation would not change if the AK Parti won the elections. The pro-Islamist elite of the new party was in fact committed to pledging that Ankara would abide by the Copenhagen criteria established back in 1993, especially regarding politically relevant questions such as the abolition of the death penalty and the struggle against the PKK (Ozel, 2003; Robins, 2003).

However, the AKP officials seem to have paid close attention to the moods from their own constituency and the masses in general. According to a study published on MERIA in September 2005, the Turkish public opinion was broadly against the war (Uslu et al., 2005)[6]. It had largely expected the Turkish government to look for peaceful solutions and was concerned that a war against Saddam would bring about Iraq's disintegration. Abdullah Gül's efforts to search for an agreement among the neighbouring countries were therefore hailed with great favour. However, the Turkish people's mood had evolved throughout the period taken under consideration (from December 2002 to September 2003). For example, although they vastly opposed any military intervention, "[i]n March 2003, the majority (54.3 percent) were in favour of sending military forces to Northern Iraq, but the rate of those who did not approve the proposal was still considerably high (40.5 percent)" (Uslu et al., 2005: 80). This apparent contradiction is due to nuances related to the nature of the questions the research posed. If asked whether Turkey should attack Iraq, the Turkish public was thoroughly opposed; if asked what the country should do in case of an imminent (March 2003) military operation by the US, it generally reversed its position by declaring that Turkey should not permit the US to act unilaterally.

The Turkish public was seemingly somewhat confused. In fact, even though the people were largely against the war, they would not accept the US preventing Turkey from playing any active role in case of a military conflict. In other words, in the event the war was inevitable, the Turkish people would definitely be in favour of Turkish participation (Uslu et al., 2005: 80) because "over half (53.6 percent) believed that a US occupation of Northern Iraq would result in the establishment of a Kurdish state" (Uslu et al., 2005: 77). Such a position mirrors widespread feelings of being impotent vis-à-vis American power. Any military conflict unilaterally led by the US would be regarded as a disrespectful hegemonic policy vis-a-vis Turkey's internal affairs.

Contrary to all expectations and to the bitter disappointment of American officials, on March 1, 2003, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) voted against the deployment of 62,000 American troops on Turkish soil, keeping America away from opening a second front for military operations against Saddam. Something went wrong with both Erdoğan and the American officials' calculations. The AK Parti was split by a huge rift probably due to those MPs elected in the mostly Kurdish populated areas, who feared a backlash from their constituents. In particular,

> *Erdoğan's caution reflected serious opposition to the US plan by many members of his own party, including Deputy Premier Ertugrul Yalcinbayir, the speaker of parliament, Bulent Arinc, and all the members of the party's subcommittees on human rights and foreign relations (Hale, 2007: 103).*

The result was "264 deputies supporting the motion, 250 opposing, 19 abstentions and thirteen absentees", with "some 68 AKP members who voted with the opposition, with another 31 casting abstentions or absenting themselves" (Hale, 2007: 113). A second vote occurred on March 20. Although it turned the tide of the former, it was substantially different in that it did not grant the US troops permission to open a second front against Iraq, but it allowed the US to use Turkish airspace and authorised Turkish troops to enter Iraq, a condition the US initially had staunchly excluded. It was clear that Erdoğan's concerns spurred him to juggle opposing imperatives of not damaging Turkey's historical relationship with the US but also having a say in the Iraqi post-invasion scenario.

The outcome of the March 2003 Parliament reflected the widespread conviction in Turkey that Iraq's future was solely Turkey's own business. This contrasted with the Western powers' decision not to recognize Turkey's deep historical ties with current Iraq when they decided to partition the Ottoman Empire and separated the Anatolian peninsula from territories between Mosul and Kirkuk. According to then Defence Minister Sabahattin Cakmakoglu, it was also clear that Turkey would not allow any foreign country's

interference. As he stated in October 2002, "Turkey considers northern Iraq to be under its direct care, and Ankara would not tolerate the region is being subjugated to the interest of others" (Olson, 2004: 176).

In the parliamentary debate, several MPs raised the potential economic sufferings once more. Antalya Deputy Osman Özcan, for example, spoke about the losses of Turkish tourism and the measures to be taken in the possible Iraq war to minimise damages (TGNA, February 27, 2003). The legal point of contention was the interpretation of Article 92 of the Constitution[7] with President Gül, on the one hand, who relied upon his role as leader of the majority party in Parliament to ask the TGNA full permission to allow foreign military intervention. On the other hand, a bunch of MPs who took the floor, such as CHP members Önder Sav and Kemal Anadol, who claimed that the American-British request was in breach of international law (TGNA, March 1, 2003).

The relations between the AK Parti and the military were another issue at stake, especially because of the AK Parti's rumoured hidden religious agenda in the face of the military's self-assigned role as the guardians of Republican values. The Islamist-secular question has always been one of the deepest cleavages in modern Turkey. The decision to take part in the war in Iraq soon became the stage for a confrontation between the two competing forces. The AKP leaders were concerned about safeguarding their legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the US. Erdoğan's decision to postpone the Parliamentary vote on March 1, after an NSC (National Security Council) meeting on February 28, was aimed at shifting the responsibility to the military (Hale, 2007: 112). In turn the military staff was not willing to be considered responsible for such a decision, and so decided to pass the buck to the Parliament. Indeed the Turkish Chief of Staff Hilmi Özkök rejected the motion just a few days after the TGNA did it, publicly stating that the military was staunchly in favour of the deployment of US troops in Turkey (Olson, 2004: 190). In this way, Özkök blamed the AK Parti as a fait accompli for being solely responsible for such a botched parliamentary passage.

Analysis of the Relevant Factors. Assessment of the Impact of Religion in Relation to Security Concerns

Overall, this research shows that the main concerns for Turkey's foreign policymakers towards the 2003 Iraqi conflict were closely related to political-security issues. Let us focus on each factor affecting their perceptions in each respective approach.

As far as the global system (G) and the dominant bilateral relations (DB) are concerned, the Turkish government was alarmed that a negative vote by the TGNA could damage Turkey's historical relations with the US. The AKP elite tried to keep good relations with the US, as Turkey would enjoy great benefits from that friendship in political, economic and geostrategic terms. In this regard, religious views about the foundation of political institutions intervened to the extent that both Erdoğan and Gül knew that the US had taken Turkey as a model of compatibility between Islam and democracy in the Middle East – according to the December 2002 speech released by Wolfowitz (2002).

Instead, looking at both the subordinate system (S) and the other bilateral relations (B) – which Iraq could be considered an element of, for economic and/or geographic reasons – Turkey was primarily concerned about the role that various Iraqi ethnic and religious groups could play in the future of Iraq. However, it was ethnicity rather than religion that was a much more relevant factor, even crucial, in Ankara's evaluations. That can be explained considering the power of ethnic affinity linking the Kurds in the KRG with the large Kurdish population located in the South-eastern part of the country[8]. In turn, religious affinity facilitated Ankara's efforts to pursue the setting up of a negotiating table with other important Middle Eastern states in order to find alternative solutions to the conflict.

Regarding the other subordinate system (SO), the importance of the EU as a powerful foreign constraint in Ankara's foreign policy had been increasing in the years before the AK Parti came to power due to its direct involvement in the accession process. Generally speaking, the commitment to the EU criteria was a powerful constraint guiding the AK Parti's moves, as pointed out above. Erdoğan was eager to let his party emerge as a reliable political organisation. Nevertheless, this factor was not immediately relevant in Ankara's strategic evaluations in the imminence of the war.

As far as the internal arena is concerned, the AK Parti was prudent not to provoke the military (PS/CE) – probably its main competitor within the domestic sphere that had been acting as a watchdog of secularism versus groups making a direct appeal to religion[9] – nor its constituency (IG/PO). Considering the AK Parti's domestic legitimacy and accountability, religious considerations played a crucial role for those MPs who decided to vote against the March 1 motion at the TGNA. That move clearly shows how the vote in Parliament depended on the mood of a specific slice of the AK Parti's constituency, precisely the one located in South-Eastern Turkey. However, religion was not the main factor, nor the only one, to affect that event – in contrast to what may appear at first glance. Indeed, both the Kurdish issue (an ethnic one) and the government's will to exert influence on institution building in post-invasion Iraq played a major role. Those factors are best explained by the favourable March 20 motion that overturned the March 1 vote and envisaged the undertaking of a military conflict. As a result, Turkey secured a prominent role in managing the upcoming situation and limiting any adverse impact stemming from inaction. Hence, as confirmed by the March 1 vote, religion played a very relevant role as regards the military dimension (M): indeed, on that occasion the religious kinship between two such Muslim countries as Turkey and Iraq functioned as a powerful constraint for a significant part of the ruling elite and the MPs elected in South-Eastern Turkey. What prevailed in the March 1 vote was the idea that a military conflict against a brother-country would de-legitimize the AKP before its Islamic-minded constituency. Finally, religion did not significantly affect the AKP's perceptions towards economy (E), which indeed was an extremely relevant factor in itself.

Table 1

Operational variables	G and DB	S and B	SO	M	E	PS and CE	IG / PO	Average
Rate (from 1 to 5)	Very relevant (4)	Facilitator (3)	Not so relevant (2)	Very relevant (4)	Not relevant at all (1)	Not so relevant (2)	Crucial (5)	FACILITATOR (3)

Table 1 illustrates the average influence of religion – according to the definition agreed on this paper – on Turkish foreign policy makers' visions with regard to the main factors taken into account in the paper. Giving the scores in question is a task reserved to the researcher. It may somehow appear a personal evaluation. However, in Brecher's model, such an evaluation activity comes out of a factual analysis of information, data, historical reconstruction, the committed scholar has made through time and by comparing different sources of research.

Upon having a look at the scores, it can be observed that religion played on average as a facilitator in the attitudinal prism of Turkey's ruling elite in their respective approaches towards the 2003 war in Iraq. By recalling the definition provided in the first section of this article, a variable can be considered a facilitator when it helps pursue the main foreign policy goals, although it is not a necessary element and it coexists with other factors. In fact, religious views were neither the only factor nor the crucial one. Security-related concerns played a more prominent role in the strategic evaluations of Ankara's foreign policymakers. On the other hand, religious images and beliefs emerge as nothing but a facilitating factor in the broader context of foreign policy determinants. As mentioned in the opening section of this paper, the main issue is to sketch out whether religious aspects of a decision constitute the goal of the same decision or they just intervene as a tool to pursue different crucial goals. This does not imply that religion is unworthy of attention. Indeed, it is clearly an important factor that could affect any foreign policy perspective in several aspects of foreign policy decision making, even if the case of the 2003 war in Iraq brings to light that it is only one among others.

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[1] For a typology of religiously oriented parties, see Ozzano 2013.

[2] On the basis of Michael Brecher's model.

[3] As explained below, the concept of *attitudinal prism* used by Brecher refers to the set of beliefs held by policymakers that serves as a lens through which they see reality and which influences their perception of it.

[4] I would like to thank Prof. Valter Coralluzzo (University of Turin) for his precious comments on this paper and for these important insights.

[5] Sèvres is the name of the French city located a few kilometres far away from Paris where the first agreement between the remnants of the Ottoman Empire and the Western powers had taken place. See: Müge Göçek, 2011.

[6] Olson (2004: 189) also reports that "plus 90 percent of Turks were against the war".

[7] Article 92 of the Constitution establishes what follows: "The power to authorize the declaration of a state of war in cases deemed legitimate by international law and except where required by international treaties to which Turkey is a party or by the rules of international courtesy to send the Turkish Armed Forces to 40 foreign countries and to allow foreign armed forces to be stationed in Turkey, is vested in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. If the country is subjected to sudden armed aggression, while the Grand National Assembly of Turkey is adjourned or in recess, and it thus becomes imperative to decide immediately on the use of the armed forces, the President of the Republic can decide on the use of the Turkish Armed Forces".

[8] It does not seem relevant for this analysis to take into account the rifts and reciprocal suspicions dividing the Kurdish people. Even if "Kurdistan" hosts around 30 million people of Kurdish nationality, they are indeed separated politically among at least four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In each country, local Kurds have established local movements and parties, some of them are even provided with a military branch, which have been fighting or still fight for a certain degree of autonomy or even independence. It is precisely that goal that is the main concern for the political elites settled in Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus. On the Kurdish social structure, see: Van Bruinessen (1992). On the Kurds' political aspirations in the Middle East, see: Gunter (2008) and Manafy (2005). On the Kurdish identity and struggles in Turkey, see: Taspinar (2005), Natali (2005), Cagaptay (2006), Yavuz and Ozcan (2015), Larrabee (2016).

[9] Indeed, as emerged in the Sledgehammer (*Balyoz*) process in 2010 – a trial which uncovered an alleged secularist coup against the winning Islamist faction and dating back to early 2003 – the Turkish armed forces had not hindered the AK Parti's moves so forcefully. On the contrary, they preferred to adopt a rather indulgent attitude in order to avoid a backlash from the EU institutions against the backdrop of Turkey's path towards democratization and commitment to the rule of law, in accordance with the 1993 Copenhagen criteria. See: Aydınlı (2011), Jenkins (2011), Karaosmanoglu (2011).

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