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TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey is not one of the great powers of the Twentieth century. Her geopolitical location, however, has enabled her to play a potentially more influential role in world politics than otherwise would have been possible. She holds the key not only to the Turkish Straits but lies along the roads from the Balkans to the Middle East and from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf. She is a member of the biggest surviving military bloc and most European organisations, as well as a candidate for European Union membership. Her political involvement and exposed position assign her an importance hardly matched by any other medium power. Accordingly, the correct evaluation of this country's policies is of crucial importance. Furthermore, as one of the small number of non-western societies successfully struggling to modernise both country and people, together with the aim of evolving a workable parliamentary democracy, she has long seemed to offer lessons and insights into an important political process.

Yet, the interest she is getting in the western media and the amount of scholarly works on Turkey, produced especially from an international relations perspective, do not match the importance conferred upon her by other players in international politics. Given her frequently expressed strategic importance on the edge of Europe, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union, this may seem surprising. For this very reason, however, it is difficult to place Turkey into any neat category that the area specialists and foreign policy analysts like to draw before starting their research. Not only does Turkey not appear to fit any one geographical category, but it does not fit any one cultural, political or economic category either. About 97% of her land mass lies in Asia, yet Turkey's progressive elite consider their country to be part of Europe and about 70% of her population supports her European Union membership. About 98% of her population is Moslem, and yet Turkey is a secular country by choice and her religious development through the years has taken a different path to that of other Islamic countries. Culturally, most of the country reflects the peculiarities of a wider Middle Eastern culture, and yet she, with an equal persistency, participates in European cultural events. She professes to have a liberal economic system, but the remnants of the planned economy still hamper the country's development. In

religious, historical and geographical senses she is a Middle Eastern country, yet any development impinging upon the status quo of the Balkans and the Caucasus directly affects Turkey just as much. These conflicting factors indicate wider uncertainties about the placing and role of the country.

A sense of confusion about Turkey seems to reign not only in external appearances, but also in the deep-rooted convictions of her people. Age-old discussions within the country about the "eastern ideal" and the "western ideal" regarding the exact nature of the country and her people appear to be as lively today as they have ever been. This uncertain self-identity and sense of confusion about Turkey's intentions and foreign policy priorities is likewise common among western statesmen, scholars, and journalists alike. Particularly since the 1970s, western political analysts, statesmen and the media have seemed increasingly confused about Turkey's intensified rapprochement with Islam, in both the domestic and international spheres. Although they seem to agree that the implications of a reversal in Turkey's western-oriented, secular foreign policy could be serious for western security interests, they do not appear yet to comprehend the extent of changes both in Turkey and in her foreign policy. If one looks through recent literature about Turkey, it appears that almost everyone seems to agree that something is happening in Turkish foreign policy - something that has not been satisfactorily explained by Turkey specialists. But there seems to be no agreement as to what is happening and where it leads the country.¹

During the 1980s, while Turkey was passing through one of the most extensive transformations the Republic had witnessed, some argued that

1. For different and sometimes contradictory explanations of what was and is happening in Turkish foreign policy see Ferenc Váli, *Bridge Across the Bosphorus; The Foreign Policy of Turkey* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins Press, 1971); *Middle East Review, Special Issue on Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Spring 1985; Feroz Ahmad, "Islamic Reassertion in Turkey", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1988; David Barchard, "Turkey and Europe", *Turkish Review Quarterly Digest*, Vol. 3, No. 17, 1989; Duygu Sezer, "Turkey's Grand Strategy Facing a Dilemma", *International Spectator*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1992, pp. 17-32; Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview, 1993); Ola Tunander, "A New Ottoman Empire? The Choice for Turkey: Euro-Asian Center vs. National Fortress", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1995; Andrew Mango, "Turkey in Winter", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, 1995; Shirin Hunter, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Islamic Past or European Future?*, CEPS Paper No. 63 (Brussels: CEPS, 1995); Mustafa Aydın, "Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of Change", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1996, pp. 157-177; Eric Rouleau, "Turkey: Beyond Atatürk", *Foreign Policy*, No. 103, 1999; William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000* (Londra: Frank Cass, 2002); Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası; Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Yorumlar, Belgeler*, 2 Volumes (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001).

Kemalism was "in the process of being buried with Özal",² and Turkey was "... facing the most serious threat from Islamic forces since the inception of the modern republic".³ Others, while not sure as to whether "Turkish secularism [was] likely to be compromised" in the international and domestic spheres,⁴ nevertheless maintained that "...if pressures from international politics become too strong, it is not inconceivable that they will strengthen those who would like to see greater emphasis on Islam as a guide in the conduct of internal affairs".⁵ Such a development could, naturally, have serious foreign policy implications for Turkey. Others disagreed, arguing that a "newly diversified Turkish foreign policy is bound to weaken even further the demagogic appeal on the Turkish domestic scene of such themes as Islamic fundamentalism and neutralism. Thus it will contribute indirectly but materially to the country's political stability".⁶ Moreover, they maintained that "the tendency to move away from Western culture", which had been enjoyed only by the elite, was natural in a "democratic age of consumerism".⁷

One may ask, then, why there are so many conflicting arguments about Turkey and her intentions. The obvious answer is that, in the absence of in-depth studies covering exclusively different aspects of Turkish foreign policy and its fundamentals, it would be too optimistic to expect any analysis to be accepted without further critical inspection. The truth is that studies of Turkey and Turkish foreign policy in general, have not yet progressed to the point where a "standard" view of the country and its prospects have emerged. Isolated by Ottoman history, language and culture from the west, and by Republican history and political choice from the east, Turkey thus stands as a unique case, one which has not often been considered to be of great interest to scholars of international relations.

2. *Sunday Times*, 9 February 1986.

3. Kenneth Mackenzie, "Turkey Racked by March of Islam", *Observer* (London), 18 January 1987.

4. Walter Weiker, "Turkey, the Middle East and Islam", *Middle East Review, Special Issue on Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Spring 1985, pp. 30-32.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

6. Dankward Rustow, "Turkey's Liberal Revolution", *Middle East Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Spring 1985, p. 11.

7. Ahmad, "Islamic Reassertation in Turkey", p. 765.

Hence, Turkish foreign policy appears to be of interest only to Turks and a narrow circle of Turkish-speaking scholars, who, under various constraints, seem to concentrate their studies on the relatively narrow paths of practical descriptions of Turkey's relations with a number of countries such as Greece, the United States and more recently the European Union. As a result, the very small number of general foundational analyses of Turkish foreign policy and the various attempts to present the Turkish reality as a coherent whole have long been outdated by the rapidly changing character of the country.⁸ Furthermore, since there is a new surge of argument, yet again, about Turkey's options after the "collapse of the Turkish-American strategic partnership" in the wake of the American invasion of Iraq, it may be worthwhile to look deep into the Turkish experience to see what, in general, drives Turkish foreign policy.

Although foreign policies are played out in international fora and thus are affected by these fora, it is clear that "the foreign policy of every single state is an integral part of its peculiar system of government" and reflects its special circumstances.⁹ Therefore, our understanding of foreign policies is likely to be much more productive if we avoid looking at general forms of behaviour in international relations that could explain all the relationships between states,¹⁰ and instead, attempt to locate each case in its specific conditionality within the international system. In this context, Turkey is one of the unique players in the international system, encountering a complex set of interrelations with other players. Although one part or another of her interrelations could be fitted into, or explained by, one of the various different international relations and foreign policy analysis approaches, almost all of them, however, fail after a certain point to explain Turkish foreign policy as a coherent whole.¹¹

8. A well-written but now outdated example of the in-depth studies I am talking about is Vâli, *Bridge across the Bosphorus*. There have been two attempts recently to look into Turkish foreign policy comprehensively with an eye also on Turkey's domestic developments. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy*; and Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası*.

9. Joseph Frankel, *The Making of Foreign Policy; An Analysis of Decision-Making* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 1.

10. K. Goldman, *Change and Stability In Foreign Policy; The Problems and Possibilities of Détente* (New York, London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1988), p. 3.

11. For examples and a more general discussion of this issue see Mustafa Aydın, *Foreign Policy Formation and The Interaction Between Domestic and International Environments: A Study of Change In Turkish Foreign Policy, 1980-1991*, Ph.D. Thesis, Lancaster University, UK, 1994, pp. 8-32.

Nonetheless, foreign policies are not made in a vacuum. Foreign policy making bodies of any state receive inputs (demands for action, values, threats, feedback) from the outside world and respond to these inputs.¹² If we wish to make sense of the foreign policy process we need to look at these inputs and their interrelationship. What makes it difficult to use these factors (inputs and outputs) as a useful tool of analysis is their elastic character, which needs to be adjusted and changed to fit a given historical and concrete situation. Therefore, it is hardly possible to specify a precise number of factors which affects foreign policy making in all countries, in the same way, all the time. Moreover, analysis of a specific policy or a specific situation may require a different emphasis on various factors.¹³ Thus, especially when studying the foreign policy formulation of a specific country in a specific time period, some thought should be given beforehand to the factors that contribute to the foreign policy decision-making. Clearly, the factors that can determine and condition the plans and choices made by foreign policy officials are too many and too varied to be enumerated,¹⁴ and the fact that foreign policy formulation is more often a response to immediate pressures from other states and the flow of events, rather than a result of long-range planning,¹⁵ makes it all the more difficult to get to the root of the matter.

Nevertheless, experience and tradition over time - in combination with basic values and norms - create a set of relatively inflexible principles.¹⁶ What affects the process of formation of these principles varies from state to state. I argued elsewhere¹⁷ that, while looking at the elements that shape Turkish foreign policy, one can see, with some degree of over-simplification, the interplay of two kinds of variables. One kind, which may be called structural variables, is

12. Brian White, "Analysing Foreign Policy: Problems and Approaches" in Michael Clarke and Brian White (eds.), *Understanding Foreign Policy: The Foreign Policy Systems Approach* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989), p. 9.

13. Felix Gros, *Foreign Policy Analysis* (New York: 1954), p. 97.

14. James N. Rosenau, "The Study of Foreign Policy" in James N. Rosenau, Kenneth W. Thompson and Gavin Boyd (eds.), *World Politics: An Introduction* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. 17.

15. Kreppel R. Legg and J. F. Morrison, *Politics and International System; An Introduction* (New York: Evanston, 1971), p. 134.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

17. Mustafa Aydın, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1999, pp. 152-186.

continuous, and rather static. The other, which may be termed *conjunctural* variables, is dynamic and subject to change under the influence of domestic and foreign developments.¹⁸ The structural factors are not directly related to the international political medium and the daily happenings of foreign politics. They can exert a long term influence over the determination of foreign policy goals. Geographical position, historical experiences and cultural background, together with national stereotypes and images of other nations, and long term economic necessities would fall into the category of structural variables. *Conjunctural* variables, on the other hand, are made up of a web of interrelated developments in domestic politics and international relations. Although not displaying any long term continuity like the structural static factors, these dynamic factors do exert temporary influence on a country's foreign policy and especially on its daily implementation. *Conjunctural* changes in the international system, such as the end of the Cold War, shifts in the world's present balance of power, domestic political changes, daily scarcities of economic factors, and the personalities of specific decision-makers, would fall into this category.

Since, in this context, in order realistically to portray any country's foreign policy, one has to appraise carefully, first of all, the elements and principles which shape it, this paper will first look at structural and conjectural determinants of Turkish foreign policy. Then, we will look at the factors that affected Turkish foreign policy just before and after the end of the Cold War, in an attempt to realistically portray future orientations of Turkey.

18. This line of categorisation of the sources brings to mind Roseau's time continuum, in which he puts the sources that tend to change slowly at one end, and the sources that tend to undergo rapid change at the other end. His categorisation also includes the systemic aggregation, which includes systemic, societal, governmental, and idiosyncratic sources. See Rosenau, "The Study of Foreign Policy"; and James N. Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1971).