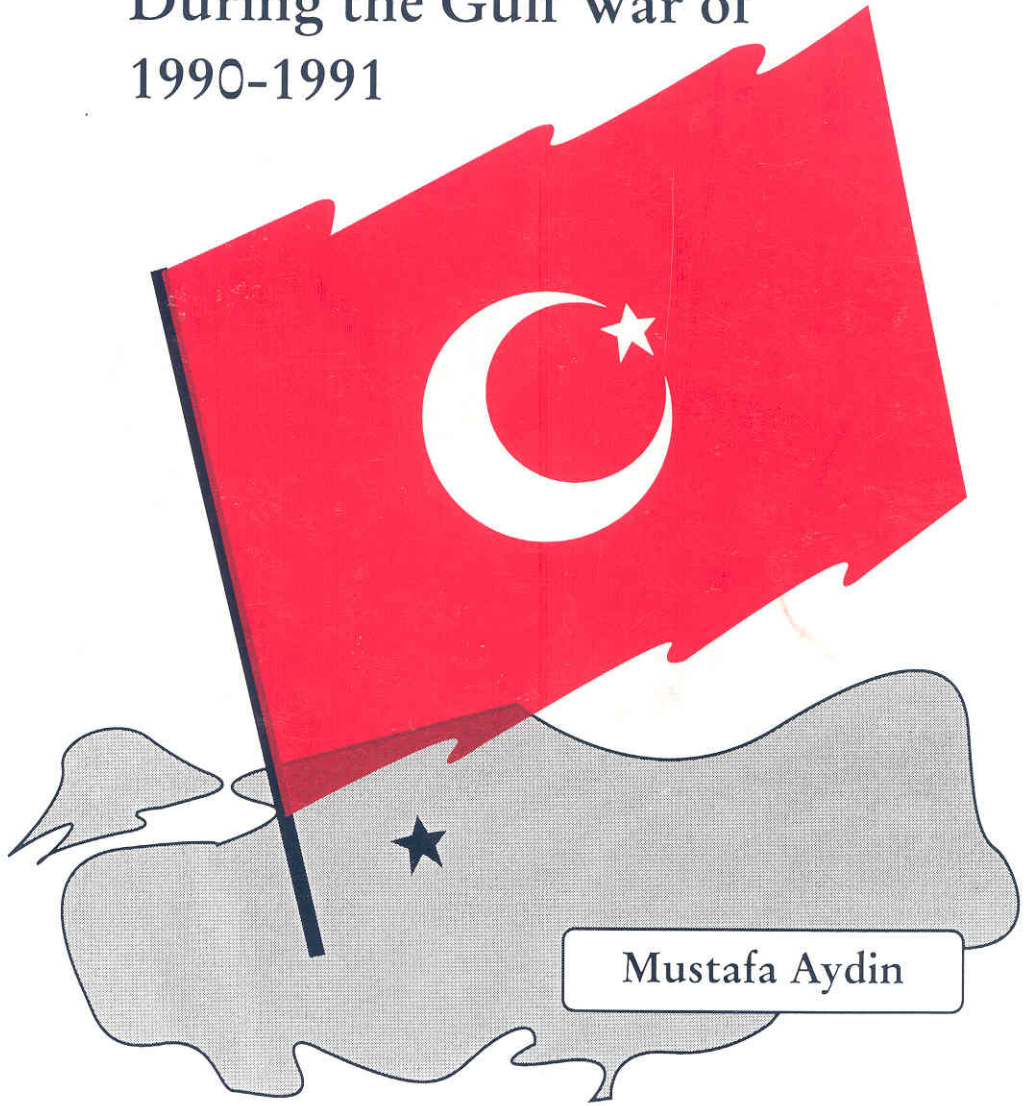


Turkish Foreign Policy During the Gulf War of 1990-1991



Mustafa Aydın

CAIRO PAPERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE
Volume 21, Number 1

CAIRO PAPERS
IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Volume 21, Number 1, Spring 1998

**TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY
DURING THE GULF WAR
OF 1990-1991**

by

MUSTAFA AYDIN

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO PRESS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION -----	1
CHAPTER ONE: THE PRELUDE -----	5
CHAPTER TWO: THE CRISIS -----	14
CHAPTER THREE: THE WAR -----	44
CHAPTER FOUR: THE AFTERMATH -----	49
CHAPTER FIVE: REAPPRAISAL -----	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY -----	81
ABOUT THE AUTHOR-----	85

INTRODUCTION

We should not be cowardly; we should not shy away from war if necessary. If we want to create a better world, war is nothing to be afraid of.¹

The developments and the point we have reached today reveal to both friend and foe that the policy Turkey followed [during the Gulf Crisis] was far-sighted, realistic and correct.²

The decade of the 1980s brought profound changes to Turkey. Politically, economically, culturally, and socially the country witnessed sharper changes than perhaps at any other time since the 1920s. During this multi-faceted evolution, the foreign policy could hardly have been standing still. Accordingly, this research will look at the changing environment of Turkish foreign policy-making and the evolving reasoning, that is domestic political, economic, and social as well as external inputs, behind the general policies through the Gulf War.

The reasons for the choice of the Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991 to demonstrate changes in Turkish foreign policy stand obvious from many aspects. First of all, the Gulf Crisis and the accompanying end of the Cold War marked the most important international development since the Second World War; its close proximity to Turkey so profoundly affected her. This was the occasion where she came closest to entering an international war. The Cyprus intervention of 1974 was a limited affair, and the only other military conflict she was involved in was fought over the far away lands of Korea. The Gulf War, on the other hand, was painfully close to home and carried with it the dangers of engulfing the whole country into a war that she was neither ready nor enthusiastic for. Yet the crisis was the one which presented, in the mid-to-long term, the most acute repercussions on Turkey's own national security. Moreover, the crisis demonstrated effectively the

¹ Turgut Ozal, during a "public reception" at the presidential palace on January 22, live on TV. Quoted in *Briefing*, weekly magazine on Turkish politics, economy and foreign affairs (Ankara), January 28, 1991, pp. 6-7, "Incirlik Produces Acrimony in Domestic Politics".

² Turgut Ozal, statement on February 28, 1991, after the cease-fire in the Gulf War. Reprinted in *Newspot*, semi-official weekly (Ankara), March 7, 1991.

changes that took place in Turkey and in her ideological underpinnings vis-a-vis her immediate surroundings.

Since the end of the Second World War, for almost forty years, Turkish foreign policy had followed the Western lead. Throughout the Cold War she was a distant outpost on the European periphery, a barrier to Soviet ambitions in the Middle East, and a contributor to the security of Europe. Her geostrategic "value" was largely limited to her role within the Atlantic Alliance and, more narrowly, her place within NATO's southern flank. During this period, Turkey had, to a surprising extent, ignored the volatile politics of the Middle East and in turn was ignored mostly by her southern neighbors.

However, her traditional foreign policy of non-intervention and non-involvement in Middle Eastern politics had been challenged during the second half of 1980s by two equally important developments: the end of the Cold War and the frustration of Turkey's hopes to join the EC.³ While the end of the Cold War had reduced Turkey's importance to the West on the southern flank of NATO, and thus signalled an end to the military and economic benefits derived from it, the events in Eastern Europe further undermined Turkey's chances of joining Europe as the EU would give priority to accommodating the newly democratic East European countries before considering Turkey. Thus, after the rejection of Turkey's application for full membership in 1989 by the EC, and the sudden changes in the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Turkey seemed, by 1990, to be left alone with fundamental political, orientational, and defense dilemmas.

Given the fact that orientation toward Europe and eventual integration in it were the underpinnings of Turkey's Kemalist foreign policy, the recent changes in international politics inevitably came to test their continued validity. It is recognition of these facts that led Turkish officials to look for new principles to guide the country's foreign policy, and that shaped many of Turkey's recent foreign policy moves, including her growing activist policy toward the Middle East, highlighted by the high profile during the Gulf Crisis.⁴

³ See S. Hunter, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Options", *Middle East International* (MEI), No. 400, May 17, 1991, pp. 18-19.

⁴ For more elaboration of Turkey's recent orientations see I. Lesser, "Turkey and the West After the Gulf War", *International Spectator*, Vol. 27 (1), January-March 1992, pp. 33-46; G. E. Fuller, and I. O. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics*;

Further, Turkey's foreign policy during the Crisis was a perfect example of *one-man rule à la Ozal*. There is no doubt whatsoever that Ozal dominated Turkish policy-making during the Gulf Crisis and thus himself alone deserved any credit or criticism derived from it. While the domestic discussion over the constitutional boundaries of the president's rights and responsibilities was heightened by Ozal's controversial standing, the prime minister and foreign ministry officials were both forced, to the embarrassment of the latter, to the background by his highly visible public stance and successfully publicized foreign contacts, including almost daily phone calls to and from President Bush of the United States.⁵

Although this controversial meddling with the government's business cost him the highly visible and critical resignations of three top officials, the foreign and defense ministers, and the Chief of Staff, who left with protests over his conduct and style of policy-making, it was President Ozal again who remained in his place and was able, despite the widespread domestic misgivings, to claim at the end of the crisis that Turkey had passed this important test "with flying colors".⁶

Furthermore, the crisis took place at a time when the fundamental paradigms of the bipolar system were dramatically altered and the so-called "new world order" was emerging. Thus Turkey's stand in the Gulf War was also poised to demonstrate, or give us clues about, the response of Turkey to the newly emerging world system that effectively made it impossible for

From The Balkans To Western China (New York, London: Westview Press, 1993); E. Rouleau, "The Challenges to Turkey", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72 (5), November-December 1993, pp. 110-126; A. Bozer, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Changing World", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (3), 1990. M. Aydin, "Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of Change", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15 (2), 1996, pp. 157-177. For a useful analysis of Turkey's relations with the Middle East and its changing role in regional politics following the Gulf Crisis, see P. Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991).

⁵ On one occasion, his phone call to Washington caught President Bush in the middle of a press conference, which the latter immediately broke because "President Ozal of Turkey is on the line". Later footage of this incident was shown on Turkish state TV over and over again in an apparent attempt to boast the president's popularity. His close cooperation with the US during the crisis earned him the title, in the words of US President Bush, "the staunchest ally of the US". See, *Briefing*, August, 13, 1990, p. 15.

⁶ *Milliyet*, daily (Istanbul), March 3, 1991.

Turkey to follow her traditionalist foreign policy based on relative safety and stability of the Cold War politics.

Against this general background, the following chapters will address Turkish foreign policy during the various stages of the Gulf War, concluding with an assessment of this policy.

سياسة تركيا الخارجية
في حرب الخليج
١٩٩٠-١٩٩١



مصطفى أيدن

بحوث القاهرة في العلوم الإجتماعية
مجلة ٢١ العدد ١