

Turkey's Foreign Policy Challenges

in the new millennium

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey finds itself at a crossroads as it is faced with new security challenges such as reformulation of the security institutions and the emergence of new threats to security. The newly shaping security architecture increases the need for a strategic consensus between Turkey and its key allies, the USA and the European members of NATO that would have different pillars than the strategic consensus of the Cold War years. Turkey is trying to protect its position in the Western security systems while at the same time has to reformulate its foreign policy in response to new challenges.

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Introduction

In February 2002, the American President George Bush called upon the United States for "a monumental struggle of good versus evil", specifying where security challenges in the new millennium would come from. Since 1990, there is an ongoing restructuring of global and regional balances of power, a reformulation of international institutions and a redefinition of security risks. Most notable changes are witnessed in the European security system with a reformulation of the Cold War institutions, NATO, Western European Union-WEU and the European Union. In addition, the definition of what constitutes a security risk has changed in the post-Cold War era as illustrated by the September 11 attacks targeting the USA. These new threats to security opened a road towards a division of the world along new demarcation lines in the 21st century. In this highly turbulent security environment, Turkey is faced with the task of redefining its place in the international balance of power system and reformulating its foreign policy in response to both changes in the international institutions and threats to global security. This paper identifies the new security challenges to Turkey's foreign policy making in line with the reformulation of security risks and institutions; while doing so it underlines the diverging preferences of Turkey's foreign policy partners, namely NATO's European members and the USA.

According to international relations theory, a country's geography is one determining factor of its political power and its interactions with other players (Morgenthau, 1985); it determines the policy choices and alternatives available to a state and imposes natural restrictions and limitations on its courses of action. Turkey's geography is the key to its international relations, subjecting it to influences from all sides that it cannot escape.(Henze, 1993) The notion of Turkey as a bridge between East and West is a pervasive theme among the Turkish political elite and it is this strategic location that gave Turkey a prominent place in the Western security systems during the Cold War. In the first years after World War II, as the only Islamic country with a secular democratic government, Turkey was viewed as a bulwark against Soviet designs in the Middle East.(Koniholm, 1991; Muftuler-Bac, 1997)

However, the post-Cold War changes in the European security architecture modified Turkey's centrality for European security. In respect to Turkey's position in the European order, the end of the Cold War raised question marks with respect to the *raison d'être* of such security institutions as NATO as well as the inclusion of Turkey into that order. Furthermore, Turkey's place in the European security architecture is complicated by the EU's newly evolving security and defense role, Common European Security and Defense Policy-CESDP.² On the other hand, there is a group of scholars who claim that Turkey would benefit from these structural changes and Turkey labeled as the new regional great power became a common theme among some students of international politics. (Onis, 1995; Tunander, 1995). What seems certain is that Turkey finds itself in a turbulent security environment in which the parameters of the previous security architecture have disappeared. The resulting uncertainty and volatility shake the pillars of Turkish policy making.

The end of the Cold War posed a number of challenges to Turkey's foreign policy. The dissolution of the Soviet Union eliminated the reason for Turkey's incorporation into the Western security systems- namely Turkey's role as a buffer against the Soviets. This required a reformulation of Turkey's position within the Western security architecture. Secondly, the end of the Cold War opened new avenues in front of Turkey in the former Soviet Union republics such as for instance its endeavors in Central Asia and in the Middle East or its rapprochement with Israel. Simultaneously, Turkey's relations with the EU have proceeded along a rocky road as the EU embarked on its

² The European Union has been engaged in building for itself a defence capability since 1999 under the second pillar of the EU. Since Turkey is not a member of the EU, it is faced with a possibility of being excluded from the new European security order if the EU's CESDP becomes fully operationalized. For further information, please see, Meltem Muftuler-Bac, (2000). Turkey's role in the European Union's Security and Foreign Policies, Security Dialogue, vol.31, no.4, 489-502. Meltem Muftuler-Bac and Gulnur Aybet, (2000). Transformations in Security and Identity after the Cold War: Turkey's problematic relationship with Europe, International Journal, vol.55, no.4, 567-582; and Meltem Muftuler-Bac, (2001). Turkey's Candidacy to the European Union, The role of Security Considerations, Security Dialogue, vol.32, no.3, 379-382.

enlargement process that included almost all the Central and Eastern European countries of the former Warsaw Pact. The ambivalent nature of the EU-Turkish relations involves a drastic reformulation of Turkey's domestic policies and its political system. In the absence of a common interest between Turkey and the EU, namely the containment of the Soviets, such factors as the stability of democracy in Turkey acquired a critical place in paving the road towards Turkey's closer ties with the EU.

Directly related to Turkey's foreign policy making is the construction of Turkish identity. The construction of Self in modern Turkey revolved around the European identity and the triadic relationship between Turkey, Europe and non-Europe; the self, an object of likeness and an object of difference. The triadic relationship that Turkey's identity construction has evolved around is particularly important in the 21st century, as Turkey is the only country with strong ties with the European order, values and civilization as well as cultural affinity with the non-West. This is an interesting position in that it gives Turkey both an advantage and disadvantage in world politics. It is a disadvantage because it does not belong fully to any category, and an advantage because it can relate to both parties. This is particularly important in the aftermath of September 11 events, when it became fashionable to talk about the clash of civilizations and Turkey's place in that.

Foreign Policy Making in the Uncertain Environment of the 21st Century

The dismantling of the Cold War structures with the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the search for new patterns of cooperation. There is, however, a divergence in the Americans' and Europeans' perceptions of newly emerging patterns of cooperation that inevitably has an impact on Turkey's position in the post-Cold War security order. The US and European security objectives during the Cold War converged in the attempt to contain the Soviet Union and Turkey had a secure place in its implementation. However, in the post-Cold War era, there has been a lack of consensus between Turkey, the US and the European states –specifically the European Union members–over the level of strategic cooperation between Turkey and Western Europe. The European security order is increasingly shifting its main focus to the protection of a 'European identity' as defined through democratic principles, respect for human rights and rule of law. The American perspective, specifically

after September 11 2001, focuses most of its energies on the fight against terrorism and containment of rogue states.

The post-Cold War cooperation patterns are such that a retreat into the fragmented, anarchical, European system should be aborted. The transition from the Cold War structures to post-Cold War structures are destabilizing. In the European order, the prevention of going 'back to the future' (Mearsheimer, 1990) is possible by putting forth the European identity as the cement holding together the European system. Security then is linked to the protection of 'Europeanness'. In the post-Cold War era, "identity becomes a security question, it becomes high politics", (Waever, 1996) therefore security issues neither for Europe nor for Turkey can any longer be concerned with only military issues. Security is reinterpreted in the post-Cold War era increasingly as a problem of survival of culture and identity. "The replacement of the ideological East-West conflict with ethnic, religious and historical conflicts presented Turkey to the rest of Europe as a non-European-i.e. non-Christian- state". (Tunander, 1995) Thus, the European conceptualization of the new security order around a common identity paved the way for Turkey's exclusion from that order based on doubts about Turkey's European credentials.

On the American front, the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the dismantling of the Soviet Union also signify that the *raison d'être* for a large American military establishment and arms race has vanished. The American strategic planning depends upon perceptions of clearly identifiable enemies of such magnitude as to justify American military build-up. (Hillen, 1997) The Soviet Union was a very visible enemy during the Cold War, with a hostile ideology, hegemonic ambitions, and extensive military capabilities. Thus, the Communist bloc was the dominant Other for Western security and a credible target for American strategic planning. Its absence created a void necessary to be filled if military spending and such institutions as the Pentagon and NATO were to be sustained. In the 1990s, therefore, a need for new enemies has emerged to justify the retention of a military, especially in the US. This is why September 11 came about at a critical time when there was a need for a concrete enemy.

In the post-Cold War era, new threats to Western security is found increasingly among the well-armed Third World countries, and fugitives such as Osama bin Laden. The new theme in

American strategic planning is a group of maverick states that are defined as well-armed, aggressively minded Third World powers that possess mass destruction capabilities. These rogue states and individuals defy internationally accepted rules of conduct, support terrorism, possess substantial military capabilities, are engaged in massive military build-up and carry the potential to destabilize regional and global security. The American administration explicitly labels Iran, Iraq and North Korea as rogue regimes and arch-terrorists like bin Laden as major threats to world peace. Implicit in this categorization is that in order to be classified as a rogue state, an anti-Western ideology is critical. A related foreign policy objective is to prevent a potential rogue state from possessing military capabilities that would have the capacity to threaten global security. Thus, the themes of American strategic concept are identified as such: emphasis on future Third World battlefields, emergence of well armed Third World powers, growing pace of weapons of mass destruction proliferation, risk of conflict with these states, and the resulting need to retain a large military establishment. (Klare, 1995).

This newly defined enemy, "Evil" became a concrete entity in the form of terrorism. Thus, the fight against terrorism is the new theme of world politics that brings old enemies together as new friends as illustrated by the 2001 agreement between NATO and Russia to form a council to work out a course of joint action on issues of terrorism, missile defense and civil emergencies. If the new American foreign policy centers around the fight against terrorism and rogue states, then this brings into question the role of NATO in that aspect and along with that Turkey's position. However, according to Valasek, the US "has yet to specify the alliance's relevance to their antiterrorism campaign, and the form and extent of future military participation by NATO allies". (Valasek, 2001/02)

It is within this conjuncture that Turkey's foreign policy making in line with the global stance against the rogue states and war against terrorism carries vital importance for the emergence of new balances in global as well as regional security. Turkey has an important role to play in the containment of rogue states due to its strategic position. For example, Turkey might be the venue for the installation of early warning systems for missiles and in this manner might play a critical role in missile defense strategy, as new threats to security are posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to rogue states. This possibility, however, increases security risks for Turkey and therefore requires serious planning and bargaining between the US, Turkey and NATO.

The American Administration perceives Turkey as a 'frontline state' increasingly important for American interests. Richard Holbrooke claimed that "Turkey is replacing Germany as the cutting edge of Europe" and described Turkey as the American government's 'New European Front'.

Turkey stands at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the U.S. on the European continent- including NATO, the Balkans, Cyprus, the Aegean, Iraq sanctions, Russian relations in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and transit routes for Caspian oil and gas. Our policy reflects the continuity of shared security interests and intensive security cooperation.

US President Clinton reflected this view in his declaration "I think it is very important that we do everything reasonable to anchor Turkey to the West. If you look at the size of the country, what it can block and what it can open doors to, it is terribly important." (Couturier, 1997) US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, declared that Turkey has been "one of our steadfast allies for so many years and was a stable nation in a region of instability with great oil reserves". (Briefing, 2001) Turkey's role in the global balance of power is no longer determined by its position as a buffer state to the Soviet Union, but as a 'corridor' between Central Asia, the Middle East and Southern Europe.

In short, the reformulation of threats to global and American security requires a reformulation of foreign policy in Turkey as well. The questions that should guide Turkey's foreign policy making are: (i) How does Turkey fit into the picture of the fight against terrorism? (ii) Does Turkey carry the potential to be a part of the jigsaw puzzle the USA is trying to solve in the post-Cold War era, and if so, is there mutual recognition of that fact?, (iii) Does Turkey still carry a vital strategic importance for Western security?, (iv) Where does Turkey fit into the diverging positions of the Europeans versus the Americans on the post-Cold War security order?, (v) What role will Turkey play in the new security architecture in Europe?.

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