

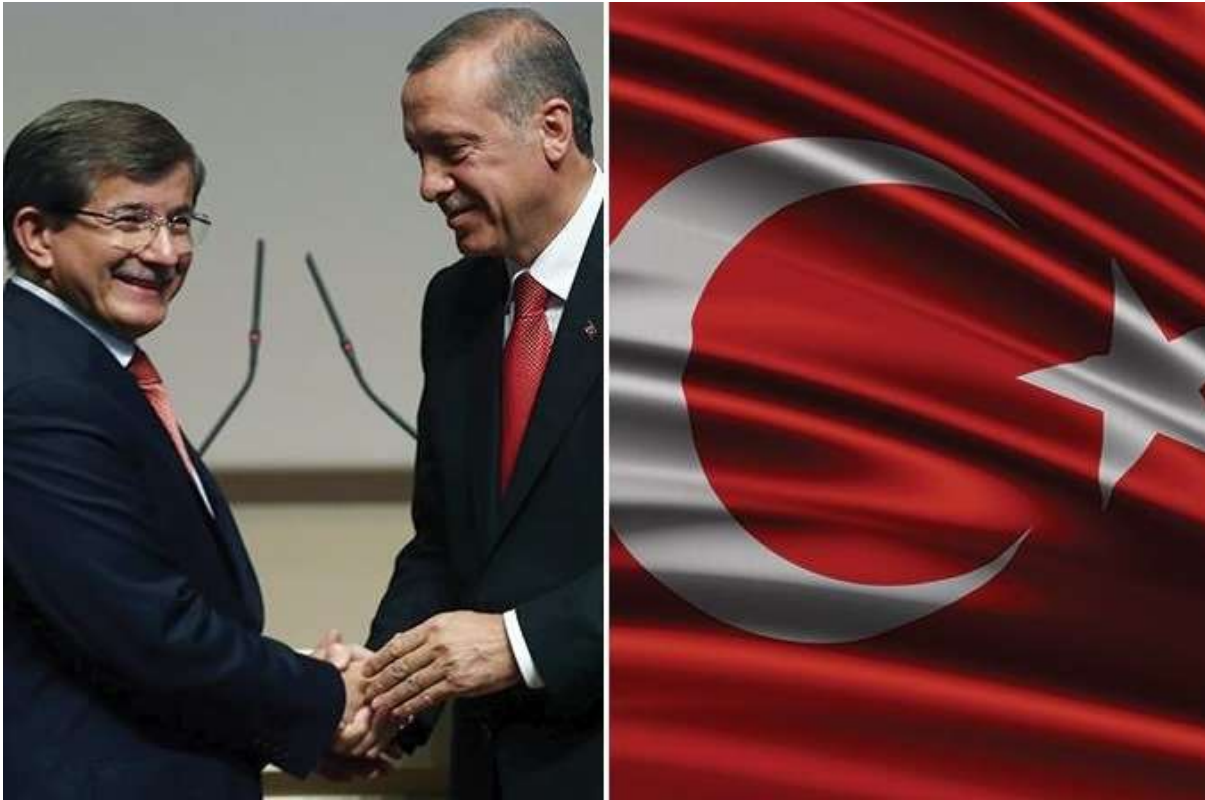
Position Papers

Davutoglu as Turkey's PM and Future Challenges



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Abstract

Recep Tayyip Erdogan was sworn in as Turkey's president on 28 August 2014. The day before, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) agreed to nominate one person, Ahmet Davutoglu, to take Erdogan's place as prime minister and party leader. As Turkey's former foreign minister who was also a superior academic, it is important to examine Davutoglu's rise to the top position in the Turkish political establishment and government as well as the tasks that lay ahead of him. This position paper examines his journey from academia to politics, why Davutoglu was chosen by Erdogan and the AKP and what he must do to maintain the AKP and Turkish government's momentum.

Introduction

After Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that the Central Executive Committee of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) had agreed to nominate a single candidate for party leader, there remained no doubt that the nominee, foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu, would be Turkey's next prime minister. Erdogan, the former party leader and prime minister and newly sworn-in president of Turkey, made the announcement on 21 August 2014 at the end of the Central Executive Committee meeting. The nomination was submitted to the AKP's emergency conference on 27 August, during which Davutoglu's appointment was confirmed. After months of speculation, Erdogan and the ruling AKP decided the future position of the country's government immediately after he won the

presidency in the country's first round of the first direct presidential election in Turkey's history on 10 August 2014.

The final decision came after many calls for the head of government to be separated from the party presidency. When he announced this news, Erdogan stressed that such separation would not happen and that it would be harmful to the future of the party and to the position of the prime minister. The AKP did not take the decision easily and debated the matter until the last minute, with some attempting to push the party in an alternate direction. This position paper contains a sketch of the former Turkish foreign minister and academic's rise to the top position in the Turkish political establishment and government and the tasks that lay ahead of him.

From academia to politics

Davutoglu was born to a conservative Turkish family in 1959 in Tashkent in Turkey's Konya province. He received his secondary schooling at a Turkish-German school in Istanbul and studied political science and economics at Bogazici University, where he earned a PhD in international relations and political science. In the 1990s, Davutoglu taught at the University of Marmara, University of Bakint and the International Islamic University of Malaysia. He also worked as a journalist from 1994 to 1999 for the Yeni Safak newspaper. In addition to Turkish, German and English, Davutoglu speaks Arabic, which he learned in Amman and Cairo. He has three major publications in political science and international relations, the most notable of which is Strategic Depth, which was translated into several languages and was the impetus for several academic studies.

Davutoglu is known for his proximity to Islamist circles during his university study and work life. He had close ties with young reformers in the Welfare Party who broke from the iconic party leader Necmettin Erbakan in 2001 and founded the AKP. In November 2002, the AKP won a resounding victory in the general election and went on to form the government at the beginning of 2003. However, as party leader, Erdogan was banned by a court judgment from participation in any political activity, so his colleague, Abdullah Gul, led the party's first government for a few months. Gul invited Professor Davutoglu to work with him as a roving ambassador and foreign affairs advisor. When Erdogan's ban was lifted, he took over party and government leadership and retained Davutoglu in his position, assigning him a number of highly sensitive responsibilities including Iraq and the Syria-Israel talks which Turkey mediated.

In spring 2009, Davutoglu was appointed as foreign minister in the second Erdogan government. Being appointed to this position from outside parliament was unusual and

rare in the history of Turkish policy; but he soon became a member of parliament for the AKP, easily winning a Konya seat during the 2011 parliamentary elections. Although he has dominated Turkish foreign policy since then, the policies he has adopted during the past five years have been formulated via extensive consultation with former Prime Minister Erdogan.

During his time as leader of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Davutoglu continually stressed that Turkey is not just a bridge between East and West, but also a key player regionally and internationally. In keeping with this vision and aligned with his prior experience, he underlined the importance of the common Ottoman legacy to the peoples neighbouring Turkey, and aimed to resolve problems within Turkey's neighbourhood as a whole. Consequently, during his first two years in office, Turkey was actively reconfiguring its diplomatic relationships with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Serbia, Greece, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Davutoglu also steered Turkey's relations with Europe, America, Russia and China forward, and established a Turkish presence on the African continent. But Ankara, similar to other capitals of the world, was surprised by the Arab revolt movement and strongly backed it, viewing it as a democratic movement with the potential to establish a new Arab world that could follow in the footsteps of Turkey's reforms. However, the faltering Arab revolution movement eventually led to Turkey's involvement in the civil war in Syria, chilly relations with Iran, interrupted relations with Egypt, and unspoken tensions with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who stood against the process of change in the Arab East.

Thus, despite the new vitality of Turkish foreign policy under his leadership, frequent criticism was directed at Davutoglu from opposition parties and the media, who declared his policy of resolving neighbourhood problems had failed dismally. Some of the criticism was justified because the policy was at times full of idealism and shrouded in mystery.

The foreign policy of a large country that aims to be regionally and globally effective will never be free of challenges, but perhaps the policy of resolving problems in Turkey's neighbourhood ought to have been a longer term goal or an ideal to strive towards, even if chances of achieving it continue to be slim given the complex context of the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Most of Turkey's foreign policy challenges after 2011 were not of its own making, but rather from the complexities of the region's historical and modern heritage which collided with peoples' demands for freedom, democracy and reform.

Why was Davutoglu chosen?

In his announcement on 21 August, Erdogan indicated several reasons for the party's nomination of Davutoglu as party and government leader. First, Davutoglu's steadfastness in the government's battle against the Gulen group's attempt to build a parallel state was noteworthy. Second, Davutoglu is still a young man who has only contested one parliamentary election; thus, according to party law, he can remain a member of parliament for two more terms. In other words, his selection renews the party's blood and the government's stability for at least eight more years.

These are good reasons, but there are other reasons not mentioned in Erdogan's statement. During the months prior to the recent presidential elections, it was apparent that the AKP had two options for resolving the leadership succession issues of both the party and the government: They could agree on a transitional figure who would assume control until outgoing president Abdullah Gul could return to parliament and become prime minister; or they could ignore Gul's ambitions and agree to give a younger candidate the opportunity to lead both the government and the party.

The proposals of the pro-Gul supporters (mainly of the older generation) emphasised the separation of the government from the party leadership, and were aimed at appointing a transitional prime minister until Gul could become party president and return to Parliament. They argued that Gul's experience and charisma made him the only viable candidate to fill the vacancy left by Erdogan in the party and prime ministry.

But there were also many opponents to Gul's return. They noted that though Erdogan had gone to great lengths to secure Gul's presidency in 2007, relations between the two men were not always smooth during the ensuing seven years, and particularly during the past two. Gul has demonstrated extreme reluctance to support Erdogan's firm stance against the military coup in Egypt, his policy of using force against demonstrators in Taksim Square in the summer of 2013, and his firm policy against the Gulen group's conspiracy to control the state's decision-making. Gul critics say that Erdogan's clear and uncompromising policy on these issues has protected Turkey from the plots and unrest that have rocked the Middle East over the past two years. Additionally, those opposed to Gul's return said the outgoing president does not support Erdogan's plans to enact a new constitution after the next parliamentary elections, which will restructure the Turkish state and strengthen the president's role in policy and decision-making. With Gul in the prime ministry, this would be a potential source of tension at the head-of-state level, possibly negatively impacting the country's political and economic progress as well as the standing of Justice and Development Party within government.

In contrast, although Davutoglu has an independent personality, he has maintained a close relationship and mutual trust with Erdogan in the past and has helped him overcome all the major challenges faced by the government over the past two years. In addition to representing a new generation in the party's leadership, Davutoglu has not demonstrated any opposition to the proposals for a new or amended constitution, nor has he opposed the idea of reconstructing the state.

En route to a new era

Erdogan officially assumed the presidency 28 August 2014. Davutoglu was elected at the party emergency conference on the previous day, 27 August, as party head and the sole candidate for prime minister. Erdogan's premiership ended as soon as he assumed the presidency, and Davutoglu has assumed the premiership on a temporary basis until he is assigned by the new president to form a new government. Formation of the government is therefore the first challenge facing Davutoglu, as he must take into account several factors. He must maintain successful ministers, particularly in the financial and economic sectors because their presence is reassuring to market forces and financial and economic circles. Simultaneously, he must also try to satisfy the party's central forces, particularly the ambitious ones, even if that might adversely affect the efficiency and performance of his new government. He must avoid deliberately provoking the new president, and above all, he must surround himself with competent ministers and advisers who are faithful to his program and are able to fill any potential deficit.

It is important to note Turkey will not enter the Davutoglu era immediately after the formation of the government. He will have to prove his competency to lead both the government and the largest and most influential party in Turkey, meaning he must lead the party to decisive victory in the 2015 parliamentary elections. During the short pre-election period, Davutoglu must maintain current growth rates and economic stability as well as demonstrate active commitment to the policy of peace and reconciliation, especially for resolving the Kurdish question. His government must negotiate the deepening dilemmas within the region with the greatest possible gains and fewest losses. At the personal level, and after long years of academic life and political work centred on foreign policy and international relations, the new prime minister will have to free himself from the mantle of Turkish diplomacy and embrace more various premiership tasks, including roads and bridges, energy policy, inflation figures, and the trade deficit, in addition to his prior work managing relations with neighbouring countries and their problems.

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