

BOOK REVIEW

Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order

By Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem (eds.)

London and New York: Routledge, 2019, 200 pages, ISBN: 978-0-367-08566-7 / 978-0-429-02306-4 (e-book)

In recent years, Eurasian states like Russia, China, India and Iran have become significant actors in world politics due to their increased capacity to influence the foreign policy of other countries in their region. More importantly, their geopolitical rivalry with the West has brought about a discussion regarding the emergence of a multipolar world order. In light of such significant geopolitical changes, Turkey, as an important regional power located at the center of the Eurasian landmass, has also sought to adjust its foreign policy preferences. Although Turkey mainly pursued a pro-Western foreign policy line during the Cold War era due to its military ties with NATO, it has endeavored to strengthen its political and economic relations with the Eurasian countries in the post-Cold War period—especially in the 2000s.

Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia, edited by Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem, focuses on the visible pivot to Eurasia in Turkish foreign policy with a particular emphasis on the changing world order and the Turkish geopolitical concerns that accompany it. The authors aim to analyze the reasons behind Turkey's pivot to Eurasia over the past decade, while also discussing whether Eurasianism as an ideology can be viewed as a reasonable option for Turkish foreign policy, especially after the emergence of a number of significant problems between Turkey and the West in the last few years. In addition to the two editors, contributors include Turkish and non-Turkish authors: Altay Atlı, Pavel K. Baev, Nicola P. Contessi, Pınar İpek, Mustafa Kutlay, Ketan Mehta, Tarık Oğuzlu, Harsh V. Pant, Gülriz Şen and Çağdaş Üngör.

The volume mainly focuses on the domestic changes in Turkey in the 2000s and their effect on Turkish foreign policy, while also elaborating on a number

of popular ideological currents such as Pan-Turkism, Neo-Ottomanism and Eurasianism. Although Eurasianism is defined mainly as a Russian intellectual movement in the introduction, Emre Erşen's chapter broadens this concept by focusing on a specific branch called "Turkish Eurasianism." As the author indicates, the way Eurasianism is used in Turkish politics not only refers to the post-Soviet region, but also involves Turkey's strengthened relations with other Eurasian actors such as China, India and Iran. Erşen also discusses the ideas of Russian intellectual Alexander Dugin and underlines the importance of Dugin and his personal networks in Turkey in the development of Turkish Eurasianism.

Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia also highlights the problems that have emerged in Turkey-U.S. relations in light of some recent developments in Turkish domestic politics. Tarık Oğuzlu, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the Gezi Park protests of 2013 and the failed coup attempt of July 2016 as two turning points in Turkey's relations with the U.S. He indicates that Turkey's interest in Eurasia is closely related to its disappointment with its Western allies in the post-July 2016 period. In this sense, it can be argued that the clash of interests between Turkey and the West is one of the major factors that prompted Turkey to try to soft-balance its traditional NATO allies by developing political and economic ties with Eurasian countries.

It seems that the rise of Russia and China in world politics in the 2000s has triggered a debate about the viability of the U.S.-led liberal world order. This trend has been accompanied by the rising popularity of charismatic leaders like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping who sharply criticize the policies of the West, particularly the U.S. This might be regarded as one of the reasons for the increasing significance of Russia and China in Turkish foreign policy, especially after the emergence of a number of important conflicts in Turkey-U.S. relations (e.g. Syria).

Although the downing of a Russian fighter jet by Turkish military forces in 2015 briefly interrupted the Turkish-Russian rapprochement, the two countries managed to resume their cooperation soon enough. Pınar İpek emphasizes that the jet crisis demonstrated the critical importance of energy security in Turkish foreign policy. She argues that Turkey's rising demand for natural gas is one of the drivers of its pivot to Eurasia. In a similar vein, Çağdaş Üngör underlines the importance of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), popularly known as the New Silk Road. Üngör notes that Turkey largely benefits from Chinese credit thanks to

its participation in the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) initiative. One notable example is the newly opened Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway which is one of the projects closely related with the BRI. In short, Turkey's economic relations with the Eurasian countries have become more important, especially in the last few years.

One could argue that Turkey's stalled EU membership process has urged Ankara to strengthen its ties with other international organizations. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for example has become much more important for Turkey in the last decade. Although Turkey has not officially abandoned its goal of becoming a full member of the EU, it has nonetheless upgraded its status within the SCO and acquired a "dialogue partner" status in this international organization which is mainly led by Russia and China. In addition, Turkey has continued its efforts to strengthen its ties with the Turkic states of the Caucasus and Central Asia within the framework of the Turkic Council as well as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA).

There is a general consensus in the book that Turkish foreign policy has increasingly gravitated toward Eurasia in accordance with the changing global order. However, some of the contributors believe it will be difficult to sustain this trend in Turkish foreign policy in the longer term for a number of reasons. Köstem for instance claims that Turkey has a limited material capacity vis-à-vis Russia and China which might restrict Turkish influence over the Caucasus and Central Asia. Similarly, İpek argues that Turkey's asymmetric interdependence with three countries—Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran—in the energy sphere could prevent it from following a flexible foreign policy in the region. Baev believes that the development of Turkey's strategic relations with many Eurasian countries depends on the leaders of these countries, which makes bilateral relations quite personalized and politicized. He uses the fighter jet crisis as an example to show how Turkish-Russian relations rapidly deteriorated at that time due to Putin's tough personal stance against Turkey.

Some of the contributors, conversely, argue that the rapidly growing economic relations between Turkey and Eurasian countries could create room for Turkey to maneuver in foreign policy. For instance, Turkish-Indian economic relations have been developing remarkably in the last few years as a result of the efforts of both countries. It should be mentioned that Turkey's relations with India have always been complicated due to the close relations between Turkey and Pakistan. Nevertheless, Pant and Mehta argue that the

Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) vision for "seeking a greater role in international affairs" has resulted in the development of Turkey-India relations.

The chapters of the volume rely on a variety of primary and secondary sources including news, expert opinions and statistics. Atlı for instance uses data from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, the Ministry of Development, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to demonstrate the development of Sino-Turkish economic relations. Although the chapters mostly use qualitative research methods, there are also significant quantitative data analyses in the chapters by Kutlay, İpek and Pant and Mehta. Contessi brings together three different international relations theories while explaining the changes in Turkish foreign policy. He tests the plausibility of Turkey's chances of joining the SCO through realist, neo-liberal and constructivist perspectives. Consequently, he finds that these perspectives provide different explanations for Turkey's motivation to improve its relations with the SCO. Finally, Kutlay's chapter discusses the concept of "new developmentalism" which mainly refers to state-capitalism in China's current economic model. He analyzes the dynamics of the interactions between China and other countries that challenge the U.S.-led liberal order and argues that new developmentalism has actually become quite attractive for developing countries in the last few years.

Overall, *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia* is an important contribution to the academic literature on Turkish foreign policy. In addition to discussing the idea of Eurasianism from a Turkish perspective and analyzing the various aspects of Turkey's developing relations with the Eurasian countries in the past decade, it provides the readers with a general understanding of the domestic and international factors that have contributed to this interesting trend in Turkish foreign policy in the 2000s.

Furkan Emer

MA Student
Istanbul Şehir University
Department of Political Science and
International Relations