

**Turkish Foreign Policy, Old Problems, New
Parameters**

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Unidad de Investigación sobre Seguridad y Cooperación Internacional
Research Unit on International Security and Cooperation

Maquetado por: Eric Pardo Sauvageot

E-mail: unisci@cps.ucm.es

Website: www.ucm.es/info/unisci

Phone: (+ 34) 91 394 2924

Fax: (+ 34) 91 394 2655

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Presentation

This book coordinated by Professor Mustafa Aydın, Rector of Kadir Has University, can be considered an important contribution to our knowledge of current Turkish Foreign Policy.

Several years ago in Istanbul, UNISCI had the opportunity to contrast its views on Turkish Foreign and Security Policy with the views of several relevant scholars selected by Professor Aydın. The outcome was the book entitled "Turkish Foreign and Security Policy. Its Environs in Eurasia and the Middle East". It was published in December 2006. Several of the Turkish co-authors make here another contribution to the topic. It can be said that in the last four years we have been witness to a sea change in Turkish Foreign Policy.

First, the changes introduced by the AKP party and the diminishing role of the Army in internal and foreign policies as well as its growing lack of cohesion should be noted.

In second place the implications of the democratization process against a background of internal Islamization.

In third place the new foreign policy designated, "New Ottoman", created by Foreign Minister Davutoglu (with the fundamental support of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan) which according to different chapters, can be qualified on occasions as "grandiose", and implies a clear departure from the traditional Turkish Foreign Policies of the nineties and the beginning of this decade. Several years ago it was obvious that Turkey was becoming little by little a more assertive state. Turkey, we stated in the book, could not follow the US policies in its neighbourhood and "has to change, sitting in its own driving sit". However it is now obvious that a major change in foreign policy also involves limitations for a medium power and can produce unwilling consequences. That is the case of the present Turkish Foreign Policy. The relationship with neighbouring countries, becoming an important player in the Caucasus, the populist criteria, the new approach to the Middle East, the possible implications and involvement in inter-Arab and intra-Arab-Iran disputes, the lack of progress in the Armenian dossier, the difficult negotiations on Cyprus, the asymmetries in the Turkish-US relationship, the implications of the energy agreements, the policies to be implemented towards Russia- a difficult and traditionally rival neighbour-,

and finally the aspiration to membership of the EU in the new internal and external context are all interrelated issues in the new Turkish Foreign Policy that requires a very careful review and interrelated evaluation-including a sophisticated theoretical approach- on goals, movements and consequences. On occasions, the chapters point out that it is difficult to identify internal coherence within some Turkish movements and approaches, including the theoretical approaches behind them. That is partly the normal result of the broad changes affecting the planning and implementation of the present Turkish Foreign and Security Policy.

These critical analyses contribute to opening up the horizon to the reader in order to facilitate an understanding of the deep changes affecting the Turkish political environment and the difficult process of adaptation that Turkey has to manage, balancing East and West in a clear departure from the Kemal Ataturk vision. Nevertheless, Turkey remains an important regional player.

With the publication of this book, UNISCI wants to make a contribution to the debate on the present Turkish Foreign Policy

Antonio Marquina, Chairman and Director of UNISCI

Introduction

Mustafa Aydin

Turkish foreign policy has undergone an overarching transformation in recent years. In contrast to most of the 1970s and 1980s, when Turkey was predominantly an inward-looking country, and 1990s when its foreign policy was defined with aggressive activism, the first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a transformation of Turkey into a cooperative and conciliatory neighbor and willing international partner. Although the transformation is widely connected in international circles with the rise of AKP government and especially its current foreign minister, Mr Ahmet Davudoglu, into power, the trend in fact dates back roughly to the early 1990s. The activism of the former president Turgut Ozal during the early 1990s, focusing on economic cooperation all around Turkey and trying expand Turkey's inroads in Middle East, Black Sea and Eurasia in general was the starting point. Later on, in late 1990s came the then foreign minister of a coalition government, Mr Ismail Cem, who focused on Turkey's ability to connect with its immediate neighborhood to create a ring of friendly countries, a zone of peace so to speak, around Turkey. This policy was most visible first at the rapprochement with Greece and then with Syria after a tense confrontation in 1998-1999.

The rise of AKP to power in 2002 coincided with coming to fore of the three international problems that occupied Turkish foreign policy most of the next few years. The first problem was the US involvement and later occupation of Iraq. Turkey was asked in March 2003 and refused to participate to US operation in Iraq. This set the tone of Turkish-American relations, hence created limitations for Turkish foreign policy, during the Bush era in the US. The second issue was Turkey's membership to the EU, which came to the fore after Helsinki Summit in 1999. The unofficial coalition of forces in Turkey from then onwards regarding Turkey's membership, which drew most of the countries power elites and almost 70% of the population behind, directed the newly elected AKP government in 2002 to focus on the issue. It embraced the issue enthusiastically, which resulted in the start of the accession negotiations in December 2005. The last issue was the old-age Cyprus problem, which was pushed to the agenda in connection with Turkey's EU prospects as well as renewed efforts of the

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. It occupied Turkey until late 2004, when a negotiated settlement was rejected in a referendum by Greek Cypriots on the Island.

With the containment of these three issues by the time AKP won its second general elections in 2007, allowed its enigmatic foreign minister Davudoglu to try to impose his vision on Turkish foreign policy. The signs of the intended transformation came as early as 2004 when Turkey somewhat dramatically overhauled its Cyprus policy. Then after the elections and the improvement of the Turkish-American relations with a new president in Washington, Turkey's foreign policy began to soften towards its neighborhood and new openings towards the Kurds of Iraq and later towards Armenia came. The visit of the Turkish President Abdullah Gül to Yerevan in September 2008 and to Iraq in March 2009 showed how far this transformation would go.

This compilation aims to assess that transformation and present as much as possible both the background and the end result of the changes in Turkish Foreign Policy in recent years. Turkish foreign policy literature has been growing substantially recently. Nevertheless, there is still room and this volume tries to make a contribution.

The book could be divided into two parts. The first half of the book deals with different factors that have affected Turkish foreign policy. The first chapter by Nur Bilge Criss aims at studying changing parameters of the Turkish Foreign Policy since the AKP came to power. She employs a critical stance towards AKP's foreign policy and argues that AKP, through its actions internationally, aims at public support at home. She further points out that too many involvements abroad do not lead to active or a new foreign policy, but to loss of priorities. Challenging the new populist injection into Turkey's traditional foreign policy, the chapter concludes that all the recent foreign policy initiatives lack necessary sophistication and managerial acumen that is a *sine qua non* for a successful foreign policy. The second chapter by Gencer Özcan deals with the role of military in policy making, arguing that the changing domestic power configurations since the 1999 EU Helsinki Summit and US presence in Iraq since 2002 created an atmosphere that forced Turkish military to relax its grip on Turkish politics in general. The harmonization process with the EU

deprived the military most of its bureaucratic instruments to exert influence over the government. The invasion of Iraq also caused chain reactions that eventually limited military's influential position in Turkey. Thus the chapter tries to present the combined effect of the EU reforms and the invasion of Iraq in limiting military influence on Turkish foreign policy.

The chapter by Gökhan Bacık about the rising importance of identity politics in Turkey looks into how differentiated identities of various groups came to affect Turkish political processes in the 21st century. The chapter clearly shows that, given Turkey's tens of different ethnic and religious groups, identity politics has become an important input of Turkish foreign policy as well. The chapter relies on a dynamic analysis of various groups and their identities in its effort to see how and to what extent different identities are reflected in Turkey's international relations and whether they are relevant factors in foreign policy making. Next chapter, a collaborative effort by Bican Şahin and Mete Yıldız, deals with transnational networks and their effect in promoting democratization and human rights in Turkey. They argue that in a global world, foreign/international and domestic/national NGOs work together on many issues including democratization and human rights, and aim to examine the cooperation between the foreign and domestic NGOs in Turkey in promoting democratization and human rights. Based on archival research and semi-structured interviews, they show that the NGOs generally cooperate to overcome the limitations of the suspicious environment they find themselves in Turkey. The final chapter in the first half is from Mert Bilgin, who deals with Turkey's energy strategy and argues that being an energy corridor, hub or center, all claimed by Turkish decision makers at different times recently, requires different agendas as well as a focus on energy issues in Turkish foreign policy. The chapter goes through shifts in Turkey's energy discourse from 1991 onwards and points to various inconsistencies between said discourse and foreign policy actions as well as domestic energy structure. Nevertheless, he argues that Turkey's somewhat loose energy discourse during the early 1990s has since evolved towards a strategic vision, which has affected Turkish foreign policy.

The second half of the book deals with different important connections of Turkey. The first chapter in this part looks hard into Turkey's challenging relations with the US. Ahmet K. Han, looking from a

strategic perspective, identifies the elements of a continuity in US foreign policy under Presidents Clinton, Bush Jr. and Obama and sees the Iraq War as a turning point for Turkish-American strategic partnership. He then goes on to analyse what the US President Obama named as a “Model Partnership.” The chapter contends that the prevailing determinants of relations stem from security concerns for the US and from a policy of omnibalancing for the AKP government. After questioning the content of the “Model Partnership”, the chapter then goes on to lists the risks facing the Turkish-US relations, which have been the cornerstone of Turkey’s foreign policy for so long. In contrast, the next chapter by Sinem Akgül Açıkmеше starts from the premise that Turkey has increasingly moved towards Europe and thus Europeanization of Turkey in recent years has brought changes in its domestic politics. By looking into underlying dynamics of recent political reforms in Turkey, she argues that it was the possibility of EU membership that conditioned the reapid changes in Turkey. She further argues that ups and downs in Turkey’s democratization process can only be grasped with in connection with the so-called EU conditionality.

A region where Turkey under the AKP governments has developed its relations most is the Middle East. While the region was certainly neglected during the cold war, since the end of the bipolar world successive governments have attempted to bridge the gap between Turkey and its southern neighbours. Yet, various problems persisted. In her chapter entitled “Turkey’s Changing Middle East Policy”, Meliha Benli Altunışık, after a brief historical background, discusses Turkey’s recent moves in the Middle East, focusing on the changes. Within this context, the current policy is analyzed through the improvement of relations with neighbors, eagerness to play third party roles in regional conflicts, and attempts at increasing economic interdependence with the region. She finally presents the possibilities and limitations of Turkey’s new engagement. Along the same lines, Özlem Tür discusses Turkey’s relations with Syria, with which Turkey had nearly gone to war in 1998. However, since then the relationship has developed so far that, in 2009, the two countries held a joint military exercise, signed a technical military cooperation agreement, established a Turkish-Syrian High Level Strategic Cooperation Council and lifted the visa requirement. These developments were unthinkable only a

decade ago. The chapter explores the dynamics of change in the relationship and argues that not only international developments, but also domestic concerns played important role in deepening the relationship. Bashar Asad’s rise to power on Syrian side and the need for economic development, as well as the international isolation the country is facing, have all been important. On the Turkish side, the Justice and Development Party’s new Middle East policy was instrumental in pushing the borders of the relationship.

The next chapter by Mustafa Aydın deals with Turkey’s Caucasus Policy, arguing that the emergence of newly independent states in the Caucasus at the end of the Cold War presented challenges to Turkey, while enlarging its role. As a result, Turkey became an important actor in the region and has since been drawn into the volatile politics of the region. Although Turkey’s attempt to further engage Armenia has come to a halt now, and economic and political conditions in the region are unlikely to stabilize for some years, the chapter argues that without a doubt Turkey will continue to create new networks of interdependence between Ankara and the regional capitals. In this context, Diba Nigar Göksel takes a hard look at Turkey-Armenia relations, arguing that secret talks and diplomatic efforts towards normalization of relations, which continued on and off between Turkey and Armenia since the early 1990s, culminated with the signing of two protocols in October 2009 and paved the way to start examining their troubled history. The problems and sticking points remain however, and reconciliation is not easy. The chapter presents the reasons why a stalemate has ensued after the signature of the protocols.

The final chapter deals with another Turkish problematic relationship which has undergone an immense change in recent years. Fuat Aksu analyses Turkey’s relations with Greece and looks into the future of Cyprus problem. He argues that the main problematic factor in Turkish-Greek relations had been the absence of a basis for dialogue and negotiation. The previous efforts for dialogue had proved inadequate due to a lack of trust between the two countries. But the last process of confidence-building adopted after the crisis of the 1990s proved durable and a détente ensued since then. Moreover, with Turkey’s candidate status for EU membership, the focus of relationship between Turkey and Greece shifted to European platforms. Even though this created an appropriate

basis for the development of dialogue and cooperation, it did not help in solving the fundamental problems. In particular, the Cyprus EU membership has altered the balance against Turkish Cypriots and Turkey and thus, in contrast to European expectations, limited the possibility of finding a solution. Although the "European anchor" has kept the relations between Turkey and Greece stable, the Cyprus problem proved more difficult to crack and might become a game spoiler when Turkey's membership prospects into the EU start to soar.