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TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: FOUR PILLARS OF TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

As Oral Sander writes, "its Western orientation is one fundamental aspect of Turkish foreign policy which has remained unchanged through the history of the Republic."1 The making of Turkish foreign policy has, thus, been a remarkable choice of policy. Sander to all intents and purposes should have stated that its Western orientation is the fundamental platform. Yet, this sweeping statement, while correct in its essence, fails to take note of the first two decades of the Republic, when Turkey cautiously maintained a neutral policy with regard to the Great Powers. However, we also need to take account of a major point. That a policy of neutrality is first and foremost a distinguishing characteristic of newly formed states. However, even during this period, Turkey's membership of the European community of nations, both politically and economically, gathered momentum. Of course, the Ottoman predecessor to the Republic had in any case almost always been at the heart of European affairs. Notwithstanding, this Western orientation was continued and reinforced after the Second World War, whereby Turkey began to fulfil the role of a staunch ally of the West. A role which in great measure exists today, particularly through NATO. A role that was cemented further when President Turgut Özal lent his support to the West during the second Gulf War.

However, if we pause for brief moment we can also note that since World War One the international system had ceased to be a 'European system', and had become a global one in which European countries were no longer the prime movers in world affairs. This fact boosted Atatürk's morale in his independence challenge to the Entente invaders.2 Moreover, the last twenty-five years of Turkish foreign policy has witnessed a process of adaptation to regional and global changes - not least the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of a bi-polar world. However, this adaptation to global change has taken place within a Western-orientated foreign policy framework. This could be seen in Turkey's complimentary role in NATO's first military intervention during peacetime, i.e. its military intervention in Kosovo.

At the heart of the Republic's foreign policy, then, lies a Western orientation. As far as the Middle East is concerned, and surprisingly many Middle East specialists need to be reminded of this point, Turkey is linked to the Middle East through sub-systems and not by an overarching foreign policy emphasis which is reserved for the West. Western orientation is a central plank of understanding a first principle and, above all else, a force of continuity in Turkish foreign policy. At the heart of this fundamental Western orientation are four traditions, which can be analysed within a historical context, as well as political and economic. Traditions or principles of Turkish foreign policy can be

found in a plethora of articles published in the 1990s, Mr Sander's is but one example, and Paul B. Henze is another.3 The following traditions overlap with one another, but it is the emphasis and weight given to each that separates scholarship on Turkish foreign policy processes, although there is surprisingly little divergence of opinion.

THE PRAGMATIC PRINCIPLE

The first principle, a pragmatic outlook, derives from a tradition of the Ottoman Empire, or the Turkish Empire as it was known in the West. However, the Ottoman Sultans did not consider themselves Turks as such, even as the Turks supplied the bulk of the ruling class, but as Ottomans. This does not imply a separation between Ottoman and Turks, or more to the point Turks in the modern Republic. In fact, both are closely inter-linked with the European system. The Ottoman Empire, no less, was a European state. Ottoman rule of over one-third of Europe for four hundred years transformed the Empire from an originally Asian one into a Eurasian one. European history cannot be understood without examining the role of the Ottoman Empire within its structural process. Not only had the Ottoman Empire at expedient times entered alliances with certain Western powers, but also by implication therefore it was part of the European system of states. The Treaty of Paris acknowledged this officially in 1856.

Another factor to note is the pragmatic outlook of Ottoman rulers. Although religion characterised the Empire, secular or, let us say, realistic concerns were a steady feature of the conduct of foreign affairs and in the administration of the various nationalities (millets). In addition, another aspect of the Ottoman rulers' practical outlook was their interest in military and administrative leadership, even to the point of rarely using the title Caliph, as the religious leader of the Muslim community - although at times, only when the state was strong. At other times Islam was promoted, as, for instance, in the case of Abdul Hamit II who, making use of his title of Caliph promoted the ideology of pan-Islamism in the face of the dismemberment of the Empire in the nineteenth century. German pressure on Istanbul to instigate a religious rebellion by a billion Muslims against their British colonisers also played a significant part.

A practical outlook in the conduct of foreign affairs could also be found in the Central Asian states, as well as with the Seljuks, the Ottomans and the Turkish Republic. In these states (unlike their European and Iranian counterparts) religion was not institutionalised. Moreover, there was no religious authority independent of the Ottoman state. The Şeyh-ul-Islam, the highest official in charge of religious affairs, was under the authority of the Sultan. Only during times of crisis did men of religion exert a certain political leverage. In short, the introduction of the Turkish Republic was not totally contradictory to the overall experience of Turkish people, and in particular foreign policy makers. Mr Sander notes: "the very quick adaptation of Turkish citizens to the concept of a secular nation-state was accomplished thanks to the Ottoman heritage of a practical, realistic outlook."4

ATATÜRK

The second principle is centred on Atatürk's theory and practice of foreign policy, and especially the future role Turkey would play in the world system. In plain terms, Atatürk wanted to raise the new Republic to the status of a 'contemporary civilisation' (Western) by establishing a nation-state of a nineteenth century and evolving twentieth-century European model: a European state, with its own traditions, trying to create a space for itself, and with a favourable position in the international society of states. A European state, most notably, shorn of any imperialistic leanings, particularly of

the kind that Atatürk struggled against. A Turkish state no less, but shorn of any pan-Turkist or pan-Islamist leanings. Atatürk's nationalism was not expansive. On no occasion, after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, not only did he insist on justified claims in Thrace and but he also refrained from laying claim to Arab countries. Neither did he settle remaining difficulties by force or fait accompli, (e.g. as in the case of the Straits or the Sanjak of Alexandretta), choosing instead a pragmatic attitude: negotiate later. This last point is significant, as is, according to Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, Atatürk's opinion that law came before force: "The adherence to legality was one of the basic principles of Turkey's foreign policy."5

An unusual characteristic of Atatürk's foreign policy is that it was starkly different from those that are typical of military regimes: e.g. reckless adventurism, chauvinistic, revanchist ideas. Concentrating rather on domestic socio-economic reform, Atatürk's statesmanship gave the new Republic a breathing space within the international arena, which was all the better for the internal reconstruction of the country and indeed for peace and prosperity. Domestic reforms, of course, brought Turkey closer to Europe, particularly the secularisation of all levels of administration, judicial reforms, the adoption of the Western calendar and the adoption of the Latin alphabet, in which Atatürk himself invested a great deal of intellectual energy. Atatürk had blamed the demise of the Ottoman Empire on its severing of links with scientific, cultural, political and economic developments taking place in a modern Europe.6 The thrust of his reforms was aimed at detachment from the old order, which was characterised by an Asian-Arabic context. Atatürk led and initiated the reforms that transferred this cultural space into a modernised European state. Its foreign policy is a natural corollary to this transformation. Atatürk was unequivocal in the direction that the new Republic should take: "Turks have always gone towards the West. We want a European Turkey, in other words a Turkish country that looks towards the West. We want to modernise our country. All our efforts are aimed at founding modern Westernised government."7

Atatürk's nationalism, occupying a pivotal role in the Republic, is based on common citizenship, within set, defensible borders and on national consensus unlike present-day Germany which still has a nationality law based on race. His maxim, "Peace at home and peace in the world", is an ideal for all civilised states to aspire to. Atatürk's legacy remains of paramount importance for Turkish foreign policy aims.

GEOPOLITICAL POSITION

The third principle and, in this author's view, the most important, is centred on Turkey's highly significant geopolitical position. This position shapes the contours of Turkish foreign policy at its broadest, including security complexes, defence policies, alliances, relations with international organisations and conflict-resolution.

Since its settlement, from 7500 BC onwards, Anatolia - which is geographically part of Europe, the only notable peninsula from east to west and located at the cross-roads of Europe, Africa and Asia - has been on the road of the world's largest migrations and invasions from all directions. The Foreign Ministry in Ankara today is no exception with regard to its concern for Turkey's territorial integrity. Anatolia, the fourth of the mountain peninsulas that jut out from the European mass into the Mediterranean, is an immense plateau, with the same proportions and climate as Spain. The fertile west of the plateau is the main reason why almost all states founded on the Anatolian peninsula, including the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, have looked to the West, rather than the East, for trade, transportation, communication and even cultural exchange.

A state's borders remain highly significant in shaping its foreign policy. Turkey is no exception. In the early days of the Republic, Turkey boarders with seven countries, four of which were major powers - Britain (mandate in Iraq), France (mandate in Syria), Italy (the Dodecanese), the Soviet Union - and the remaining three were with Bulgaria, Greece and Iran. After the Second World War, Turkey's neighbours decreased to six - Bulgaria, Greece, Iran, Iraq, the Soviet Union and Syria.

Turkey has been the most active of these countries in forming and entering into a series of bilateral and multilateral security arrangements: e.g. the Balkan Entente (1934), the Saadabad Pact (1946), NATO (1949, when the Turkish government cemented a formal alliance with the United States), and the Baghdad Pact (1955). As Andrew Mango notes, "Mustafa Kemal had never avoided alliances; he used them when it suited his aims. This policy was continued by his successors to the present day."8

Turkey's common border with the former Soviet Union is an important factor in accounting for the continuity of Turkish foreign policy. During the first two decades of the Republic, relations between the Bolshevik regime and Ankara were cordial, with the latter receiving material and political support from Russia. These amicable relations found expression in the Treaties of 1921 and 1925. After World War Two the Russians unilaterally abrogated the Treaty of Non-Aggression of 1925 and demanded territorial concessions and bases on the Bosphorus. Turkey's role in NATO exacerbated relations between Moscow and Ankara. Turkey's entry into the NATO alliance was seen in Ankara as necessary to offset a possible adverse distribution of power in its immediate region. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ankara's relations with the Russian Federation have been based on pragmatic considerations, and are arguably good at this time, as are relations with Bulgaria. A competitive struggle with the Russian Federation, and to a lesser extent Iran, over influence in Eurasia is a possible bone of contention in the future.

For the foreseeable future, the Russian Federation will remain the dominant actor in Central Asia. The Central Asian leaders, fearful of the possible spread of religious radicalism and concerned at the potential fragmentation of their states from regional and sub-ethnic groupings, are eager to remain under a loose Russian security umbrella. They are also keen to continue to benefit from economic support from Russia and from other states interested in the region, such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Israel, the US and members of the European Union. These states share a common concern to preserve stability in Central Asia. However, Turkey remains a very important partner for those Central Asian states well endowed with oil and gas reserves.

Moscow is determined to ensure that oil or gas pipelines constructed across Central Asia and the Transcaucasus cross Russian territory so Russia can maintain control over the former Soviet Republics. The Turkish authorities are pressing for new pipelines from Central Asia and the Transcaucasus to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Turkey would benefit economically from the royalties and gas while thereby lessening Turkish dependence on Russia and Iran. Russian influence in the region could eventually diminish as a consequence of the construction of new pipelines to Turkey, while conversely Turkey could acquire more of a voice in regional affairs.

In general, Turkish officials are disappointed at the lack of progress over plans to build pipelines across Turkey. Deliberations over the possible routes of new oil and gas pipelines are notoriously slow and painstaking. Planning, feasibility studies and other technical and financial problems need to be addressed. Politics is also involved. Turkey, Russia and also Iran are involved in effect in a competitive game over who gets what, when and how with regard to the oil and gas that is meant to come on tap from Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

Turkey is likely to continue to cultivate closer relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, bearing in mind their considerable oil and gas reserves. Uzbekistan will also remain an important partner for Turkey because of its economic potential and its political influence in Central Asia. Officials in Ankara are endeavouring to maintain close relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, in particular, because of their critical influence on the pipeline issue. With the exception of the pipeline question, Turkish and Russia interests in Central Asia coincide on one significant issue: preserving stability in the region.

The principle objective of Turkish foreign policy towards the Central Asian republics can be conceived of as helping these countries to become secular democracies and progress towards a market economy: in short, to adopt Turkey as a model on the basis of mutual advantage. While pursuing these policy goals, Turkey is careful to assure Russia that its links with the Turkish Republics do not have pan-Turkic implications.

This two-pronged strategy has, more or less, become Turkey's official policy line towards the new republics in Central Asia. However, keeping the balance between, on the one hand, hopes of a special relationship with the Central Asian states that grants Turkey a preferential position in their foreign relations, and, on the other, restricting Turkey's foreign policy towards Central Asia to good but normal relations with no pretence of regional leadership, proved to be a difficult - almost impossible - task. At least, at the declaratory level, Turkish leaders could hardly prevent ambiguity thus being misinterpreted. This has happened since the early days of the new relations. For instance, in April 1992 the then prime minister Süleyman Demirel, visiting Central Asian states, declared that Turkey had no intention of patronising the new republics but at the same time he spoke of the possibility of establishing an association of a sovereign Turkic world. Political circles in Moscow and the Russian military élite took such language as proof of Turkey's intention to replace Russian influence in the region. This view became even more prominent in Moscow as the concept of the 'near abroad' became a crucial element of Russian foreign policy thinking.

Turkey's political activities towards the new republics too could be interpreted as efforts aiming at the establishment of a special relationship with a dominant position. In the very early days, Turkey could successfully take on the function of opening the doors of many Western international organisations for the Central Asian states. Turkey, in an even more general way, is functioning as their gateway to the West.

During the course of the post-Soviet period, Ankara's interests in the southern flank of the former Soviet Union, and in the Transcaucasus in particular, have been driven by the triple desires to spread Turkish influence while maintaining Turkish security, and to enhance trade relations.

Turkey now looks to the Transcaucasus as a primary sphere of interest. Ankara projects itself in Azerbaijan and Georgia as a model of westernised, secular, market-orientated democracy upon which these newly independent states can pattern their transition from Soviet rule. With the decline of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ankara came to feel increasingly that its geo-strategic value as an ally of the West was dissipating. Thus, "finding a new role for Turkey within the overall Western strategy that would guarantee Turkey's continued importance" became a central occupation of Ankara.9 With the redrawing of the geopolitical map of Eurasia spawned by the Soviet demise, the most logical option for Turkey is to offer itself as a 'bridge' between the West and the Caucasus, and the Turkic former Soviet republics. Turkey itself, most importantly, lacks the financial muscle to invest substantially in these republics. Ankara, moreover, eyes Caspian oil and

gas with the desire not only to attain lucrative transit revenues for their shipment to the Mediterranean Sea via Turkish pipelines, but, and this point that should not be overlooked, also to meet expanding domestic energy demand.10

Transcaucasia, as a crossroads among landmasses, offers Turkey access to the republics of Central Asia. Serving as a bridgehead to the east is Azerbaijan, important to Turkey in its own right due to its vast oil reserves and its 7.5 million population of Azeris. However, due to geographical reality, the Republic of Armenia separates Turkey from Azerbaijan proper. Armenia's location makes it either a bridge or barrier between Turkey and its eastern Turkic neighbours. At present, with Ankara having no formal diplomatic ties with Armenia due to its support for Azerbaijan, Armenia remains a barrier for Turkey. Further potential barriers to the expansion of Turkish influence were extended by Russia and Iran, and both have sought to exclude the Turks by various means. However, all three have a common interest in maintaining political stability in the region. None of these major players in Eurasian politics want the prospect of nationalist strife in areas adjacent to their borders - not least by Turkey who has battled against a major internal insurgency by Kurdish terrorists in its southeast.

Turkey's regional foreign policy position with regard to the Middle East is of a high strategic importance. This point does not need further elaboration. Turkish foreign policy in the region has been traditionally cautious. A history of instability in the area, with frequent change of government, a lack of democratic tradition (with the exception of Israel and the Lebanon), and the continuous flow of large amounts of arms into the region, coupled with past Iraqi and Syrian militancy, heightens Ankara's apprehensions, and serves to encourage close ties with the West. Turkey's alignment with Israel is a welcome development for both countries, and has had a warm reception in the United States, Turkey's primary ally. After a series of intermittent criticisms from Arab governments over its Western-orientated foreign policy, Turkey now, by and large, has good relations with many, although not all Arab countries and, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has had a greater active interest in economic co-operation with these states. Turkey has also been a staunch supporter of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, its close military relationship with Israel has caused tension with some Arab neighbours, especially Syria and Iraq and may in the long term be considered a risk by Ankara. But this is unlikely, especially if Jordan joins to make it a tri-partite relationship. A move that will be welcomed in Washington.

ECONOMICS

After World War Two, when Turkey's export boom came to an abrupt end, Turkey was faced with four major tasks: to gear the economy to lower prices on export items; to augment and open new areas of economic activity while keeping its armed forces at the level of the war years due to the Soviet threat; to finance the modernisation of its armed forces; and to finance industrial development.11 Although Turkey entered the post-war era with foreign exchange and gold reserves amounting to $276 million, this was not the result of healthy economic development but rather of limitations placed on imports, the restrictions imposed on consumers and the increased need of the belligerents for Turkish agricultural goods during the war years.12 Turkey became increasingly dependent on foreign aid and credits and particularly on the United States during the Democratic Party regime in the 1950s. Under the leadership of Mr Özal, Turkey truly liberalised its economy in the 1980s, a trend that continues to this day. Turkey, however, still relies on financial packages from the IMF, particularly after the February 2001 financial crisis.

Economic considerations have acquired a more significant role in foreign policy making since World

War Two and especially since the advent of globalisation. Turkey's application for membership of NATO was in part born of economic considerations: more aid, military and economic, could be had in the security system. But Turkey's relations with the West have been topsy-turvy at times. Since the late 1960s, relations between the West and Turkey have deteriorated, an example being the 1975 US arms embargo and Western European countries' withholding of credits and military assistance. These measures were taken in the wake of the Greco-Turkish differences over Cyprus and the Aegean, leading to the Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974. While these economic sanctions adversely affected diplomatic and economic relations with the West, they did not lead to a major change in Turkey's attachment to the Western security system.

After the Customs Union Agreement, full membership of the European Union remains a central aim of Turkey. In this sense, receiving candidate status in 1999 at the Helsinki Conference can be regarded as a major success. While the EU voices concerns over human rights violations in Turkey as a stumbling block to membership, the fight against high inflation rates started to pay dividends in 2000. EU membership is an economic aim of Turkey, and only gradually is the political context of EU membership taking root in Turkey. A thorough revision of the political system is envisaged with changes to the composition of the National Security Council, in essence meaning a downgraded role for the Turkish military in the political affairs of the country. The EU is also calling for a thorough revision of state laws, as well as agricultural reform and further privatisation measures. Notwithstanding, trade with the EU countries is envisaged to grow.

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The forces of continuity responsible for the Western orientation of Turkey's foreign policy have been subject to far-reaching changes, particularly in light of the demise of the Soviet Union. While the Cyprus problem continues, relations between Athens and Ankara continue to thaw, with Greece accommodating Turkey in the latter's move for full EU membership. As a regional power, or middle-range power, Turkey has entered the twenty-first century with a new series of challenges. However, the Western orientation of its foreign policy will remain - seen as it is in Ankara as serving the national interests of Turkey. Undoubtedly the rise of Eurasia in the global arena is the most exiting development. Turkish influence in the republics of the former Soviet Union is especially evident in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan; Turkish influence in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lags somewhat behind. The potential for future Ankara-Moscow co-operative relations exists, but depends on internal developments in the Russian Federation itself. The United States will continue to be Turkey's primary ally and Turkey's membership of NATO will remain one of the crowning glories of its foreign policy successes. Turkey's integration progress with the EU is open to speculation, but full membership of the EU will be achieved eventually. In short, the Republic will maintain in the twenty-first century its status as a middle-range, regional power at the centre of European affairs. Turkey will continue to look to the West, just as Atatürk did in the preceding century, while pursuing foreign policy goals maximising Turkey's national interests, especially within an increasingly global economic climate.

1 Oral Sander, 'Turkish Foreign Policy: Forces of Continuity and Change', Turkish Review, Winter 1993, p. 31.
2 Ibid., p.32.
3 See Paul B. Henze, 'Turkey: Toward the Twenty-first Century' in G.E. Fuller and I.O. Lesser (eds.), Turkey's New Geopolitics, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1993, pp. 1-35.
4 Oral Sander, 1993, p. 34.

5 Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, 'A General Look at Turkish Foreign Policy During the Period of Atatürk', Turkish Review, November 1985, p. 35.
6 Ibid, p. 35.
7 'Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, III', Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1952, p. 67.
8 Andrew Mango, 'Kemal Atatürk - Father of the Turks', Turkish Review, Autumn 1990, p. 8.
9 Shireen T. Hunter, The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994, p. 162.
10 Gareth M. Winrow, 'Turkey's Role in Asian Pipeline Politics', Jane's Intelligence Review, 9, No. 2, February 1997.
11 Oral Sander, 1993, p. 42.
12 Ibid., p. 42.