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***From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring***

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**To cite this article:** Özdamar, Özgür, B. Toygar Halistoprak and İ. Erkam Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Volume 11, No. 42 (Summer 2014), p. 93-113.

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# From *Good Neighbor* to *Model*: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring

Özgür ÖZDAMAR, B. Toygar HALİSTOPRAK and İ. Erkam SULA\*

## ABSTRACT

The recent Arab uprisings have forced many actors to reconsider their positions regarding Middle Eastern politics. Role theory provides a viable tool to explain changes in actors' foreign policy behaviors, presuming that states' foreign policies are shaped by the ruling elites' foreign policy role conceptions. This article analyzes Turkish foreign policy roles with regard to the Middle East and North Africa before and since the Arab uprisings that began in December 2010. We argue that these uprisings caused Turkey to change its emphasis from roles built on soft power instruments to harder roles requiring material capabilities. We also discuss the implications of this change with reference to theories of international politics.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, Turkish Foreign Policy, Role Theory, Foreign Policy Analysis.

## *İyi Komşu'dan Model Ülke'ye: Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu'da Arap Baharı Sonrasında Değişen Roller*

## ÖZET

Son dönemde yaşanan Arap ayaklanmaları bölgenin birçok aktörünü Ortadoğu politikalarını gözden geçirmeye zorlamıştır. Devletlerin dış politikalarının yönetici elitlerin dış politika rol tasavvurları tarafından şekillendirildiği varsayımına dayanan rol kuramı, aktörlerin dış politika davranışlarındaki değişimleri açıklamak için uygun bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Bu makale, 2010'da başlayan Arap ayaklanmalarının öncesi ve sonrasında, Ortadoğu ve Kuzey Afrika bölgelerinde kullanılan Türk dış politikası rollerinin analizini yapmaktadır. Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin Arap ayaklanmaları sonrasında bölgede yumuşak güç üzerine kurulu rollere olan vurgusunu değiştirip, materyal kapasite gerektiren daha sert rolleri ön plana çıkardığını iddia etmektedir. Çalışmanın son bölümünde uluslararası politika kuramları üzerinden bu değişimin ne anlama geldiği tartışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Arap Baharı, Türk Dış Politikası, Rol Kuramı, Dış Politika Analizi.

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## Introduction

Since December 2010, the Middle East has undergone a historic process of transformation. The so-called Arab Spring has shown that the region's authoritarian regimes have begun to lose legitimacy. Although these movements began with hope for more democratization in the region, they destabilized the region to a great extent. On the one hand, the process still contains some "spring" because it has opened a door to change and transformation. On the other hand, changing old regimes has created an insecure environment because of the unpredictability and chaos.<sup>1</sup>

The Uprisings have forced many actors to reconsider their positions regarding Middle Eastern politics. Some continue to follow existing policies, while others have produced new foreign policy orientations based on the newly appearing status quo. As a result, actors' changing orientations have begun to constitute the agenda of scholarly debates aiming to explain the situation in the Middle East.

Turkey is one of the key countries affected by the Arab Uprisings. Until these events, Turkey enjoyed privileged relations and powerful economic linkages with these Middle East regimes via cross-border trade, foreign investment and foreign aid, as well as through social and cultural apparatus such as Turkish soap operas, education and religion.<sup>2</sup> While some of these relationships have changed for the worse, the uprisings have increased Turkey's sphere of influence overall as it tries to improve its relations with the governments and the people of the region.

Role theory provides a viable tool to explain changes in actors' foreign policy behaviors. The theory presumes that states' foreign policies are shaped in accordance with their foreign policy role conceptions, which are framed in an environment influenced by different elements of domestic and international politics. This assumption does not reject the existence of systemic variables constraining actors,<sup>3</sup> their incentives to pursue absolute gains,<sup>4</sup> or identity-based explanations for actors' foreign policy behavior.<sup>5</sup> How-

1 E. Fuat Keyman, "Rethinking Turkish Foreign Policy", *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 27 May 2013, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3758/rethinking-turkish-foreign-policy.html>, (Accessed on 28 May 2013).

2 Henri J. Barkey, "Turkish Foreign Policy and the Middle East", *Ceri Strategy Papers*, 06 June 2011, No.10, p.12. Also see, Keyman, "Rethinking"; Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Role in the Arab Spring", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 16 June 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-role-in-the-arab-spring.aspx?pageID=449&nID=23296&NewsCatID=424> (Accessed on 28 May 2013); İbrahim Kalın, "Turkey and the Middle East", *Aljazeera*, 25 May 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/05/201152592939180898.html>, (Accessed on 28 May 2013); Alper Y. Dede, "The Arab Uprisings: Debating the 'Turkish Model'", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2011, p.23-32; Bruce Mabley, "The Arab Aggiornamento in Syria: Turkey's Foreign Policy Metaphors", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.4, 2012, p.89-95.

3 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979.

4 Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.

5 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

ever, through a synthesis of material and ideational sources of foreign policy, role theory provides researchers with an analytical unit that is capable of explaining different foreign policy preferences.

This research analyzes Turkish foreign policy roles through a framework informed by role theory. It is designed to explore two main questions: (1) How does the Arab Uprisings affect Turkey's foreign policy role conceptions about the Middle East? and (2) What do Turkey's changing roles towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) subsystem imply for the international system and systemic international relations (IR) theories?

## **Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis**

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) as a sub-discipline of international relations has been developing over the last 50 years, filling the gap between theory, which constitutes the discipline's core, and practice. With an actor-specific emphasis,<sup>6</sup> FPA focuses on the process in which foreign policy decisions are made and the actors taking part in it, and aims to provide theoretical frameworks that can also be used as practical tools in the analysis, rather than making generalized claims about international politics.

Rosenau's framework of "pre-theories"<sup>7</sup> is one of the founding pieces of the literature. He develops eight different state typologies and determines the variables influential in the foreign policies of each type. For instance, in the United States, representing Rosenau's "open-large-developed" type, the order of the variables influencing foreign policy decision making are role, society, government, systemic variables and the leader. According to this analysis, national roles appear to be the main determinant of foreign policy in open-developed countries, which is a dimension overlooked by so-called 'grand IR theories' (such as realism or liberalism). Rosenau frames the concept of role as an analytical unit that competes with the individual, national and systemic variables emphasized by IR theories.<sup>8</sup>

Holsti further specifies state actors' role orientations in world politics,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that theorists should look beyond the existing rough classifications of foreign policy actors, that is, "non-aligned", "bloc leaders", "balancers" and "satellites".<sup>10</sup> Within this context, national role conceptions, which appear as the summation of a country's general foreign policy orientation and its responses to international political incidents, constitute

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6 Valerie Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No.1, 2005, p.1-30.

7 James Rosenau, "Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy", R. Barry Farrell (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative International Politics*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966, p.115-169.

8 James Rosenau, "A Pre-Theory Revisited: World Politics in an Era of Cascading Interdependence", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.28, No.3, 1984, p.245-305.

9 K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.14, No.3, 1970, p.233-309.

10 *Ibid.* p.233.

the major determinant of foreign policy behavior. Holsti conducts a content analysis of speeches from every country's leaders from January 1965 to December 1967, and derives 17 foreign policy roles. He argues that all state actors in international politics can be examined through the lens of these roles, and that specifying them allows political scientists to predict a specific actor's future foreign policy.

In Holsti's framework, the concept of role is taken as a leader's self-manifestation. Walker takes this concept further, arguing that in addition to the interactionist elements, the term role is built on cognitive responses.<sup>11</sup> According to this conception, a role is not only a self-attribution, but also comprises a set of behaviors developed as cognitive responses and actions to the outer environment's expectations. Thies maintains that broadening the term makes role theory a more viable tool for FPA, which focuses on a social sphere in which sets of actors act interdependently.<sup>12</sup> As a result, although the general tendency in the literature is to derive role conceptions from foreign policy elites' speeches, analyzing foreign policy behavior is also a legitimate way of extracting roles. Role theory provides a framework to analyze states as foreign policy actors, and ones who not only play a single role but possibly occupy a position in which a set of different roles intersects.

Holsti underlines that states may indeed play more than one role,<sup>13</sup> which results in "inter-role conflict".<sup>14</sup> An actor playing more than one role may experience tension between the roles. For instance, Barnett argues that the origins of conflict in the Middle East before 1967 lie in the conflict between the roles of those emphasizing sovereignty and those emphasizing pan-Arabism.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Tewes<sup>16</sup> focuses on the conflict in German foreign policy about playing a role regarding deepening EU integration and a role regarding EU enlargement. When roles conflict, the actor must choose between them, which may change the actor's conception of a specific role and how it affects foreign policy behavior.<sup>17</sup>

Role theory also serves the major aim of FPA, which is to fill the gap between theory and practice.<sup>18</sup> Walker asserts that role theory is capable of reducing the uncertainty in grand theories through its emphasis on role location. He maintains that role theory

11 Stephen Walker, "Role Theory and Origins of Foreign Policy", Charles F. Hermann, Charles Kegley, James Rosenau (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, London, Harper Collins, 1987, p.269-284.

12 Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy", *International Studies Association Compendium Project, Foreign Policy Analysis Section*, 2009.

13 Holsti, "National Role Conceptions", p.276.

14 Michael Barnett, "Institutions, Roles and Disorder, The Case of the Arab States System", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.3, 1993, p.271-296.

15 Ibid.

16 Henning Tewes, "Between Deepening and Widening: Role Conflict in Germany's Enlargement Policy", *West European Politics*, Vol.21, No.2, 1998, p.117-133. Emphasized in Thies, "Role Theory", 2009.

17 Barnett, "Institutions, Roles and Disorder", p.288.

18 Stephen G. Walker, "Binary Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis", *ISA*, New Orleans, February, 2010; Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis".

is framed as social enough to consider actors' social interaction within complex adaptive systems, which develops viable and systematic explanations for certain courses of foreign policy behavior under certain conditions. Similarly, Thies and Breuning argue that both IR theory and FPA focus on the "agent-structure debate", although from slightly different perspectives.<sup>19</sup> Foreign policy analysis, utilizing the social psychology based role theory, has adopted a "cognitive approach" to roles, and IR, utilizing sociology-inspired constructivist analysis, has generally adopted a "structural approach". The authors suggest that the individual-oriented analytical tradition of FPA could be combined with the structure-oriented tradition of IR, and that role theory has the potential to be the merging point.<sup>20</sup>

The literature has been utilizing role theory's practicality and is abundant in studies focusing on specific country analyses. For instance, Baehr argues that the Netherlands' foreign policy is characterized by its desire to appear as the centre of international law.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, Granatstein focuses on Canadian national self-image, built on the mentality of "doing some good" in world politics; Canada initiated the Ottawa Convention in 1996 to ban land mines in accordance with that role.<sup>22</sup> Hedetoft relates Denmark's somewhat isolationist foreign policy with the Danes' self-image of "international insignificance".<sup>23</sup> He argues that the Danes maintain distance between internationalist and integrationist ideas because their national identity is based on the sovereignty of their small, neutral and internationally "insignificant" country. Breuning juxtaposes the UK's, Belgium's and the Netherlands' foreign policy rhetoric on foreign aid.<sup>24</sup> She identifies that the Netherlands perceives its role as an activist state and consistently spends the most on foreign aid of the three countries, while the UK spends the least, congruent with its perceived power-broker role. Chafetz, Abramson and Grillot analyze Ukraine's and Belarus' policies on the nuclear non-proliferation regime through role theory.<sup>25</sup> They detect considerable differentiation between the roles referred to by the two countries' officials. While Ukrainian leaders make references to "leader", "global system leader", "regional protector" and "anti-imperialist"

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19 Cameron G. Thies and Marijke Breuning, "Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No.8, 2012, p.1-4.

20 There are several other pieces with similar arguments. For more information, see the Special Issue of *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol.8, No.1, 2012; Stephen G. Walker, "Binary Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis", *ISA*, New Orleans, February, 2010; Lisbeth Aggestam, "Role Conceptions and the Politics of Identity in Foreign Policy", *ARENA Working Papers Series*, 1999.

21 Peter R. Baehr, "Trials and Errors: The Netherlands and Human Rights", David P. Forythe (ed.), *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy*, Tokyo, New York, Paris, United Nations University Press, 2000, p.49-86.

22 J.L. Granatstein, "Peacekeeping: Did Canada Make a Difference? And What Difference Did Canada Make?", John English and Norman Hillmer (eds.), in *Towards a New World: Readings in the History of Canadian Foreign Policy*, Toronto, Lester, 1992.

23 Ulf Hedetoft, "National Identity and Mentalities of War in Three EC Countries", *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.30, No.3, 1993, p.281-300.

24 Marijke Breuning, "Words and Deeds: Foreign Assistance Rhetoric and Policy Behavior in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.39, No.2, 1995, p.235-254.

25 Glenn Chafetz *et al.*, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1996, p.727-757.



roles, Belarusian leaders emphasize mediator-integrator and example roles. The analysis shows that both countries shape their foreign policies on the non-proliferation regime in accordance with the role that they reference most often. The literature is abundant in other such examples.<sup>26</sup>

Role theory's contribution can be summarized with reference to four points. First, it provides a theoretical framework that is also viable for specific policy analysis. Second, it helps understand the multiple roles played by a specific actor. Third, by making reference to role conflict, the theory can juxtapose the interplay between different roles and capture the dynamics of change. Finally, the concept of role and the theoretical framework are appropriate for analyzing foreign policy's social context.

## Roles in the Context of Turkish Foreign Policy

Role theory analyzes the cultural/ideational, geostrategic, political and economic determinants of a country's foreign policy, through eliciting state elites' cognitive filters and perceptions. Many studies analyze Turkish foreign policy with reference to state identity, culture, geographic location, economic material factors and strategic/military considerations, as well as state elites' political preferences, but only a limited number of these studies implicitly or explicitly refer to role theory.<sup>27</sup> It is still possible, however, to observe some references to Turkish foreign policy role conceptions, especially in studies that focus on

26 For more, see Daniel Bar-Tal and Dikla Antebi, "Beliefs about Negative Intentions of the World: A Study of Israeli Siege Mentality", *Political Psychology*, Vol.13, No.4, 1992, p.633-645; Matthew S. Hirshberg, "The Self-Perpetuating National Self-Image: Cognitive Biases in Perceptions of International Interventions", *Political Psychology*, Vol.14, No.1, 1993, p.77-98; Glenn Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.111, No.4, 1996-1997, p.661-688; Gauvav Ghose and Patrick James, "Third-Party Intervention in Ethno-Religious Conflict: Role Theory, Pakistan and War in Kashmir, 1965", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.17, No.3, 2005, p.427-445; Amy L. Catalinac, "Identity Theory and Foreign Policy: Explaining Japan's Responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. War in Iraq", *Politics & Policy*, Vol.35, No.1, 2007, p.58-100; Bengtsson Rikard and Ole Elgström, "Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No.8, 2012, p.93-108.

27 For studies referring to role theory and Turkish foreign policy role conceptions, see, for instance, Bülent Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey's Position*, Frank Cass, London, 2002; Bülent Aras and Aylin Görener, "National role conceptions and foreign policy orientation: the ideational bases of the Justice and Development Party's foreign policy activism in the Middle East", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010, p.73-93; Pınar Tank, "Dressing for the Occasion: Reconstructing Turkey's Identity?", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2006, p.463-478; Lerna K. Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2009, p.531-549; Kemal Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the 'Trading State'", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, p.29-57; Vit Benes, "Russia's and Turkey's attitudes towards the EU in the light of Role Theory", paper presented at the seventh Pan-European International Relations Conference: International Responses to the Financial Crisis. Stockholm, Sweden. September 9-11, 2010; Lerna Yanık, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism': Discourses of liminality and hybridity in post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy", *Political Geography*, No. 30, 2011, p.80-89.

Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. The most widely used role conceptions in these studies include: Turkey as a “bridge between continents” (Europe and Asia), as a “bridge between civilizations” (Muslim and Christian),<sup>28</sup> as a “trading state” (which seeks to decrease its trade dependence on Europe and increase its economic relations with the Middle East and Africa),<sup>29</sup> and as a “liberal/democratic model” for the Muslim world.<sup>30</sup>

For example, Aras argues that the end of the Cold War and the emergent power vacuum in Central Asia and the Caucasus had crucial effects on Turkish foreign policy. To utilize the opportunities that emerged with this situation, Aras maintains that Turkey attempted to utilize its bridge role to establish political and economic ties, as well as to find a solution to its ethnic conflicts.<sup>31</sup> Yanık also provides a detailed analysis of the “bridge” role, arguing that the metaphor has been utilized by Turkish elites as a discursive strategy since the 1990s and that foreign policy officials have embraced it to justify their goals and to re-construct Turkey’s identity and international role into a model for the East regarding its secular political system and dynamic economy.<sup>32</sup> Yanık points out, however, that since 9/11 and the establishment of the AKP government, the use of the bridge metaphor has changed to incorporate religion, transforming its meaning from “bridging continents” into “bridging civilizations”.<sup>33</sup>

In a more recent article, Yanık analyzes the discursive practices of Turkish politics that serve to construct an “exceptionalist” understanding of Turkey’s position in international politics.<sup>34</sup> Yanık argues that Turkey has been portrayed as being exceptional because it is part of both East and West. This role provides Turkey the opportunity to be a mediator/peacemaker in world politics, and is fed by Turkey’s cosmopolitan and hybrid character inherited from its Ottoman history. Yanık also stresses that while serving the aims of the contemporary foreign policy elites, such a neo-Ottomanist portrayal has the potential to clash with the traditional foreign policy vision based on *Kemalism* and its emphasis on purity rather than cosmopolitanism.<sup>35</sup>

Such traditional understanding is also emphasized by Tank, in her analysis of contemporary Turkish foreign policy.<sup>36</sup> She argues that Kemal Atatürk established the Republic of Turkey in 1923 with a determination for it to become part of Western civilization, and any transformation necessary to achieve this aim was to be adopted. In line with that goal the Turkish elite developed a Western identity for Turkey and denied its

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28 See Aras, “The New Geopolitics”; Aras and Görener, “National Role Conceptions”. For a different interpretation of the bridge role, see Yanık, “The Metamorphosis of Metaphors” and Yanık, “Constructing Turkish ‘Exceptionalism’”.

29 Kemal Kirişçi, “Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy”.

30 Aras, “The New Geopolitics”; Tank, “Dressing for the Occasion”.

31 Aras, “The New Geopolitics”.

32 Yanık, “The Metamorphosis of Metaphors”.

33 Ibid. p.533.

34 Yanık, “Constructing Turkish Exceptionalism”.

35 Ibid.

36 Tank, “Dressing for the Occasion”.



Muslim heritage. However, after the 9/11 attacks, that heritage ceased to be an obstacle and became instead a marketable attribute, together with the country's democratic structure; Turkey became a potential role model for countries in the region and an important ally for Western countries, especially the US. The author stresses that AKP leaders have attempted to change Turkey's identity from a "Western identity" towards a "progressive, democratic, Muslim" identity.<sup>37</sup>

Kirişçi provides an alternative role perspective on Turkish foreign policy, referring to it as a "trading state".<sup>38</sup> He argues that powerful domestic business circles such as TUSİAD, MUSİAD and TOBB have been quite influential in Turkey's foreign policy in the AKP era, and that the AKP's active engagement in its surrounding regions is directed by the economic considerations of the Turkish elite.<sup>39</sup>

Aras and Görener have developed a comprehensive theoretical role approach to Turkish foreign policy, applying Holsti's method.<sup>40</sup> From an analysis of AKP leaders' speeches they identify seven roles in recent Turkish foreign policy: "regional leader", "regional protector", "regional subsystem collaborator", "global subsystem collaborator", "example" and "bridge".<sup>41</sup> The authors emphasize that leaders have role conceptions that direct their foreign policy decisions towards specific policy areas, and these conceptions have thus directed their active engagement with the Middle East.

## The AKP's Role Conceptions Regarding the Middle East and Turkey's Change in Roles

### *Historical Context*

Middle Eastern politics appeared on the AKP's foreign policy agenda through a crisis in the fourth month of its tenure. The discussion on whether Turkey would join the coalition against Iraq occupied the country's political agenda for some time. With Parliament rejecting a government motion on March 1, 2003 to include Turkey in the coalition and open Turkish territories to US forces, Turkey effectively refused to become directly involved in the Iraq War.<sup>42</sup> Morally, the decision was a difficult one for the AKP, who represent a conservative proportion of the population, and joining the war would make it "vulnerable to its political constituency".<sup>43</sup> However the AKP leadership which defended more invol-

37 Ibid., p.464.

38 Kemal Kirişçi, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy".

39 Ibid.

40 Aras and Görener, "National role conceptions and foreign policy".

41 Aras and Görener, "National role conceptions and foreign policy", p.81.

42 Zeynep Taydaş and Özgür Özdamar, "A Divided Government, an Ideological Parliament, and an Insecure Leader: Turkey's Indecision about Joining the Iraq War", *Social Science Quarterly*, No.94, 2013, p.217–241.

43 Nikolaos Raptopoulos, "Rediscovering its Arab Neighbours? The AKP Imprint on Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East", *Les Cahiers du RMES*, 2004, p.2.

vement argued that Turkey should follow an active foreign policy in the Middle East and prevent possible separation of Kurdish region from Iraq following the operation.

We suggest Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East was shaped in accordance with these two points in the subsequent years. Turkey followed an active foreign policy in the region, with a strong emphasis on soft power.<sup>44</sup> In accordance with this vision, the zero-problems-with-neighbors policy gained prominence. Further rapprochement with Syria can be noted as one outcome of this policy. President Sezer's visit to Syria in 2005,<sup>45</sup> a joint summit of the countries' councils of ministers in 2009<sup>46</sup> and increasing trade relations were all signs of this change.<sup>47</sup> Turkey has experienced a similar rapprochement with Iran<sup>48</sup> despite Iran's serious problems with the US and the EU regarding its nuclear program.

Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel, however, also constitute a noteworthy characteristic of this period. The process started with the so-called "One Minute" crisis in 2009 (where PM Erdoğan criticized Israel's 23-day military campaign against Gaza), continued with more visits of Hamas leaders to Ankara and the *Mavi Marmara* affair in May 2010 (where nine Turkish citizens were killed by Israel Defense Forces followed by the withdrawal of the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv). These events not only hurt relations with Israel, but also symbolized Turkey's rapprochement with the Arab-Muslim world of the Middle East, a stance that traditional Turkish foreign policy refrained usually. These policies also sent a message to Turkey's domestic constituency that Turkey is playing 'protector of the oppressed' role in the region.

Another important theme of this period has been the economic dimension. Middle Eastern politics is not only a geopolitical calculation but also has been framed as an area of opportunity for Turkish business elite. The boost in Turkey's trade relations with Middle Eastern neighbors, Gulf countries and North Africa has provided the AKP, which "presented no cogent economic strategy"<sup>49</sup> towards the region in the early years of its rule, justification to further intensify its focus on the Middle East.

Turkish engagement with the region has also been shaped around the discussion of being a role model or example. This debate is not new; it rises and falls depending on

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44 Meliha B. Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.10, No.2, 2008, p.41-54.

45 Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür, "From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations." *Security Dialogue*, Vol.37, No.2, 2006, p.229-248; *Hürriyet*, "Onurlu Cumhurbaşkanı Hoşgeldiniz", *Hürriyet*, April 13, 2004 <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=311456> (Accessed on 4 June 2013).

46 Ministry of Interior, Public Information Office, *Press Release*, NO: 2009/107: [http://www.icisleri.gov.tr/default.icisleri\\_2.aspx?id=4017](http://www.icisleri.gov.tr/default.icisleri_2.aspx?id=4017) (Accessed on 4 June 2013).

47 Carolyn C. James and Özgür Özdamar, "Modeling Foreign Policy and Ethnic Conflict: Turkey's Policies towards Syria", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol.5, Issue 1, 2009, p.475-494.

48 Nihat Ali Özcan and Özgür Özdamar, "Uneasy Neighbors: Turkish-Iranian Relations since the 1979 Islamic Revolution", *Middle East Policy*, Vol.17, No.3, Fall 2010, p.101-117.

49 Marcie J. Patton, "The Economic Policies of Turkey's AKP Government: Rabbits from a Hat?", *Middle Eastern Journal*, Vol.60, No. 3, 2006. p.513-536.

the conjuncture, and this discourse peaked after the 9/11 attacks. Although the example role has not been officially proclaimed by Turkish political elites, it is nonetheless part of Turkey's soft power dynamics in the region.<sup>50</sup> Turkish foreign policy in this period can thus be summarized with reference to the abovementioned three points: an active foreign policy, a strong emphasis on economic relations and increasing influence in MENA through exercising soft power.

As articulated in the literature review section, role theory assumes that states' foreign policy behaviors are shaped by their role conceptions, evident from the speeches of foreign policy elites. In this research, we use three methods to identify role conceptions in Turkish foreign policy regarding the MENA region. First we focus on foreign policy speeches of Abdullah Gül (Minister of Foreign Affairs 2003-2007), Ahmet Davutoğlu (Minister of Foreign Affairs 2009-present) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Prime Minister since 2003). Second, we utilize Holsti's<sup>51</sup> role definitions and sought to match the role statements with those definitions. Third, roles specific to Turkish foreign policy and not stated in Holsti's work are also included in this analysis.<sup>52</sup>

### *Role Conceptions*<sup>53</sup>

This section focuses on roles referred to from 2002 to 2011. We identify 11 Turkish foreign policy role conceptions regarding the Middle East during this period. Our observations show that six roles came into prominence in the pre-Arab-uprisings AKP period: "mediator", "defender of regional peace and stability", "regional subsystem collaborator", "good neighbor", "bridge across civilizations" and "trading state". Although these roles include different elements of foreign policy, one can argue that they all are built on soft power instruments. With the breakout of the turmoil in the region, we observe an obvious decline in some of these roles; especially "mediator", "defender of regional peace and security", "regional subsystem collaborator" and "good neighbor". More emphasis is placed on roles such as "central/pivotal country", "active independent country", "developer" (i.e., assisting developing countries), "protector of the oppressed" and "model/example country". Different from pre-Arab uprisings period, these new roles do not directly emphasize soft power instruments and they require larger material capabilities. The "example" role may seem built on soft power, but our observations suggest that references to this role rise in parallel with roles that require material capabilities that claims leadership and capacity to influence course of

50 Meliha B. Altunışık, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.1&2, 2005, p.45-63.

51 Holsti, "National Role Conceptions".

52 For the purposes of this research, we focus only on roles relating to the MENA region.

53 The roles presented in this section are defined within the scope of the above mentioned project supported by TÜBİTAK and were also used by Özdamar in a paper presented at the 2013 conference of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, April 3-6. These roles were found by making an extensive survey of the literature and three foreign policy executive's relevant speeches (Gül, Erdoğan and Davutoğlu).

events in the region. The mediator' role is based on Holsti's "mediator-integrator" role conception, referring to leaders' "perceptions of a continuing task to help adversaries reconcile their differences".<sup>54</sup> In our analysis, references to a responsibility to mediate differences between countries are accepted as indicators of this role. The 'defender of regional peace and stability' role refers to a country that assumes a special responsibility to defend such in the region. Holsti<sup>55</sup> defines this role conception as "seem[ing] to indicate a universal commitment to defend against any aggression or threat to peace, no matter what the locale".<sup>56</sup> We encounter several references to this role in Turkish leaders' speeches, such as the country being an "island of stability" in the middle of a conflict-ridden geography, and we count these as indicators of this role for our research. For example, Abdullah Gül –then Minister of Foreign Affairs– in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2004 says, "Turkey is determined to deploy every effort aimed at strengthening peace and stability in its immediate region and beyond."<sup>57</sup>

"Regional subsystem collaborator" refers to a state's conception of a role to build regional systems of cooperation. Holsti notes that this role refers to "far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities, or to cross-cutting subsystems..."<sup>58</sup> Leaders' speeches that refer to Turkey's attempts to initiate and/or take active part in regional institutions and cooperation efforts are taken as indicators of this role,<sup>59</sup> for example, references to Turkey promoting regional cooperative institutions and regional governance initiatives such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

The "good neighbor" role conception is frequently used in AKP leaders' speeches, and refers to Turkey's incentive to enjoy peaceful bilateral relationships with its neighbors. Speeches that refer to solving existing conflicts with neighboring countries are taken as indicators of this role, as are references to the zero-problems-with-neighbors policy. The "bridge across civilizations" role differs from conventional bridge utterances. Rather than emphasizing Turkey's geostrategic location of the country, it attributes ideational responsibilities between Muslim and Christian civilizations. References to the civilizational dialogue or to Turkey becoming the voice of the Muslim world in the West are taken as indicators of this role.<sup>60</sup>

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54 Holsti, "National Role Conceptions", p.265.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid. p.272.

57 Abdullah Gül, *Horizons of Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Century*, Ankara, Dışişleri Bakanlığı Yay., 2007, p.104.

58 Holsti, "National Role Conceptions", p.266.

59 Aras and Görener also utilize this role, and define it as follows: The "AKP's leadership envisions an important role for Turkey in constructing a stable and cooperative regional security environment in the Middle East". See Aras and Görener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy".

60 Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision".

Kirişçi frames the “trading state” role conception via economic considerations, arguing that although economics have been an important factor in determining Turkish foreign policy since the Özal era, they have received inadequate attention.<sup>61</sup> We agree, and posit that this role refers to leaders’ conceptions that foreign policy is mainly motivated by economic considerations, particularly with an aim to diversify trade relationships. References regarding the need to decrease Turkey’s trade dependence to only one region (mainly Europe) and establish new economic relations with regions such as Africa and the Middle East are indicators of this role.

A major impact of the Arab uprisings has been a decline in these abovementioned roles, which we argue to be built on soft power instruments. Instead we observe an increase in roles requiring harder power or material capabilities. Since 2011, we observe both Davutoğlu and Erdoğan make references to the “central country” and “pivotal country” roles. This role conception assumes a “globally” central status and a geographical and ideational condition that views Turkey as the hub of different regions, cultures, alliances and economic relations. Utterances referring to Turkey’s central ideational and material qualities are indicators of this role. For instance, Davutoğlu notes that Turkey’s inclusion in Middle Eastern affairs is not exclusionary to the country’s relations with Europe or the US; Turkey can engage with all regions.<sup>62</sup>

The “active independent” role refers to a country that seeks more than mere self-determination, actively engaging in cooperative efforts, trade relationships and diplomatic relationships to bolster its independence. Holsti defines this role as “emphasiz[ing] at once independence, self-determination, possible mediation functions, and active programs to extend diplomatic and commercial relations to diverse areas of the world”.<sup>63</sup>

The “example/model country” role is taken from Holsti’s<sup>64</sup> “example” role, which “emphasizes the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies”.<sup>65</sup> Applying this role to the Turkish context, we note that Turkey is generally identified as a progressive, democratic and secular country with a Muslim majority. With such characteristics, Turkey is seen by some as an example or model for other Muslim countries, especially in the region.<sup>66</sup> References to this function are taken as indicators of the “model country” role.

Erdoğan and Davutoğlu have consistently framed Turkey as a “protector of the oppressed”, especially since the beginning of Arab uprisings. This role mainly refers to a mission that Turkey support people who live under oppressive governments. Witnessing the harsh protest crackdowns, Turkish government has increasingly emphasized protestors’

61 Kirişçi, “The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy”.

62 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, İstanbul, Küre Yay, 2010, p.551-564.

63 Holsti, “National Role Conceptions”, p.262.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid. p.267.

66 Tank, “Dressing for the Occasion”, 2006.

security and suggest that regional integration is not possible without achieving human security and political stability. In the post-uprisings period, references to Turkey promoting the rights of the Syrian people instead of supporting its oppressive regime are taken as a direct reference to this role. Similarly, the emphasis of Turkey backing the people of Gaza underlines its desire to protect the people affected by Israel's blockade.

We take the “developer role” from Holsti: “This national role conception indicates a special duty or obligation to assist underdeveloped countries”.<sup>67</sup> A country that sees itself as a developer brings development projects to several regions or countries. Several Turkish initiatives in the developing regions of the world and references provide evidence for this role's use by the AKP governments. The next section discusses the change in Turkish foreign policy roles since the AKP has been in power and the impact of the Arab uprisings on this change.

### ***The Impact of the Arab Uprisings on Turkish Foreign Policy Role Conceptions***

The AKP's foreign policy role conceptions have not remained constant throughout its decade in power. The first years of AKP rule began with a pro-active foreign policy that emphasized Turkey's EU membership perspective while focusing on its role as a “bridge between civilizations”. Indeed, Turkey's regional and zero-problems-with-neighbors policies were stressed as an asset in its bid for EU membership. Beginning from 2009, debate on Turkey's foreign policy focused on Turkey's alleged axis shift in and the “Middle Easternization” of Turkish foreign policy. While AKP leaders insist that Turkey's EU membership perspective has not changed, they have also actively stressed its “central/pivotal country” role, especially apparent from its leadership aspirations in MENA.

We observe Turkey's foreign policy towards the region and the roles Turkey attributes to itself have changed from soft roles to harder since the Arab uprisings. In the following pages we first present the roles less emphasized since 2011 then discuss which new roles have been introduced into Turkey's foreign policy agenda.

“Mediator” was one of the most widely expressed roles in the first years of AKP foreign policy. Turkey pursued this role regarding the Palestinian issue and in Syrian-Israeli relations until 2009, when problems such as the Arab-Israeli conflict hurt mediation efforts.<sup>68</sup> With Turkish government protesting Israeli attacks on Gaza since 2009, and worsening relations with Syria since 2011, Turkey's mediation efforts have stopped.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, references to Turkey's economic power and ability to organize free trade and economic cooperation between Middle Eastern governments have also di-

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67 Holsti, “National Role Conceptions”, p.266.

68 Raymond Hinnebusch and Özlem Tür, *Turkey Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, 2013.

69 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Teoriden Pratiğe Türk Dış politikası Üzerine Konuşmalar*, İstanbul, Küre Yayınları, 2011, p.425-426.



minated. For example, Turkey's trade with Syria that reached 2.2 billion dollars fell sharply towards the end of 2011 due to the conflict in Syria and Turkey's stance against the Syrian government.<sup>70</sup>

Emphasis on Turkey's role as a "bridge" between West and East or Islam and Christianity has also declined, in favor of Turkey's role as a "central country" located in a rich and multi-dimensional geography. Although in the earlier AKP era the latter bridge role was frequently referenced the "central/pivotal country" role is being raised more recently. Policy makers maintain that Turkey should not choose one region over another, but act strategically to utilize its position in the middle of the Balkans, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. For example, when Middle Eastern issues are considered, Minister Davutoğlu posits that Turkey should draw on its Middle Eastern heritage; in issues regarding the Balkans it should channel its Balkan identity.<sup>71</sup>

Same policy makers also suggest Turkey's location requires it to actively engage in cooperative efforts with countries in its immediate neighborhood<sup>72</sup> to avoid conflict, rather than being a passive bridge. We observe that the "central/pivotal country" and "active independent" roles mutually constitute each other. Events after the Arab uprisings and Turkey taking a more active stance in the region prove that Turkish policy makers now prefer a "central country" role to a "bridge" role.

Turkish foreign policy has been criticized in academic and political circles since the Arab uprisings.<sup>73</sup> One of the harshest criticisms is that Turkey has moved from a decade of so-called "zero problems with neighbors" to "zero neighbors without problems", referring to increasing tensions between Turkey and Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Armenia. Murinson argues that the issue with the AKP's zero-problems policy is not its inapplicability but its undifferentiated notion, which simply nullifies the doctrine. That the term "problem" is not properly defined makes the concept ambiguous; it can refer to short and long-term issues such as geopolitical and strategic affairs as well as threats to domestic political and social issues.<sup>74</sup>

Replying to such criticism, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey has never claimed that there are *literally* zero problems; rather, the policy implies a reintegration with neighbors to solve existing problems and prevent the issues from erupting into hostile relations.<sup>75</sup>

70 Özlem Tür, "The Political Economy of Turkish-Syrian Relations in the 2000s- The Rise and Fall of Trade, Investment and Integration", Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey Syria Relations*.

71 Ibid. p.428

72 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı" *Radikal*, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=107581> (Accessed on 28 May 2013).

73 Lerna K. Yanık, "Foreign Policy During 2011 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey: Both an Issue and Non-issue", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2012, p. 215.

74 Alexander Murinson, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century", *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, No. 97, September 2012, p.24-25.

75 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives," *Turkey Investor Conference, "The Road to 2023"*, organized by Goldman Sachs, London, 22 November 2011, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-\\_vision-2023\\_-turkey\\_s-foreign-policy-objectives\\_-\\_delivered-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-_vision-2023_-turkey_s-foreign-policy-objectives_-_delivered-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa), (Accessed on 04 June 2013).

The government also claims that even while responding to the rapid transformation in the Middle East, Turkey's foreign policy principles have remained essentially the same.<sup>76</sup> The foreign minister argues that the "good neighbor" role is not the only manifestation of Turkey's zero-problems policy; he maintains that a peaceful resolution to the uprisings is a necessary condition for its reintegration with its neighbors and for bolstering cooperation initiatives. Until such resolution, however, Turkey's "good neighbor", "regional subsystem collaborator" and "defender of peace and security" roles have been put on hold and its "model" role is being emphasized. "Once the regional transition is completed, we will continue our work towards regional integration within the spirit of the 'zero problems with neighbors' principle".<sup>77</sup> Now, stressing democracy and liberty, AKP officials are working to achieve a "balance between security and freedom" in the region.<sup>78</sup>

With rising criticisms targeting Turkey's post-2010 policies towards the region, however, academic and political circles alike seek an answer to the question of whether Turkey can indeed be a model for Middle Eastern states in a rapid process of transformation. Pushing others to adopt Turkey's characteristics has its own risks and challenges, such as possible frustration in Arab states. The literature also argues that Turkey's uncalculated policies to become a model country may result in deteriorating bilateral relations with Middle Eastern states.<sup>79</sup> In Mabley's words, "some pro-democracy observers would like to see Turkey establish a dialectical balanced dynamic in its foreign policy" that harmonizes its own interests and values of human solidarity and freedom.<sup>80</sup> Öniş comes to a similar conclusion through a different theoretical lens. He argues that from the beginning of the Arab uprisings, Turkish foreign policy has been confronted with "an ethics versus self-interest dilemma".<sup>81</sup> While a purely ethical perspective requires unquestioned support for "democratic" public movements in the region, Turkey also needs to rearrange its economic and political relations with existing governments.<sup>82</sup>

As evident, Turkey's active foreign policy outlined by AKP leaders has changed over the party's decade in power due to significant conjectural developments. The government began with an active EU membership perspective stressing Turkey's ideational assets as a potential "bridge between civilizations", a "mediator" in regional disputes and a secular/democratic "model" for Middle Eastern regimes. As Turkey's European membership perspective blurred in the AKP's second period, leaders stressed the "central/pivotal country" role, which engages actively and independently with the politics of its region.

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76 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Zero Problems in a New Era", *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 21 March 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/21/zero\\_problems\\_in\\_a\\_new\\_era\\_turkey](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/21/zero_problems_in_a_new_era_turkey) (Accessed on 04 June 2013).

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Learning from the 'Arab Spring: Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux", *Middle Eastern Studies Programme*, Working paper, No. 32, February 2013, p.13.

80 Mabley, "The Arab", p.95.

81 Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between Ethics and Self-Interest", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.14, No.3, 2012, p.61.

82 Ibid.

As the literature also argues, Turkey sought to develop regional subsystems of cooperation and trade while emphasizing its role in resolving regional disputes. Hence, we argue that a shift from a more multidimensional “bridge role” towards roles of “central/pivotal country”, “active independent country” and “developer”, are observed in the AKP’s second period, intensifying with the recent Arab uprisings to include “defender of regional peace and stability”, “protector of the oppressed” and “model/example”.

## Role Theory and IR Theory as a Possible Direction for Future Research

We observe a mutually beneficial relationship between the FPA literature and IR theory embodied in role theory. Systemic approaches provided by the three main IR theories (neo-realism, constructivism and neoliberal institutionalism) provide us with international relations theory’s major dynamics and states’ motivations, but not with a detailed description of the processes or sources of states’ foreign policies. Understanding and explaining state behavior in the international realm can be better achieved through adopting the agent-specific approach provided by the FPA literature. In this regard, role theory provides a useful way to explain how such motivations or major dynamics emerge.

The Turkish case discussed in this paper provides us with an example of how this objective can be met. The analysis of Turkey’s foreign policy role conceptions can be utilized to increase the explanatory capacity of both role theory and IR theory. Role theory can be utilized in explaining specific countries’ foreign policy *intentions*, whereas IR theory, with its broader focus, better accounts for foreign policy *change*.

A dialogue within general IR theories might improve role theory’s explanatory capacity. Let us examine Turkey’s ambivalent stance in the Libyan case, for example. Before the Arab uprisings, AKP foreign policy makers argued for Turkey to play an active and central role in the region. However, Turkey’s initial resistance, but later support of, Libya’s NATO operation indicates that in the final analysis, Turkish elites acted according to their countries’ capabilities *vis à vis* others in the system. Although the elites’ subjective perceptions of Turkey’s regional role were of leadership and solidarity with Muslim governments, when faced with hard choices, Turkish foreign policy makers made decisions in line with their NATO alliance commitments. A structural realist theory and power politics approach might provide a more comprehensive explanation for this case. The realist emphasis on the effects of international anarchy on state behavior would stress that states need power and alliances to ensure their security and survival. Therefore, in the end, Turkey’s decision to act with the NATO on Libya is a sign of self-preservation motive. Turkey’s response to the Arab Spring and Syrian crisis also sheds light on influence of domestic transmission belt and how ruling elites’ worldview may intervene in a country’s foreign policy and create tensions between the local capabilities and the structural pressures of the international system in a neoclassical realist analysis.<sup>83</sup>

83 Ahmet K. Han, “Paradise Lost: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy and the Case of Turkish-Syrian Relations”, Hinnebusch and Tür, *Turkey Syria Relations*.

Similarly, Turkey's attempt to play a "regional subsystem collaborator" role through establishing institutions in and cooperation with the region before the uprisings can be studied through a neoliberal institutionalist framework. Turkish foreign policy makers' repeated references to a regional leader role can be understood within the liberal paradigm's "hegemony" concept. Turkey, as a middle power in the international system, first aimed to expand its sphere of influence in its region through establishing cooperation schemes. Similarly, Turkey's shift from a "bridge between continents" perspective towards a "bridge between civilizations" approach might be explained comprehensively through combining a Wendtian constructivist approach with the existing role conceptions. Different IR theories provide general frameworks that stress certain variables over others, whereas the FPA literature focuses on detailed agent-specific explanations. From a role theory perspective, we argue that one can utilize the benefits of systemic *and* agent-specific approaches to increase a study's explanatory power.

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