

THE CAIRO REVIEW INTERVIEW

STRATEGIC THINKING

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu explains the Turkish Republic's place in the world

Having won a parliamentary seat last year to represent his hometown of Konya, **Ahmet Davutoğlu** can now call himself a politician. To most Turks, he will always be the cerebral professor of political theory, the architect of a dynamic, outward-looking foreign policy that has transformed Turkey into a regional powerhouse.

After earning a PhD in political science and international relations at Bosphorus University, Davutoğlu went on to teach at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, Marmara University, and Beykent University. Fluent in English, German, and Arabic, he caught the imagination of Turkish leaders as the author of books on geopolitics, including *Strategic Depth; The Global Crisis; Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World*; and *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*.

Following the victory in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Davutoğlu, the grandson of a shoemaker, became special advisor to the prime minister and ambassador-at-large, and was appointed foreign minister in 2009. In those capacities he has proved a dizzyingly active, always principled, often effective diplomat. He has visited Syria as an envoy sixty-two times. In 2010, he stitched together the Tehran Joint Declaration, a Turkish-Brazilian effort to negotiate a way out of the dangerous international impasse over Iran's nuclear program. His instinctive backing of the Arab Spring, and staunch support for Palestinian rights, has enabled Ankara to expand its influence throughout the Middle East. Despite serious tensions with Israel, he has helped keep

Turkish relations with the U.S. in good form. His combination of vision and skill has impressed the world; he made *Foreign Policy* magazine's list of '100 Top Global Thinkers' for 2010 and 2011. Davutoğlu responded in writing on March 7 to questions from the *Cairo Review*.

▷ **Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cairo, July 2, 2011. Amel Pain/EPA/Corbis**

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you define Turkey's strategic interests today?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey's strategic interests lie in peace,



stability, security, and prosperity in its neighborhood and beyond. Turkey is in a unique position in geopolitical terms, in the midst of Afro–Eurasia. This vast geography neighbors crisis-prone regions such as the Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. It also holds a great potential for development and prosperity, which has so far been held back due to security problems. Any crisis in these regions—be it economic or political—has direct ramifications for Turkey and the wider international community. Therefore, stability in these regions is in the best interests of Turkey. And this is why Turkey actively works to foster peace and security around it—the very idea at the heart of our ‘zero problems with neighbors’ policy. Through this policy, while we try to leave behind the problems with our neighbors, we also try to help them solve any domestic, bilateral or international problems they might have—to the extent we can.

Our foreign policy is also shaped by our economic interests. Turkey has a big population, young people constituting half of it, and a vibrant economy, striving to be among the top ten economies of the world by 2023, which is the one hundredth anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Additionally, the Turkish private sector is very active and has a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This requires us to widen the scope of our outreach as an economic actor. Increasing the level of economic cooperation with as many countries as possible becomes an important priority for Turkey. It compels us to reach out and enhance the scope of our relations on a global scale. This is also why we have increased cooperation and engagement with the emerging powers of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, all of which have become priority areas in terms of our strategic interests.

Turkish foreign policy is guided by our democratic values as well as our interests. This can best be seen in our support for reform efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey has always been encouraging the administrations to address the legitimate expectations of their people and undertake the necessary reforms. However, now, given the home-grown and irreversible march toward more democracy in the region, Turkey has stepped up its efforts to support this process. Consolidation of democracy in these countries in a way that will empower the people and strengthen stability is in the best interests of the entire region. This process should be advanced in a peaceful manner without leading to new divisions of ethnic or sectarian nature. This is not what people want, and we have to do all we can to avoid such a dangerous scenario. Turkey exerts every effort in this direction in cooperation with the countries in the region.

Turkey greatly values its alliance with the Euro–Atlantic community. Our membership in NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and strategic relations with the United States and other Western countries in Europe constitute a fundamental

pillar of our foreign policy. In addition, Turkey has been a negotiating country with the EU [European Union] for a long time. In this context, membership in the EU remains a strategic goal for us.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What is Turkey's role in the evolving global system, at this point in history?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: In a globalized world, countries are not isolated entities anymore. We live in a world where states, leaders, and peoples increasingly interact with each other on a daily basis. Almost anything—products, persons, capital, and ideas—can be moved and communicated across borders. Whatever happens in one part of the world can be simultaneously heard in another corner and they receive rapid reaction from countries across the globe. In light of all these, no country can exist or prosper on its own anymore. This is a new global order in the making, and Turkey is doing its best to contribute to the successful completion of this transition period. In this regard, we believe that the new system has to be:

- legitimate, just, transparent, and democratic;
- representative and fully open to participation;
- in full regard to resolve dormant or active disputes that have an impact on world stability;
- result-oriented in terms of eliminating disparities;
- based on the precept of security and freedom for all.

We also believe that we have the necessary elements of soft and hard power to help achieve that goal. And we will not shy away from using our comparative advantages in this direction. Our geostrategic location, booming economy, ability to understand different social and cultural dynamics in a vast geography, and commitment to advance democracy domestically and internationally are all important assets.

What Turkey wants to promote and achieve is: cooperation, understanding, and tolerance through dialogue and engagement. Turkey's efforts are focused on bringing together the parties in order to solve or preempt conflicts; championing universal values and human rights; supporting those who are subjected to unfair treatment, and promoting economic and social development of the underprivileged countries.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative we cosponsored with Spain is an example of Turkey's active efforts in this direction. Similarly, Turkey and Finland have launched the Peace through Mediation initiative in September 2010 at the margins of the sixty-fifth United Nations General Assembly. We also tabled a resolution at the UN General Assembly on mediation, which was adopted unanimously in June 2011. Just recently, on February 24–25 of this year, Turkey organized the Istanbul Conference on Mediation, in order to provide a platform where all parties in

mediation could interact with each other and share their experiences and insights, thus enhancing their understanding on different perspectives of peace building.

Likewise, Turkey has become an emerging donor, conducting various development projects through its own agencies. Turkey is determined to help the least developed countries with a long-term commitment. Turkey hosted the LDC [Least Developed Countries] Summit in Istanbul last May with a view to supporting sustainable development in these countries.

Overall, Turkey is a constructive power able to play an important role in setting the parameters of the new global order. We are conscious of our capabilities and of what needs to be done. In cooperation with our friends and partners we will continue to play a positive role in our region and beyond.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Has Turkey achieved the ‘strategic depth’ that you seek?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey’s strategic depth rests on its geographical and historical depth. Our long history provides us with a unique set of relations with countries and communities all around us. Our geostrategic location in the midst of a vast geography, on the other hand, places us in a position to relate to and influence the developments that are key to the future of the world. So the question is not achieving the strategic depth, but using it for regional and global peace. This requires us to engage with the countries with which we share a common past and geography in a way that will promote our shared interests and create a mutually beneficial framework for cooperation and dialogue. Today, with its strong democracy, vibrant economy, and active foreign policy, Turkey has more opportunities to capitalize on its strategic depth. And we have been working very actively to this end.

Our efforts to create high-level strategic councils and visa-free travel regimes, for instance, are geared toward making this strategic depth an operational concept where all peoples and states benefit from the enhanced cooperation. The principle that lies beneath our general approach is to turn this vast area into one of stability, security, and prosperity through political dialogue, economic interdependence, and cultural understanding.

On the other hand, strategic depth also rests on creating a sense of regional ownership based on shared interests and common ideals. This can be achieved only through a more effective regional cooperation and active engagement with all regional systems in our neighborhood. This, in turn, necessitates enforcing existing regional integration structures, and forging new ones as necessary. This is why Turkey supports and seeks to promote regional cooperation in its neighborhood and to boost the profile of regional organizations for that purpose. We believe that this would help countries to find regional solutions to their regional problems, rather than waiting for other actors from outside the region to impose their own solutions.

CAIRO REVIEW: *We have witnessed important shifts and changes in Turkey's domestic politics and political life in the past decade. How have these developments affected or shaped Turkish foreign policy?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey's greatest success has been consolidating its democracy and achieving a strong economy at home. These are also the driving forces behind Turkey's proactive foreign policy. Of course, this has become possible due to the political stability, which we have been enjoying since 2002 in Turkey. As a stable, secular, and democratic country with an economy ranking sixteenth in the world, Turkey has indeed become a regional powerhouse whose friendship and cooperation is increasingly sought in the international arena. This enabled us to pursue a more independent and visionary foreign policy.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you evaluate the success or failure of the Justice and Development Party's five new principles for a new Turkish foreign policy: balancing freedom and security; zero problems with neighbors; active rather than reactive; complementary relations with global powers; and activism in international organizations?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Our foreign policy is essentially based on the principle of "Peace at home, peace in the world" as laid down by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. Over the years, it has developed and gained many layers and dimensions, always on the basis of this tradition. Building on this tradition, we have introduced five new principles with a view to injecting refreshed dynamism into our foreign policy as well as for adapting ourselves to the new realities.

I think all of these five principles have been successfully translated into concrete policies. First, in terms of balancing freedoms and security, Turkey is a living example of how important it is to expand the space of freedoms to realize the full potential of a society. Turkey has, in this regard, also managed to de-securitize its foreign policy understanding, which allows us to see our neighborhood through the prism of opportunities rather than a perception of threat. As a result, we have come a long way in improving our relations with neighbors and opening up new areas of cooperation. We have also presented an example for others to seek more freedoms, which have otherwise been constrained by security considerations, and offered a reliable partner for those who are willing to proceed in this direction. The recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa both vindicate our approach and provide us with new opportunities to extend the common area of freedoms.

Secondly, the 'zero problems with neighbors' policy that we have adopted bears a much deeper meaning than settling our problems with each of our neighbors. It aims at the transformation of our neighborhood, where serious problems and elements of instability exist, into a friendship and cooperation basin that will serve the interests

of all. In this context, we believe that our policy of zero problems with neighbors has also gained additional meaning and importance as the Middle East stands at the brink of a historical transformation. We hope that the current dynamic for reform advances in way that will meet the expectations of the people while also contributing to peace and security in the region. If this can be achieved, the spirit of cooperation that we are trying to develop on the basis of our zero problems policy will be further strengthened. We are sparing no effort toward this direction and we will continue to do so.

As to the principle of being active rather than reactive, it is obvious that Turkey today acts upon a longer-term vision, which foresees a stable and secure region within the framework of a new global order. The way Turkey has been trying to forge new and stronger mechanisms of cooperation with a vast number of countries and organizations has allowed us to be more aware of the developments in various parts of the world and take the necessary measures in advance to steer the course of events in the right direction. In fact, the reason why Turkey has been able to respond to the developments in the region much faster and more effectively than many others is because we have long established the kind of relationships with the people that will carry us to the next stage. Also, the way Turkey strives to mediate and/or facilitate the resolution of disputes in a preventive way also reflects the proactive and visionary nature of our foreign policy. Today, in a large area spanning Balkans to Southeast Asia, Turkey's efforts are instrumental in maintaining peace and security so that we do not have to react to conflicts in their aftermath.

Finally, active Turkish foreign policy is also well reflected in the international organizations with the tasks assumed and policies pursued. Today, Turkey is an active member of many international and regional organizations ranging from the UN to the G-20 [Group of Twenty], OIC [Organization of Islamic Cooperation] to NATO, OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] to ECO [Economic Cooperation Organization]. In each case we are constantly looking into ways of making these organizations more effective and lead many initiatives to this end. If I have to give one example of our renewed activism in international organizations, the UN Security Council comes to mind. Right after completing nonpermanent membership of the UN Security Council for the term 2009–2010, we have now put our candidacy for the term 2015–2016. Also, our active role within the G-20, which is now becoming the new core structure for global economic governance, is another case in point reflecting Turkey's added value in multilateral diplomacy.

Overall, we have made great progress in operationalizing the five principles of our foreign policy. We will continue to uphold these principles and maintain our active stance in putting them into practice. This is not only a must for our own national interests, but helps create an international environment conducive to cooperation and dialogue.

CAIRO REVIEW: *After remarkable economic success over the past decade—notably in attracting foreign investment and increasing trade—what are your challenges looking ahead to the next decade?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey has navigated through a serious economic crisis in the recent past, which compelled us to carry out serious economic reforms. Thanks to these reforms and the entrepreneur spirit of the Turkish private sector, today Turkey has a stronger and rapidly growing economy. In 2010 and 2011, while most European countries fought against the diverse adverse effects of the global economic crisis like recession, negative growth, unemployment, etc., Turkey recorded economic growth of 9 percent and 7.5 percent respectively. With a GDP of nearly \$1 trillion, Turkey is the sixteenth biggest economy in the world and the sixth biggest in Europe. Turkey's economic growth so far has been highly beneficial for our neighbors too, whose share in our total trade volume has increased from 8 percent to 30 percent in the last ten years. However, as European countries constitute the biggest foreign trade partner of Turkey, we see the current economic crisis in Europe as an important challenge for us too. This is why we call upon European leaders to take the necessary measures in time. In this regard, Turkey is ready to do all it can to facilitate the way out of this crisis and believes that in the long term its membership of the EU will make a great difference, enabling the EU to be a stronger global actor. Our aim is to elevate Turkey to the league of the world's ten biggest economies by 2023, when we will celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic.

CAIRO REVIEW: *A decade after the September 11 attacks provoked great debates about a clash of Islam and the West, what is your view about this 'civilizational' question?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: By mentioning the civilizational question, I presume you are referring to the “clash of civilizations” theory of Samuel Huntington. I have thoroughly reflected my observations against this theory in an article published in 1997, entitled “The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis) Order.”

As revealed in my article, I think Huntington's theory is a status quo-oriented ideological formulation to justify foreign policy measures and maneuvers adopted in the post-Cold War era. While doing so, he unfairly blames non-Western civilizations for the existing crises and conflicts and absolves the Western powers of any responsibility in this regard. Unfortunately, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Huntington's theory has drawn even more attention and thus a distorted understanding has been further promoted which considers terrorism, radical movements, and Islam interrelated. This understanding, shaped around Islamophobia, is the main reason today for unjust reactions against Muslims, tantamount to discrimination. Over time, the presentation of the Muslim world as a potential enemy has also

resulted in encouraging oppressive political tendencies in Muslim countries for the sake of preserving Western interests and thus exempting the Muslim world from enjoying the universality of democratic values.

I am not going to dwell upon the reasons behind the promotion of such civilizational clash theories, which are embedded more in political and economic considerations rather than actual social and philosophical realities. Indeed, for me the basic reason for declaring the Muslim world as a threat is the geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic potentialities of the Muslim world and the need to justify the strategic and tactical operations to have control over these potentialities. In any case, and with the advantage of hindsight, I categorically refute the clash theories as an inter-civilizational mode of relationship. I prefer and believe in the necessity of finding peaceful ways of resolving inter-civilizational differences through consolidating dialogue among civilizations and facilitating free exchanges and stressing on the common universal values rather than emphasizing the fault lines. The fact that the history of civilizations is not composed only of clashes, and there are many examples of dynamic and peaceful cooperation and interaction among civilizations, is an encouraging proof that this is an attainable goal. With this understanding, Turkey has cosponsored the Alliance of Civilizations initiative with Spain, which lately became a UN project with more than 120 members. The success of this initiative alone is another proof of our common aspirations and ideals irrespective of our cultural and religious differences.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Did you see the Arab Spring coming?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: From our point of view, it was expected; we were aware of the urgent need for change and democratic transformation in the region. As you might remember, in my book *Strategic Depth* (April 2001) I have underlined that the stability and political experience in the Arab states were not based on social legitimacy, and that stability was worthless. Likewise, I have also asserted that the transformation in Arab nationalism and the political legitimacy crises in the Arab world would affect the political leadership structures of those countries. As such, from the early years of the previous decade, we started emphasizing the importance of introducing political and economic reforms and upholding dignity, human rights and freedoms, as well as universal values such as the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and gender equality in the region.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Broadly, what factors led to the Arab uprisings?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Protests are home-grown and naturally ignited by years-long aspiration for freedom, transparency, accountability, democracy, and social justice. A driving force for the popular movements has been the young people who were frustrated to live under pressure and restraint while suffering from economic distress.

Popular discontent gained a wider sphere of influence through social networking sites, which have been utilized by the activists to organize protests all over the region.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How will the Arab uprisings fundamentally change the Middle East—or not?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The process of change will take time in the region. It won't be linear and it could undergo many seasons. But it is irreversible. It is not possible to turn back the clock, simply because the pressure for change is driven by demography. Today, around 60 percent of Arabs are under thirty. Overwhelming numbers of them are fed-up with regimes that have not even tried to give them better lives. The Arab Spring has necessitated the establishment of a fair balance between freedom and security for the development of stability as well as unity and peace. Such a need requires a social contract to eliminate the legitimacy gap between those who govern and are governed, in view of the aspiration of the peoples for freedom, justice, and democracy. This has never been easy before, and there is no reason why it should be any easier now.

The biggest challenge is to materialize the reforms in the fields of politics, economy, and security simultaneously. On the one hand, you need to set up democratic institutions and make them function; on the other, you need to produce lasting solutions to the requirements of the peoples on employment, education, food, and health. Inevitably, the next decades will witness the struggle to turn such ossified vicious circles into virtuous circles. Perhaps some will make it, some others won't. However, those successful ones will lead the way for their less fortunate peers. The course of the popular movements will be determined by the peoples of the region. In other words, the people will set the pace and the scope of the change in the Middle East.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What is your personal perspective of how the Turkish government responded to the Arab Spring, beginning with the protests in Tunisia, and later in Egypt and elsewhere?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: We have adopted a principled stance regarding the popular movements in the region. This stance is based on two pillars: to support the reforms for more transparency, legitimacy, and accountability, and to pursue them through peaceful transition. We always advocated for the regimes to carry the torch of change themselves. Since sustainable security and stability in the region is only possible through accommodating the legitimate aspirations of the people, we encouraged our regional partners to implement necessary reforms in due time to this end.

Turkey has always underlined that violence and use of force against people is unacceptable. The sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and political unity of each country must be preserved and respected. It is also important not to let these

processes be hijacked by radicals who seek to foment sectarian, ethnic or ideological strife across the region. Turkey also notes that the scope of change and dynamics differ from one country to the other. Therefore, a ‘one size fits all’ approach cannot be applied to the countries in transition. If needed, Turkey remains ready to share her own experience with the interested countries.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Do the revolts in the Arab world present a crisis for Turkey, or an opportunity?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: We would like to see a democratic, constitutional system taking root in our neighborhood so that all religions and sects can coexist in harmony and peace within a multicultural setting. This is also the only way to secure peace, security, and stability in the region. If ongoing popular movements succeed in the establishment of democratic systems, this will certainly serve the interests of Turkey. Turkey will spare no effort in supporting the processes of change and transformation in the region with its democratic culture and historical experience. However, one of the biggest challenges ahead will be to thwart the likelihood of a new form of polarization emerging in the region, as sectarian identities have sharpened in the wake of popular movements. Turkey will strive, in coordination with regional and international actors, to ensure that ongoing processes of change and transformation conclude with success.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How does Turkey respond to fears of neo-Ottomanism—the prospect that your ‘strategic depth’ effectively seeks Turkish hegemony over the Arab region?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Certain circles accuse us of pursuing a neo-Ottoman agenda. These allegations are baseless. Common geography and historical relations with the region certainly dictate Turkey to follow an active policy in the face of developments in the region. Turkey simply looks for the establishment of security, peace, and stability on the basis of democracy in the region. Turkey has no hidden agenda toward the region. Our goal is working toward the creation of a belt of peace, stability, security, and wealth along its borders. The key word defining Turkey’s relations with the Arab countries is not ‘hegemony,’ but ‘mutual cooperation.’ Therefore such fears are baseless.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Do you regret anything about Turkey’s bilateral relations with the former regimes in the region—Mubarak in Egypt, Assad in Syria, for example?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: History is replete with telling examples of regimes failing to survive as they lost their legitimacy in the eyes of their people. For Turkey, it is not the regimes, but the peoples that matter and it is the people that lasts, not the regimes. It is for this very reason that Turkey has consistently chosen to stand by the peoples of the region as they have charted for democracy and freedom, bringing about an Arab Spring.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Does Turkey's experience with strong military involvement in politics and government—for better or worse—contain lessons for Egypt's transition to democracy—a 'Turkish model'? Some observers in the West and in Israel have expressed alarm at the success of Islamic parties in Egypt's elections—the fear of an Islamic state with a militant agenda. Do you share any of that concern?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey and Egypt are two brotherly and friendly nations, which are tied together with deep-rooted and unbreakable bonds of common history, culture, and geography. Egypt has a huge historic and cultural background. It is one of the most important civilizations in the world. It should not be forgotten that during the Ottoman times, the reform process had started in Egypt.

Promoting democratic transformation in our region for years, Turkey welcomes Egypt's peaceful revolution and fully respects the Egyptian people's sovereign choice. With the revolution, Egyptian people have embarked upon a historical journey that would bring greater democracy, freedom, stability, and prosperity to its future generations. We believe in Egypt's democratic vision and we are fully confident in the Egyptian people's ability to move forward in unity, solidarity, and determination. Democratic transition period in Egypt will have important repercussions for the entire region and Egypt's democratic success will create an important precedent that will inspire other nations.

The progress achieved in Egypt's democratic transformation process adds to our optimism on Egypt's future. Egyptian people celebrated the first anniversary of the 25 January Tahrir revolution. We fully shared your joy and your pride. The conclusion of the elections for the People's Assembly, and its inauguration on the eve of the revolution's anniversary, represents a significant phase in this regard.

We do not underestimate the challenges ahead. We are also aware that there still remains a long way to go to complete the transitional period. There will be inevitable ups and downs. The Egyptian people have been long aspiring for a full democratic system and a better living. The process is sensitive and it's full of difficulties. Demands and expectations are naturally very high and the time, as well as resources, are limited. The delays in realization of people's aspirations lead to further frustration and resentment. The deadly incidents erupting in moments of high social tension remind us how fragile can be the order in society at these delicate times. In short, coping with the socioeconomic and political challenges on the one hand and advancing the transition in peace and stability on the other, is not a simple task.

Yet, we are fully confident that our Egyptian brothers will continue advancing with the understanding of compromise and dialogue and show utmost care to preserve the spirit of national unity in order to successfully conclude this historic process. We fully believe that thanks to the perseverance, resilience, and arduous efforts of the Egyptian people, Egypt will emerge from this delicate process even stronger and more

prosperous than before. As displayed by the visits of President [Abdullah] Gül and Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan in March and September respectively, as well as by my six visits to Egypt last year, Turkey will remain in full solidarity with the Egyptian people in their journey to democracy.

Each and every country has its own unique characteristics shaped by its own unique historical and sociopolitical background. Therefore, as Turkey we do not want to present ourselves, nor to be seen, as a role model. It took years of democratic experimentation for Turkey to arrive at the current stage. Moreover, Turkish democratic experience is not merely about the evolution of civilian-military relations, but of an all-encompassing nature affecting the society across the board. I think, this aspect of the Turkish experience and its ability to prove the compatibility of democracy and secularism with a predominantly Muslim society could constitute an inspiration for the regional countries under transition, including Egypt. If needed, Turkey remains ready to share her own democratic experience with all interested countries.

We are now beyond such outdated prejudices and concerns against political parties with Islamic references. Starting with the free and fair elections in Palestine in 2006, we have always advocated that the democratically elected political entities should be allowed to assume and execute their governmental functions. Only through practice can democracies mature. However, the international community failed to recognize this fact in the Palestinian example and this failure continues to adversely affect the Palestinian body politic, with negative repercussions on the peace process. Therefore, in the context of the Arab Spring in general, and in the Egyptian case in particular, the international community should not repeat the same mistake.

On the other hand, ascendancy to power through democratic elections comes with responsibilities, as well as with authority to rule. These responsibilities include ensuring the rule of law, good governance, accountability, transparency, and upholding of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the protection of women's rights and rights of the minorities. In the final analysis, in democracies what matters is the free will of the peoples. Of course, full democratization is a long and arduous process that is about institutions, as much as about free and fair elections.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How has Turkish foreign policy assessed and dealt with the evolving political crisis in Syria?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: For us, Syria is not just a neighboring country. We have a common history, we share a very long land border and we are destined to live next to each other. Our societies are interwoven through the ties of kinship. This is why we could not remain indifferent to the developments taking place right on the other side of our 910-kilometer-long border.

Determined to extend a helping hand to the people in Syria, we have approached the Syrian leadership even before the outbreak of the current popular movement. We explicitly warned the Syrian leadership that Syria could be the next step of the Arab Spring unless the leadership took on board the very basic demand of its citizens for a life in dignity. We offered to share our experience and expertise in the field of democratization that could inspire the Syrian leadership to take difficult yet necessary steps for accommodating the legitimate demands of the Syrian people.

I have visited Syria sixty-two times in total since I have taken the post of special advisor to the prime minister. Just to remind the Syrian administration about the necessity of reforms, I have visited and met with President [Bashar] Assad three times. We have even presented a road map for reform in Syria in every walk of life. However, promises given to us for reform were not upheld. Despite relentless efforts by the Turkish government, the Syrian leadership chose to confront its own citizens by engaging in a dead-end policy based on the brutal repression of street protests.

The developments in Syria continue to be one of the major concerns of the international community in view of the mounting death toll in the country. The stage that has been reached in Syria poses a threat to the international peace and security. Now that it seems unlikely to see an action by the UN Security Council, the international community should reassess its options according to the new conditions in place.

Being a neighboring country to be first affected by the developments in Syria, Turkey will sustain its efforts in cooperation with regional and international actors in order to end the bloodshed and to pave the ground for a political transformation process in the country. As Turkey, we tried everything first at the bilateral level, then in coordination with the Arab League, and lastly at the UN Security Council in order to resolve the crisis in this country. We now need to work for an international platform on Syria, originating from the region and with broad participation of all related members of the international community. We hope that the Tunis meeting [of the “Friends of Syria” group of nations] on 24 February enabled the international community to send the long-overdue messages to the Syrian regime and to alleviate the sufferings of the Syrian people.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you estimate President Assad, and his role in the crisis and the solution?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The developments in Syria have gained a tragic dimension due to the uncompromising attitude of the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime has not only disregarded the outcries of its own people, but also lent a deaf ear to international calls for abandoning violence and use of force against protestors. Against this background, President Assad and his close entourage have the primary responsibility for

the current crisis, which, unfortunately, ravages the country in front of our eyes. It is again in the hands of President Assad to end the bloodshed and to initiate a peaceful transformation process in the country through full implementation of the Arab League's initiative and roadmap.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What is the most effective way for outsiders—whether it is Turkey, Arab states, or a combination of international action—to address a crisis like the one in Syria?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The most effective way of dealing with the crisis in Syria is the adoption of a unified position by the international community as a whole. It will be only then that the Assad regime will finally comprehend that persisting in its current policies will only lead to more bloodshed and nothing else. Sharing a 910-kilometer-long border with Syria, Turkey will continue to be at the center of the efforts in order to address the crisis in this country. As a regional organization, the Arab League has a pivotal role in steering the efforts of the international community. The recipe for ending the crisis should ideally originate from the region and be implemented with the support of the international community.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Does the instability in Syria pose a threat to Turkish security—as a border state with potential refugees fleeing violence, or as a country with a Kurdish region?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The worsening situation in Syria has gained a potential to pose a threat not only to regional but also to international security and stability. In addition to close and deep-rooted historical and cultural ties between the peoples of Turkey and Syria, Turkey shares its longest land border with Syria. It is hard to imagine a neighboring Turkey immune to the likely negative effects of the developments in Syria. All relevant Turkish authorities watch vigilantly the situation on the ground in this country and are ready to take necessary measures against possible sources of instability originating from Syria, including a mass influx of refugees.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Would you agree with analysts who speculate that Turkey's relations with Israel will never return to the high point where they have been in the past? Has Turkish policy toward Israel become 'emotional'—considering Prime Minister Erdoğan's 'walkout' at Davos, and the anger over the 'Flotilla incident'?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Certain positive developments in the Middle East peace process also had their reflections on Turkey's relations with Israel. After the Madrid Peace Conference and the Oslo Peace Accords, Turkey upgraded its ties with Israel in the early 1990s; over the years, Turkey and Israel established better relations so that this relationship could serve the Middle East peace process. However, Israel's acts and

policies jeopardizing peace and stability in the region have had negative repercussions on our bilateral relations. The Suez Canal crisis of 1956, Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980, and Israel's brutal military attacks on the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the 'Operation Cast Lead' in December 2008, were among them.

The Israeli attack against the international humanitarian aid convoy on the high seas on 31 May 2010, which resulted in the killing of nine innocent civilians and the injury of many others from a host of nationalities, inevitably led to the deterioration of our relations. The attack constituted a clear breach of international law. Israel has drawn severe condemnation not only from Turkey, but also from the entire international community.

This brutal attack left an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of the Turkish people. The crime committed by Israel is not a simple offense. Israel has not only violated the international law, but also the right to life, the most fundamental human value, of innocent civilians, once again. Yet, we have acted responsibly and with prudence during the last twenty-one months. Our expectations were both judicious and realistic. Despite this fact, and contrary to the common practice in international relations, Israel failed to meet Turkey's legitimate demands for a public apology, compensation, and an end to the blockade of Gaza, until now. No country can turn a blind eye to the killing of its citizens by foreign forces on the high seas and the subsequent maltreatment of other passengers.

Turkey's demands are clear. Israel needs to apologize and pay compensation. The unlawful blockade on Gaza must also be lifted. The Israeli government must make a choice. Israel needs to see that it will only be possible to ensure real security by building a real peace. We hope that Israel would see the big picture and what serves best its own interests. Normalization of our relations will depend on the steps to be taken by Israel.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You personally were involved in a significant Turkish initiative to mediate a peace agreement between Israel and Syria—and by some accounts it nearly succeeded. Can you provide us with insights into your mediation mission, and what happened to it? What are the prospects for an Israeli–Palestinian agreement?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the core issue in the Middle East. Fundamental changes taking place in our region in the recent period have made the need for the settlement of this dispute more important than ever. Turkey supports the two-state solution that would lead to the establishment of an independent, sovereign, and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live in peace and security with the state of Israel.

We welcome and support all efforts for the resumption of the negotiations between the two parties. However, meaningful negotiations can take place only on an equal footing. Israelis have been enjoying their statehood since 1948, whereas the

Palestinians have been denied such an inherent right for years. The steps taken by Palestinians in order to achieve full international recognition by the UN could remove such a lopsided approach from the agenda for good. It is now high time to address this imbalance. Israel must have a counterpart on an equal footing in every sense. Palestinians must have their recognized state.

Evidently, the primary obstacle in front of the peace efforts remains to be the Israeli government's continued intransigence on the Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing settlement activities of Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Settlements are not only contrary to international law and the Road Map commitments but also endanger the vision of a two-state solution. If the peace process is to be truly revitalized and concluded successfully, Israel should seriously commit itself to respecting the existing final status parameters, particularly on the 1967 borders.

Turkey strongly believes that the Middle East peace process should be advanced in all three tracks, namely the Israeli–Palestinian, Israeli–Syrian, and Israeli–Lebanese tracks. With this understanding, Turkey mediated between Israel and Syria in the past. As both parties were about to launch direct negotiations, the process was disrupted by the Israeli attack against the Gaza Strip. We strongly hope that this track as well would be revived as soon as possible once the conditions in the region normalize.

CAIRO REVIEW: *You were also involved in the Tehran Declaration—an effort by Turkey and Brazil to mediate a solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. Was it a success or a failure?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: I wouldn't describe the Tehran Joint Declaration as a matter of success or failure. It was rather a missed opportunity on the part of the international community in achieving a breakthrough in the longstanding diplomatic rift with Iran. The Tehran Joint Declaration proved that a genuine diplomatic engagement with Iran could yield results. If the proposal contained in the Declaration could have been implemented, it could have been the catalyst to a constructive diplomatic process addressing the broader issue of the Iranian nuclear program. In our view, confidence-building measures are still achievable if they are put into the right context. The Tehran Joint Declaration sets a successful example for future efforts.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Western countries led by the United States have expressed strong suspicions that Iran is determined to become a nuclear weapon power. What do you think?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The problem is first and foremost that of a confidence crisis. Lack of confidence on the part of the international community in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program, and the security perceptions of Iran

for its own part, create a big psychological barrier between the parties. Overcoming these barriers can only be possible through serious and targeted negotiations that would address the concerns and expectations of both sides.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is Iran on a collision course with the West, with no real diplomatic way out?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Based on previous experiences, Iran might have its own reasons to question the consistency of the principles and standards of its Western counterparts. Yet finding a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue is in the interest of all parties. Given the impact of the psychological factor and the crisis of confidence among the parties, however, the process will not be easy. Patient but perseverant diplomacy will be needed to achieve the desired outcome. Only through a gradual process, including exploratory talks on a set of parallel actions aimed at overcoming the present impasse, will it be possible to arrive at a mutually satisfactory settlement of the outstanding issues.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How would Turkey view an Israeli military attack on Iran to disrupt Iran's nuclear project?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey is against any kind of military strike against Iran. The military option does not represent a solution to the challenges posed by the Iranian nuclear activities. Any military action would, on the contrary, create more problems than it would solve—particularly in terms of its unavoidable negative implications on regional and global peace, security, and stability. Determined efforts toward a peaceful solution through dialogue and cooperation, therefore, do not have any viable alternative. Negotiation remains the only way forward.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Turkey was strongly skeptical of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. How do you evaluate the results nearly a decade later, and the impact of the transformation of Iraq on Turkish interests—including the Kurdish issue?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Let me begin by sharing with you the main contours of Turkey's policy toward Iraq. Turkey wishes to see a stable, secure, democratic, and prosperous Iraq at peace with its own people and its neighbors. We have strong cultural and historical links with Iraq and we attach importance to being in close relations with all segments of the Iraqi society.

We all had misgivings about the war in Iraq since we knew that the war would first and foremost affect Turkey as a neighboring country. Turkey suffered from the war and the ensuing instability in Iraq in various ways. Instability and the power vacuum turned northern Iraq into a safe haven for PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] terrorists

that use this region as a base to plan and execute attacks against Turkey. Our economic and commercial interests were also seriously hampered. The PKK terrorist organization does not constitute a threat only to the security and stability of Turkey, but also to those of our neighbors including Iraq.

In recent years Turkey has significantly improved its relations with the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Turkish businessmen, contractors, and workers have made crucial contributions to the prosperity and welfare in northern Iraq. Our expectation from Iraq—including the regional authorities in northern Iraq—is to take decisive and result-oriented measures to eradicate the presence and activities of the PKK terrorist organization therein.

The withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Iraq in December 2011 has presented the Iraqi leaders with the opportunity to prove to themselves and to the international community that they can work together to build a stable, democratic, and prosperous Iraq. However, in the wake of the U.S. troop withdrawal, Iraq has been once again plagued by political instability. We are concerned that the ongoing political crisis may lead to the recurrence of sectarian violence in the country. We therefore call on all Iraqi leaders to resolve their difficulties through compromise and negotiations with a view to finding mutually acceptable solutions to the existing political problems.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What are Turkey's interests in Central Asia, and what are the obstacles to improving relations with the nations of this region?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Central Asia lies at the heart of Eurasia with its ample opportunities and challenges. Since gaining their independence in 1991, the countries in the region have taken significant steps in enhancing their sovereignty, consolidating their statehood as well as elevating the level of integration with the world.

Sharing common cultural, historical, and linguistic ties, Turkey is the first country to recognize the independence of these countries. Our primary objectives toward these countries are to support the efforts for a working democracy and free market economy; to promote the political and economic reform process; to advance political and economic stability and prosperity in the region; to contribute to the emergence of an environment conducive to regional cooperation; to support their vocation toward Euro-Atlantic institutions, and to assist them to benefit from their own energy resources. The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTS) was established in 2009 as a new international intergovernmental organization, with the overarching aim of promoting comprehensive cooperation among Turkic-speaking states.

In the last few months, we have witnessed two important developments in the region. First, Kyrgyzstan has made an important progress on the way to parliamentary democracy. It is the first time that a peaceful power handover took place in Central

Asia. Turkey will continue to support Kyrgyzstan's aspirations for building a full-fledged democracy. Second, Kazakhstan is also moving in the right direction toward a multiparty democratic system. We boldly encourage these efforts to yield concrete democratic results. We welcome and support these transformational efforts and developments in the region catering for the needs and aspirations of peoples.

CAIRO REVIEW: *After its initial electoral success a decade ago, the AKP government seemed to be on a good track for European Union membership, yet some observers see the process at a standstill now. What happened?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey's accession negotiations started in 2005 and continue. Their goal is membership on the basis of the EU's unanimously taken decisions. Despite some negative tendencies, the EU expresses that it is committed to carry forward the enlargement process which also includes Turkey. The 2011 Enlargement Strategy Document published by the European Commission last October stresses that "Turkey's contribution to the EU in a number of crucial areas will only be fully effective with an active and credible accession process."

Except for a number of member states that oppose our accession negotiations for domestic political considerations, EU countries in general state that they support Turkey's accession process. They are aware of the added value that Turkey would bring to the Union. The Strategy Document that I have mentioned underlines that Turkey is a key country for the security and prosperity of the EU, with its dynamic economy, important regional role, and its contribution to EU's foreign policy and energy security. As a factor of stability in its region, Turkey's membership of the EU would not only amplify the global political, economic, and sociocultural power of the Union, but would also contribute to regional and global peace and stability, the dissemination of universal values to a wider geography, and the dialogue among cultures.

Accession to the EU is our strategic goal. I consider EU membership as an integral part of Turkey's historical efforts for further modernization and transformation. On the other hand, it is true that in spite of our tireless efforts to make further progress in the negotiations, the process is confronted with difficulties as a result of politically motivated obstacles created by some EU members. Nevertheless, we are committed to carry forward this process and our reform agenda, which is now in an irreversible course. By doing so, we aim to provide our people with the highest norms and standards in every field of their daily lives. As a matter of fact, we have already made huge strides to that end in recent years through comprehensive reforms. We will continue reform since it is first and foremost for the good of the Turkish people. The new, progressive, and comprehensive constitution which will be drafted through a broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders will constitute an important step in this respect.

CAIRO REVIEW: *What concrete steps do you envision taking to move forward in closing chapters in your accession negotiations with the EU?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Since the beginning of the negotiation process, out of thirty-three chapters, thirteen chapters were opened. These chapters cover different sectors; from agriculture, fisheries, energy, and taxation to science and research, education and culture, and environment. The accession process has never been easy for any country. Unfortunately, we are facing politically motivated obstacles which undermine the technical nature of the negotiations and in fact, are against the principle *pacta sunt servanda* [agreements must be kept]. Despite the hurdles, Turkey is determined to carry forward the process. Turkey has adopted and started implementing a national program with a comprehensive road map to ensure a society based on high democratic and legal norms. The program foresees a great number of legislative changes in order to harmonize our legislation with the EU's. All our relevant ministries and institutions continue to work on the negotiation chapters, blocked or not, in line with the National Program, in order to be ready to open and close all chapters as soon as the political blockages are lifted.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Has the prospect of a more democratic Middle East caused Turkey to rethink its geopolitical position concerning its future alignment with Europe?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey, a candidate for accession to the EU, is a European, Mediterranean, Balkan, Caucasian, and Middle Eastern country all at the same time. All these regions harbor challenges, but also opportunities for their people. Turkey's proactive, multidimensional, and result-oriented foreign policy aims at contributing to the strengthening of peace, stability, and prosperity in all these regions. This is in our interest. It is also in the interest of the EU. The global international environment is rapidly changing. Transformation is now the key word. The Arab Spring has, and will continue to have, an immense impact on the international system. Political transition reflecting the legitimate aspirations of the people is leading to a future based on free and democratic foundations. During this turbulent period in the Arab world, [given] our geopolitical position, as both a part of this very region and as an EU candidate country, Turkey will continue to strive to foster dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes in the region with solution-oriented approaches, to the benefit of all peoples of the region.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Is Turkey serious about resolving the Cyprus problem?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Let me state this very clearly: as Turkey, we want a negotiated and mutually agreed-upon political settlement in Cyprus, and we fully support the efforts of the Turkish Cypriots and the UN secretary-general to this end. The question you should be asking is: are the Greek Cypriots serious about resolving the Cyprus problem? Unfortunately their track record indicates that they are not.

The ongoing comprehensive negotiation process on the island was initiated in 2008 under the auspices of the UN, and within this framework the leaders have met more than 140 times to date. So far, progress in the process has largely been achieved thanks to comprehensive and constructive proposals of the Turkish Cypriots, which were also appreciated by the UN. Most recently, the fifth tripartite meeting of the leaders with the UN secretary-general was held in Greentree, New York, on 23–24 January. The international community had high expectations from these talks. As the Turkish side, we had been hoping that the Greentree meeting would usher in the high-level meeting with the participation of the two sides and the three guarantors, namely Turkey, Greece, and the United Kingdom, which would address all remaining issues that couldn't be agreed upon by the two sides in order to seal the settlement through a grand bargain. Regrettably, this has not been possible due to the Greek Cypriot side's stubborn intransigence. In Greentree the Greek Cypriots sidestepped genuine talks in order to avoid a decision for a high-level meeting, and a very important opportunity was missed.

Now, with the approaching Greek Cypriot EU presidency in the second half of 2012, the window of opportunity narrowed considerably. Despite this, the Turkish Cypriot side will continue its determined efforts and we will continue to fully support them. There is still some hope: if the assessment of the process to be provided by the secretary-general's special adviser Mr. [Alexander] Downer in March is positive, the secretary-general intends to call a high-level meeting in late April or early May. This could finally produce a settlement agreement, enabling the new partnership to be established in Cyprus to assume the EU presidency on 1 July. But these hopes will be meaningless if the Greek Cypriot side does not negotiate sincerely. The Greek Cypriots must first decide whether or not they truly want a partnership and a common future with the Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots proved back in 2004, in the Annan Plan referenda, that they are on the side of a settlement. It is the Greek Cypriots who must now also display the necessary political will. The secretary-general, in his report in 2004, clearly stated that if the Greek Cypriots remain willing to resolve the Cyprus problem, this needs to be demonstrated.

Without a political solution, the Cyprus issue also harbors a potential risk for trust, stability, and cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The unilateral start of offshore drilling activities by the Greek Cypriot side last September and the developments which ensued after this provocative move have demonstrated the risks which the continuation of the Cyprus issue carries both on a regional and, partly, on a global scale. These unilateral activities of the Greek Cypriot side have also compromised and prejudged the Turkish Cypriots' inherent and legitimate equal rights over the natural resources of the island. Mr. [Dervis] Eroğlu, president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), put forth a constructive proposal for a fair sharing of the

island's natural resources and for using these resources to finance the settlement, but this proposal was returned by the Greek Cypriots without any comment. This crisis clearly demonstrates the necessity for a political settlement in Cyprus. On the other hand, Turkey and the TRNC will implement, by 2014, a pipeline project which involves bringing 75 million cubic meters of drinking water to northern Cyprus. This amount can be increased tenfold, and that would be equal to double the water need of the entire island. As Turkey, we would like the whole of the island to benefit from this project. This new water source could, like the hydrocarbon resources, be utilized as an incentive for the successful conclusion of the ongoing negotiations with a comprehensive solution. Thus a mutually agreed settlement in Cyprus would enable not only the two sides on the island but also the entire region to benefit from the increase in prosperity made possible through the peaceful use of these new natural resources.

The Turkish side is sincerely committed to the goal of a mutually agreed political settlement in Cyprus. A just and lasting settlement of the Cyprus problem will not only be in the interests of the two sides on the island but also the EU and all concerned parties including Turkey, as well as contributing to peace, cooperation, and stability in the eastern Mediterranean and the wider region.

CAIRO REVIEW: *The Armenia question has also been a problem in Turkey's foreign relations. Ankara has warned the French president about signing a law criminalizing denial of 'Armenian genocide'—are you making progress on this issue, or are things actually getting worse?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Two separate appeals were lodged with the French Constitutional Council: to annul on the grounds of unconstitutionality the draft law “to penalize the denial of the genocides recognized by law in France.” The signatories of these appeals are either French deputies or senators. The Constitutional Council of France annulled the draft law on February 28. We consider the annulment as a step in line with freedom of expression and research, the rule of law, and the principles of international law, and against the politicization of history in France. We are glad to note that a grave error was corrected by the most competent judicial authority in France. Turks and Armenians have differing interpretations over the tragic part of their long common history, where all sides suffered. We would like to resolve these differences and diverging interpretations with Armenia through dialogue and based on impartial scholarly studies. Our aim is to reach a just memory. Trying to score points in third countries is not the way to deal with this issue. Third countries should play a constructive role in this process rather than take exclusivist, one-sided positions.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you see Turkey's role in NATO going forward?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey is a member of NATO since 1952 and we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of this membership this year. The international system has changed since 1952, as well as Turkey and the Alliance, but NATO is still the cornerstone of our defense and security policy. NATO, as a unique forum for Euro–Atlantic security, provides Turkey an opportunity to put forward her views and expectations regarding international security issues and to have a strong impact on transatlantic initiatives. Turkey’s membership of NATO is also an integral part of her global identity. Turkey proceeds to take part in missions and operations on collective defense and crisis management within NATO. Turkey mobilizes its ‘soft power’ by means of using its deep historical ties with populations and countries in the wide geography where NATO acts. In view of the fact that the security and stability of the Euro–Atlantic area and the Middle East are closely linked to each other, Turkey takes the lead in the development of NATO’s relations with the countries in the Middle East through partnership mechanisms like Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). We shall continue to add value to NATO’s outreach in the future. As such, NATO maintains its relevance to respond to the risks and challenges of the new strategic environment.

CAIRO REVIEW: *As historical competitors with centuries of rivalry, are Russia and Turkey establishing a fundamentally healthier partnership in the new global order—perhaps through the mutual benefits of natural gas cooperation?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: We have intense relations with Russia, which go back over six centuries at a time when both countries were multiethnic empires. St. Petersburg was among the first capitals where the Ottoman Empire sent a resident ambassador. Rivalry between the two neighboring empires transformed into a cooperative nature in the aftermath of the First World War. This cooperation has continued—especially in the economic sphere—even during the Cold War.

Our relations with Russia have evolved and developed rapidly since the beginning of the 1990s. Turkish–Russian relations constitute an integral component of Turkey’s multidimensional foreign policy. We maintain a sincere and open dialogue with Russia in order to preserve and strengthen the atmosphere of mutual trust and to further our cooperation to the mutual benefit of both sides.

Economic cooperation constitutes the driving force behind Turkish–Russian relations. Our trade volume reached \$26.9 billion as of November 2011 and is on the rise. The leaders of both countries have set the target of a bilateral trade volume of \$100 billion by the end of 2015. The volume of Turkish investments in Russia has surpassed \$7 billion. Turkish companies are active in a large spectrum of areas, from food to construction to textile sectors. Our construction companies have undertaken 1,191 projects so far, worth \$32 billion. The volume of Russian investments in Turkey has

also reached \$7 billion. We are pleased that our country continued to be the most preferred country by Russian tourists also in 2011. Last year, 3.6 million Russian tourists visited Turkey. The visa exemption agreement entered into force on 17 April 2011. We believe that the implementation of this agreement will contribute to our cooperation in the fields of trade, economy, transportation, and tourism.

Our cooperation in the energy field adds a strategic dimension to our relations. Russia is the biggest natural gas supplier of Turkey through two pipelines. While economic relations are the driving force, high-level dialogue provides for the strategic orientation of our bilateral relations. The High-Level Cooperation Council that we established in May 2010 during the official visit of President [Dmitry] Medvedev to Turkey opened a new chapter in our relations. We held the second meeting during the visit of our prime minister to Russia on 15–17 March 2011 in Moscow. This visit coincided with the ninetieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Moscow Agreement, which is the basis for our relations in the modern era. We are planning to hold the third meeting of the Council this year.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Are you satisfied with Turkish–Russian cooperation in addressing regional challenges, such as the crisis Syria, the Arab uprisings generally, Iran’s nuclear program, the Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: We believe that a stable, market-oriented, democratic, and peaceful Russia will certainly be an asset for regional peace and stability as well as for the European security architecture. We see Russia as one of our important partners and a significant actor regionally and globally. We think that a sincere and open dialogue with Russia would help transform our region in a positive direction. Russia’s contribution to the settlement of the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe is necessary. Likewise, it is expected by many that Russia would play a constructive role in the Syria crisis. This was one of our main themes when I visited Russia in January.

CAIRO REVIEW: *President Gül has spoken of a ‘golden age’ of relations with Washington. Ties were not so good after the AKP came to office a decade ago? What happened?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey and the U.S. currently enjoy an advanced level of cooperation. President Obama paid his first bilateral overseas visit to Turkey soon after becoming president. However, we do not always pursue identical approaches on international issues. As Turkey has traditionally strong ties with its neighborhood and beyond, sometimes there may be nuances in Turkey’s approach on issues taking place in our region. Turkey’s geography necessitates a multidimensional foreign policy. Therefore, we have many issues concerning Turkey and the U.S. Turkey is ready to work with every country that embraces the goals of peace, stability, and economic

development. It is not possible to accept the assumption that “ties were not so good after this government came to office a decade ago.” There is always speculation following a change in governments in all countries. Turkey’s decisive journey, encompassing comprehensive democratic and political reforms and brilliant economic performance in the last decade or so, is self-explanatory to dispel such groundless assumptions.

CAIRO REVIEW: *Would you describe the relationship between Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Obama, which seems to be quite good and important to Turkish–U.S. relations?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: The developments in our region and beyond necessitate close consultation and coordination with our allies and partners. It is with this understanding that Prime Minister Erdoğan holds regular consultations with President Obama on international issues of common concern. You may also recall that President Obama recently named Prime Minister Erdoğan as one of five world leaders with whom he enjoys the most effective working relations.

CAIRO REVIEW: *How do you evaluate American policy during the Obama administration—with regard to Turkey’s interests, to the Middle East region, and to global security as a whole?*

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU: Turkey welcomes the U.S. foreign policy, which promotes multilateralism and seeks broader international support within the framework of the UNSC [UN Security Council] for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. We believe in the ultimate success of principled foreign policy that is governed by the rule of law and international law. The unfolding set of events in the Middle East and North Africa highlight the indispensable feature of those principles. The calls for democratic, accountable, and sound governments in the region are equally important. I would also like to point out that the legitimate expectations of the people, regardless of wherever they emanate from, should not fall on deaf ears.