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Why Welcome Al Basheer? Contextualizing Turkey`s Darfur Policy (with Birol Akgun)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the underlying elements of the Muslim world’s reaction toward the Darfur crisis by critically evaluating Turkey’s involvement. Turkey is important because it has been cited as a rising star of 21st century in the Muslim world not only for its growing economic potential and deepening democratic credentials, but also with its recent pro-active diplomatic initiatives in conflict areas such as in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Turkey’s Darfur policy has been one of its most criticized in recent times. Although the criticisms leveled against this policy have some merit, they do not provide much insight into the motivations behind Turkey’s approach to Darfur. Thus, Ankara’s distinctive approach to Darfur and Khartoum requires a thorough, in-depth analysis within the context of Turkey’s changing role in regional and global affairs. It is argued that on the Darfur issue, Turkish policy has been characterized by convergence and distinction from the official position of the Muslim-Arab world.

We argue that the Turkish approach to Darfur has been mainly shaped by three elements: the international environment/discourse on “the war on terror” since 2002; Turkey’s recently deepening political and economic engagement with the Arab world and Africa; and Ankara’s search for a new political “language” on Darfur, a middle ground between the West’s claims of “genocide” and defending al Basheer. In sum, Turkey’s Darfur policy can be described as an example of “passive quiet diplomacy” in a highly complex international environment.

WHY WELCOME AL BASHEER?
CONTEXTUALIZING TURKEY’S DARFUR POLICY

Mehmet Özkan, Birol Akgün

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Introduction: What is at Stake?

Since 2003, a conflict has been ongoing in Darfur. Although a fragile peace agreement has been signed and elections took place in April 2010, the situation on the ground is still far from a lasting peace. The exact number of the death toll in the Darfur conflict remains the subject of speculation. Nevertheless, the range is estimated as anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000. To the surprise of many, this total is two to four times the toll of the Bosnian wars of the 1990s, while reaction from Turkey and Turkish civil society have been extremely low in comparison to the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. Turkey’s Darfur policy today stands as one of the most criticized and less understood topics in Turkish foreign policy. Why is this so? What are the main determinants of Turkey’s approach to Darfur? Is it an example of a “double-standard” or does it flow from Turkey’s new and evolving foreign policy? Here, the central question is to what extent Turkey’s Darfur policy is driven by political and economic considerations or is characterized by a bias for its Muslim brethren or umma.

This brief tries to portray the underlying elements of the Muslim world’s reaction toward Darfur by critically evaluating Turkey’s involvement in the conflict. Turkey is important because it has been cited as a rising star of 21st century in the Muslim world not only for its growing economic potential and deepening democratic credentials, but also with its recent pro-active diplomatic initiatives in conflict areas such as in the

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Middle East, Balkans and Caucasus. Turkey is not an Arab country, therefore, not a party to the Darfur conflict from an ethnical point of view, nor a country that initially showed no interest in the conflict. However, Turkey as a rising power in the international arena is aware of its diplomatic limits and carefully operates between the concerns of the Muslim consciousness and the interests of other actors at international and regional levels. As Turkey strengthens its relations with Western institutions, such as NATO and the EU as well as being an elected member of the UN Security Council for 2009-2010, it can neither ignore the “genocide” claims nor the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the role of the Sudanese President Omer al Basheer. However, Turkey seemingly does not want to jeopardize its developing relations with the Arab and African countries by joining the Western position of Darfur. Basically, Turkey seems to be between rock and hard place in its Darfur policy. A critical appraisal of Turkey’s approach to the issue may not only help us understand Turkey’s growing soft-power instruments in the Muslim world, but also reveals the limitations of Turkey’s new proactive foreign policy.

From Past to Present: A Periodization of the Darfur Conflict

Although a thorough discussion of the historical roots and all the political aspects of the Darfur conflict are beyond this paper, the Darfur conflict has three stages and it is imperative to outline those to understand and situate the crisis in an international context. The first phase of the crisis was between February 2003 and the end of 2004. It has been characterized as “the site of brutal counterinsurgency”\(^2\) with a death toll estimated somewhere between 100,000 and 400,000.\(^3\) The second phase, from early 2005 up until the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) indictment of al Basheer on 14 July 2008, has been marked by a decrease in fighting. During this period, the death toll decreased, however, the crisis finally attracted international interest accompanied by a campaign against genocide.\(^4\) This is noteworthy because, in the initial stages of the conflict when the mass killings occurred, international interest in Darfur was relatively low in comparison to later stages. This can be explained because international attention was diverted to the invasion of Iraq. Third stage is the post-ICC process. Here, a serious international effort to resolve the Darfur crisis culminated in the Doha talks where an agreement was reached in April 2010. However, the international community is divided. While the African Union (AU)\(^5\), Arab League (AL),\(^6\) and the Organization of the Islamic


\(^3\) There is huge debate about this number as it is usually used as a political motivation to show the “greatness” of the brutality, and the numbers increased and decreased from time to time depending on agencies that release the statistics. For an excellent summary, presentation and discussion about numbers can be found in Mamdani, pp.25-39.

\(^4\) Ibid, p 33.


Turkey’s Darfur policy converges and distinguishes itself from the overall reaction of the Muslim world.

Contextualizing Turkey’s Darfur Policy

Conference (OIC) see the ICC decision as an obstacle to peace efforts, the UN and the EU see it as an advancement in the process toward ending the mass killings. It is certain that with the decision of the ICC, the international community remains divided as to how to further peace efforts despite the peace agreement. However, there are signs that al Basheer has softened his support to the rebels. Consequently, the conflict may be winding down with the ICC indictment against al Basheer. Since April 2010, we have entered a fourth phase that will define future developments within Sudan as well as the reaction of the international community.

Such a periodization is important in understanding the Muslim world’s overall reaction to the conflict because such an understanding may help us to better contextualize Turkey’s approach to the issue. During the first period, almost all international attention, both the Muslim world and the West, was focused on the invasion of Iraq. Simply stated, the international community turned a blind eye to the developments in Darfur. In the second period, the Western media through NGOs (i.e. Save Darfur Coalition) launched an offensive to garner support for Darfur. However, the Muslim world’s reaction was very limited. In fact, it took a highly defensive against the Western discourse of the claim of “genocide.” What we have seen in the third period is that Western attention has virtually disappeared while the Muslim world, namely Qatar and the OIC, played a critical role in reaching agreement along with the efforts of the AU. Turkey’s Darfur policy converges and distinguishes itself from the overall reaction of the Muslim world. These distinctions require further explanations.

What Drives Turkey’s Darfur Policy?

Turkey’s approach to Darfur has been subject to criticism by analysts and human rights groups as contradictory and holding a double standard. This criticism was particularly strong when the Sudanese Vice-President, Ali Osman Mohammed Taha, visited Turkey after Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan stormed out of the 2009 Davos meeting accusing the Israelis of knowing “how to kill people” in Gaza. According to former Turkish foreign minister and retired diplomat, Ilter Turkmen, it was “obvious that there is a contradiction in Erdogan’s approach toward Gaza and Darfur.” The President of the Turkish Human Rights Association, Ozturk Turkdogan, openly declared the visit to Turkey “an indication of the government’s double-standard policy.” Professor Mensur Akgun also criticized Turkey’s invitation of Taha by stating that if Taha did not come to Turkey for a discussion over a solution in Darfur, “it is not an accurate act on the part of Turkey” to receive him.

The International community’s reaction towards the Sudanese leaders visit to Turkey was also interesting. The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) has tried to legitimize its lobbying on the recognition of the Armenian

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8. We are grateful to Serhat Orakci for this point. See also “War in Sudan’s Darfur “is over”, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8224424.stm (accessed 27 August 2009).
Turkey’s policy has been mainly shaped by three factors: the international environment/discourse on “the war on terror,” Turkey’s new political and economic engagement policies with the Arab world and Africa; and Ankara’s search for a new political “language” on Darfur.

International Environment, Discourse on Genocide and the “War on Terror”

Turkey’s interest in Darfur and its policy toward the conflict have been directly shaped by the current international environment; however, Turkey has taken a unique position. During the first phase of the Darfur conflict, the attention of the Muslim world was diverted towards the Iraqi War. This conflict weighed more strategically, politically and economically due to its heavy fall out and long-term implications for Muslim states. In this context, Iraq had more relevance for Turkey. Turkey is not only a neighboring country to Iraq but because of the Kurdish issue, the Iraqi conflict represents an immediate fully-fledged threat to the unity and sovereignty of Turkey. Therefore, in the first phase of the Darfur conflict, Turkey was not initially really involved during the debates. In the second phase, when Turkey started to show interest in the crisis by officially hosting al Basheer in Ankara for his first state visit to Turkey in January 2008, “genocide” claims were at its height but al Basheer was not indicted by the ICC yet.

Turkey has had its own reasons to reject the term “genocide.” Within the context of an international environment in which “the war on terror” rhetoric is dominant and the images of Arabs and Muslims in western media are presented as potential terrorists since September 11th, it has been politically difficult for the Muslim World and Turkey’s ruling conservative government to accept the “genocide” argument for the conflict in Darfur. Furthermore, qualifying the conflict as “genocide” has had far-fetching results in political and legal terms. The argument that a genocide carried out in Darfur by Muslim Arabs on Muslim Africans was “yet another selective and unfair judgment” of the
West according to the overall understanding of Turkey and the Muslim world. Thus, neither the Arab states nor the Arab League accepted the idea of “genocide.” Turkey’s approach towards Darfur was also a reflection of the potential negative discourse due to environment the war on terror has engendered. It is possibly because of this concern that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan questioned the charges brought against Omer al Basheer and said that “no Muslim could perpetrate a genocide,” and “If there was such a thing (a genocide), we could talk about it face to face with President Basheer,” when he is asked about the situation in Darfur. Turkey wanted to prevent such a negative discourse from taking place, especially in the context of an East-West dialogue, which Turkey has been co-chairing. This is the “the alliance of civilizations” project under the auspicious of the UN Secretary-General, which is to promote peace and harmony.

When the ICC indicted al Basheer as the person responsible for the atrocities in Darfur, Turkey had to clarify its policy on Darfur. After the ICC decision, the West asked other countries to cooperate and support the ICC. However, neither the AU nor the Arab League expressed its willingness to cooperate with the ICC. They requested that the international community delay its decision on the grounds that it could threaten the peace process in Sudan. At the same time, Turkey was a newly elected member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2009-2010, thus forcing Ankara to take sides. Ankara officially preferred to be silent about the issue. However, policy actions reveal that Ankara leaned towards also requesting a postponement of the charges against al Basheer. The fact that al Basheer visited Turkey twice in 2008, amidst all the atrocities in Darfur, is taken as a clear indication that Ankara is not willing to follow the western position and alienate Sudan’s political leadership. Similarly, Turkish officials have gone on record, several times, saying that Sudan’s territorial integrity must be protected—a position in line with Turkey’s position on Iraq. However, Turkey has expressed its unhappiness with the humanitarian tragedy in Darfur and several times diplomatically raised the issue with al Basheer behind the closed doors.

In a recent interview, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu argued that Turkey is “working on providing a better dialogue between the parties in Darfur and the Sudanese government” and “when President al Basheer came to Turkey, our (Turkish) president criticized him in a most sincere and open way.”

Limitations of Multidimensional Foreign Policy

Turkey’s Darfur policy is precariously positioned because of Turkey’s multidimensional foreign policy and opening towards both Africa and the Middle East since 2002. Ankara has been involved in many issues since the Iraqi war of 2003, not only in its surrounding

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regions (Balkans, Caucasia and the Middle East) but also in regions further afar, such as Africa. However, while Turkey’s influence in these regions has been on the rise, similar outcomes cannot be observed with such clarity in others. This is not because of a lack of interest on Turkey’s part, rather, it has more to do with global politics and the position of the states in those areas. For example, Turkey’s Darfur policy has been influenced by both the position of Western and non-Western countries, specifically the AU and the Arab League. Ankara’s position is situated between the West and the East; however a closer look would reveal Turkey's quiet interest in the conflict as it tried to chart a policy while weighing its options, limitations and margins.

Turkey’s Darfur policy has been strained by international and regional involvement. On the one hand, Ankara’s active involvement in every conflict, initiative and organization in its surrounding regions has tremendously increased its standing, influence and weight in relations with those regions. On the other hand, such an active involvement forces Turkey to be cautious and develop sometimes a rather ambiguous policy line that will not exclude other actors or share-holders in a conflict. What we see here is a so-called “contradiction” or “side-effect” of the multidimensional foreign policy that the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) has carried out since it took office in 2002. Indeed, since 2002 Turkey has clearly diversified its international relations developing economic and political ties with the AU, the Arab League, and the OIC. Turkey now holds a strategic partnership status with the AU and a permanent invitee status with the Arab League. Turkey’s economic and political ties with the Arab world and Africa are such that Ankara cannot take a strong political position toward any conflict in the region without taking into consideration the position of these regional organizations, otherwise it may jeopardize its newly emerging relations.

The Arab League took the position that the situation in Darfur was neither genocide nor ethnic cleansing and accused the US and the West exploiting the situation in Darfur.17 However, as mentioned, it was not this position that brought Turkey closer to the Arab world on the Darfur issue. There were basically two reasons which shaped and led to this virtual cooperation. First, economic and political relations have developed so much that Turkey cannot ignore the Arab world’s policy on Darfur, as the Sudan is an important part of the Arab world. Secondly, because of the current discourse on the war on terrorism and Islam, as discussed earlier, Turkey’s position has moved closer to that of the Muslim world.

As the largest regional organization, the AU remained central to the international response on Darfur. It made a significant appearance from the start and demonstrated a willingness to play an active role, despite limited military capacity and political constraints. Initially, the AU deployed a peacekeeping force in Sudan called the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), but the ability of AMIS to protect civilians and humanitarian

operations was difficult due to its limited capacity, insufficient resources and political constraints. However, it has played an active role in finding a solution for the Darfur crisis through the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on Darfur, chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki. There have been two reasons which shaped Turkey’s understanding and support of the AU activities. First, as it was the case before the Iraqi war, Turkey rejected external involvement in any country. In its foreign policy, Turkey has also frequently emphasized the principle of sovereignty. These principles were directly in line with the position of the AU on Darfur and thus Turkish decision-makers did not hesitate to align themselves with the AU.

Turkey’s diplomatic alignment with the AU is also in line with its growing economic interests in Africa. Turkey is now an emerging new player in Africa, in terms of economic involvement. Its trade with Africa has grown more than four times since 2002, reaching almost $17 billion in 2009. Supporting the argument for claims of “genocide” and external involvement would certainly have an impact on Turkey’s newly developing relations with the continent.

The OIC, a 57-member Islamic organization, has also held the same position on the Darfur issue as other regional organizations such as the AU and the Arab League. In a statement, OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu reiterated that “there was no evidence to support this [genocide] allegation” and urged the Sudanese government “to continue its investigations on the human rights violations in Darfur.” In general, the OIC supported negotiations in Doha and asked for the international community to take concrete steps to support the efforts aimed at resolving the Darfur issue through the Doha process. Considering Turkey’s active involvement in the OIC, its growing socio-economic ties with the Muslim Middle Eastern countries, and the election of a Turkish candidate closer to the ruling JDP circles for the position of secretary-general of the OIC; it is not without reasons that Turkey would try to mobilize the OIC and other organizations on Darfur, while agreeing with them on the way forward at least in principle.

In addition, economic imperatives may have also influenced Turkish policy on Darfur and motivated Ankara to work behind closed doors to urge al Basheer to end the conflict. Sudan has played a role in Turkey’s economic and political opening towards the Arab and African world. As an Arab country, located in Africa, Sudan has been a gateway for Turkey’s entrance into Africa, especially for trade. Therefore, Turkey has traditionally enjoyed a trade link with Sudan in comparison to other African countries. Again, with Turkey’s multidimensional foreign policy, there have been advances in the

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Turkey has also offered its soft-power elements to help ending the sufferings in Darfur while diplomatic endeavors evolve. Turkey’s official development agency, TIKA, has had its office in Khartoum since 2006. It has contributed to a number of projects in many sectors, ranging from agriculture to the health sector. Along with official humanitarian agencies, Kizilay (Turkish Red Crescent) and some other Turkish humanitarian NGOs have significant projects in Sudan as well. One project stands out among others; it is the Cataract project of the Istanbul-based NGO, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH). The IHH initiated the Cataract Campaign in 2007 with the slogan of “if you see they will see too” to help those who lost their vision by hot temperatures, eating habits and climatic conditions in ten African countries. Sudan forms the 40% of the project and takes the central place in the project, and so far more than 15 thousand people have been operated within the project.

Similarly, while Ankara has founded a hospital in Darfur’s capital, Nyala, offering its service to those who need medical care; the Ankara Chamber of Industry is working to establish an industrial zone in Khartoum.

Toward a new “language” and beyond: Passive Quiet Diplomacy?

It is argued above that Turkey neither shared the western perspective on Darfur, nor defended the position of the Arab world. If that’s the case, what is Turkey’s exact position on Darfur? It is possible to argue that, in general, Turkey’s Darfur policy can be seen as an example of “passive quiet diplomacy” in a highly complex international environment in which Turkish foreign policy operates.

Basically the term “quiet diplomacy” describes the congruence of two basic ideas: the overall framework should be diplomacy, rather than sanctions and military actions, while the adjective “quiet” refers to the style of the diplomatic engagement defined as a combination of measures that include behind the scene engagements, secret negotiations, and subtle coaxing. In sum, it is a way of “discussing problems with officials of another country in a calm way.” In the literature, as Graham argues, the term “quiet diplomacy” is used extensively to refer to many types of soft diplomatic initiatives. However, drawing on the existing literature it is possible to describe “quiet diplomacy” by three characteristics.

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The first and foremost characteristic for any initiative to be described as quiet diplomacy is that there must be personal and direct diplomatic contact between heads of states or governments. Only with this type of interaction, can the initiator talk, reason and discuss the issue in order to persuade his/her counterpart or the involved parties in the conflict. This style is also important as it demonstrates the sincerity of the parties involved – providing reassurance to facilitate the resolution of the conflicts at hand. Despite the strong critique against the two visits of Sudanese President Omar al Basheer in 2008 and several other meetings at international forums such as the Arab League summit in Khartoum; they served for the framework of ‘quiet diplomacy.’ Turkish leaders were able to talk directly to the Sudanese head of state and criticize him “in a most sincere and open way.”

This diplomatic style was also intended to create a balanced approach between the EU and the US position and that of the Arab and African countries’ opposing political stances.

The second characteristic of quiet diplomacy is to limit outside interference – either through action or inaction. Although this can trigger a great deal of criticism and disapproval, it reflects the underlying goals of quiet diplomacy, which are persuasion, influence and pressure through a strategy that may seem as inactive but is actually based on the willingness of the parties involved to talk with each other. While this is the backbone of this diplomatic style, it is also reflects a certain weakness. Because it not only attracts criticisms but it also places the state that engages in quiet diplomacy in an awkward position in the eyes of the international community. While the state pursues a very careful dialogue and engagement with the target country, it can appear as being ineffective and far from producing results in the short run.

According to the media, Turkey’s Darfur policy has hardly produced any direct results on the ground so far. That is why, when Turkey hosted al Basheer, it seems to support the claim that Turkey was in fact supporting al Basheer’s position in the conflict. This is reinforced, as Turkey never stated that it was pursuing ‘quiet diplomacy’ in resolving the conflict in Darfur. Nevertheless, Turkish leaders have openly spoken to al Basheer, asking that the conflict and killings cease.

Many saw Turkey’s effort as a waste of time and as awkward diplomatically. Turkey wanted to use the quiet diplomacy as it also fits within the reaches of its diplomatic power. In a political environment where the international community has been divided into two camps around the conflict, Turkey’s goal was to conduct its quiet diplomacy outside the glare of the media while carrying out persuasions behind closed doors. Turkey’s implementation of this ‘passive quite diplomacy’ attracted much criticism and even led to the claim of the existence of “an axis of genocide” between Turkey and Sudan. In this situation, Turkey neither could...

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28. Interview with Ahmet Davutoglu, Newsweek, 28 November 2009.
defend its position by producing a new language nor pave the way for a solution in the immediate future. However, Turkey believes that its apparently sincere efforts to convince the government of Khartoum to resolve the issue peacefully may have contributed to change in al Basheer’s approach to the crisis in Darfur.

The third characteristic of quiet diplomacy is that states prefer their carefully planned constructive engagements in the context of bilateral and multilateral forums, whenever possible. In some cases they act as unassigned appointees of a regional or/and international organization, while in some cases they are recognized officially as mediators, brokers or intermediaries. Turkey’s engagement in Darfur through international organizations only came to the surface during the Doha meetings. Although in earlier periods, Turkey supported the efforts of all international organizations to solve the Darfur conflict, Turkey actively participated in the OIC’s Darfur Donors Conference held in Cairo on March 21, 2010, by co-chairing with Egypt and promised to donate 60-75 millions to projects of water, education and agriculture until 2015.33

Quiet diplomacy occurs usually behind closed doors and tries to keep initiatives out of the light of media coverage to prevent sensationalism, outside involvement and excessive or unrealistic optimism. Nevertheless, states engaging in such diplomacy prefer to feed the media in small doses, in order to gain a certain degree of international support, credibility and even some sort of benefit for its foreign policy. Turkey failed, at the beginning of the process, to sufficiently inform the media, or at least to explain its position and intentions. This oversight in communicating even minimally with the media led to the misinterpretation of Turkey’s involvement in the Darfur conflict. If Turkey had had an effective approach towards the media, it would have been less criticized for its stance on the crisis in Darfur. Instead, the outcome may have been a constructive public discussion on Turkey’s Darfur policy.

The policy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ has been popularized with the South African experience with Zimbabwe. A close examination of this case reveals that this type of diplomacy has the benefit of keeping channels open for communication between the Mugabe regime and the outside world.34 However, the main criticism was that this style of diplomacy is too soft and does not produce a substantial outcome nor does it bring about a quick solution to a conflict, and the situation may even deteriorate. The result is the same with Turkey’s Darfur policy: more criticism and no quick solution. Unlike the South African case, there has been no sign that the international community appreciated that Turkey kept channels of communication open with the Sudanese head of state in the case of Darfur. Obviously, this maybe because Turkey never officially announced that it would follow such a policy, nor did the outside world witness what Turkey was attempting to accomplish. That is why we have been describing Turkey’s engagement as a ‘passive quiet diplomacy’. The term passive, however, is not intended to mean ineffective, rather it means that Turkey has not stated it to be its official policy.

Concluding Remarks

It is clear that Turkey's Darfur policy is one of the most criticized policies among students of Turkish foreign policy. Ironically, it also represents one of the less researched and debated issue among experts. This brief argues that Turkey has a Darfur policy that requires an in-depth analysis because it is an example of a policy position that was not formally presented to the outside world and the media. We argued that Turkey has not aligned itself with the western position of criticizing the Sudanese government and its leader al Basheer by describing the conflict in Darfur as ‘genocide.’ However, we have also argued that Turkey has not ignored the developments and human tragedy that occurred in its official dealings with the Sudan. Ankara's policy on Darfur is basically a strategy of ‘passive quiet diplomacy’ and constructive engagement, supported by its developing economic and political ties with the Sudan. This policy seems to be in contradiction with the positions taken by Washington and Brussels, but have much in common with the positions of the Arab world, African nations and Muslim states in general. However, Turkey's policy targets peace and stability in Sudan in the long-term, which is also the U.S. and the EU's desired outcome.

With the 21st century, many states seem to attach greater value to softer foreign policy strategies and quieter ways of solving conflicts. Indeed, Turkey had demonstrated the efficacy of such a policy in its involvement in negotiations between Israel and Syria, Serbia and Bosnia and in other regional conflicts. However, Turkey was not able to properly explain its intention to create, albeit in a passive way, a new language on Darfur in order to go beyond the “for and against” dilemma of the role al Basheer played in the Darfur crisis and the essence of the conflict. The international discourse on the “war on terror” and the limitations of developing a multidimensional foreign policy have also shaped Turkey’s ‘passive’ stance on Darfur, leaving it to the international organizations. However, despite good intentions, Turkey was also not able to produce a convincing alternative to the situation, thus attracting more criticism at home and abroad. Nevertheless, Turkey's Darfur policy is an example of ‘passive quiet diplomacy’ in a highly complex international environment.
This study analyses the underlying elements of the Muslim world’s reaction toward the Darfur crisis by critically evaluating Turkey’s involvement. Turkey is important because it has been cited as a rising star of 21st century in the Muslim world not only for its growing economic potential and deepening democratic credentials, but also with its recent pro-active diplomatic initiatives in conflict areas such as in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Turkey’s Darfur policy has been one of its most criticized in recent times. Although the criticisms leveled against this policy have some merit, they do not provide much insight into the motivations behind Turkey’s approach to Darfur. Thus, Ankara’s distinctive approach to Darfur and Khartoum requires a thorough, in-depth analysis within the context of Turkey’s changing role in regional and global affairs. It is argued that on the Darfur issue, Turkish policy has been characterized by convergence and distinction from the official position of the Muslim-Arab world.

We argue that the Turkish approach to Darfur has been mainly shaped by three elements: the international environment/discourse on “the war on terror” since 2002; Turkey’s recently deepening political and economic engagement with the Arab world and Africa; and Ankara’s search for a new political “language” on Darfur, a middle ground between the West’s claims of “genocide” and defending al Basheer. In sum, Turkey’s Darfur policy can be described as an example of “passive quiet diplomacy” in a highly complex international environment.

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