



RESEARCH PAPER

Turkish Foreign Policy from Zero Problem Policy to Hegemonic Behavior in South Caucasus

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In 2002, in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party became the ruling power. Soon after its rule, The Justice and Development Party started to reshape the Turkish Foreign Policy. Tayyip Erdogan's advisor, Ahmet Davutogluo devised the Foreign Policy according to new principles to protect the interests of Turkey. Under the new trend, Turkey, for the first time reshaped its relation giving more importance to the eastern world rather than the west. Instead of the USA, Turkey started to show inclination towards China and Russia. Turkey, very clearly expressed that she will not depend for its interests, entirely on Europe. Formerly, Turkey tried to adopt the doctrine of Zero-Problem-Policy, but the Arab Spring and the USA's and West's interference with this matter, made Turkey revisit its Zero-Problem-Policy and drift away from the USA and the west. 'Neither the West nor the USA, but an Independent Turkey became the prominent trend in the Turkish Foreign Policy. Under the emerging trend Turkey has been facing difficulties and challenges on national as well as on international level. Even the unsuccessful military coup d'état galvanized the policy of 'Dewesternization in Turkish Foreign Policy'. The current research encompasses the changes and challenges in adopting the new trend in Turkish Foreign Policy.

Introduction

In 2002, the newly elected government in Turkey reshaped its foreign policy. The government wanted to renew relations with the Eastern and the Western world. The multi-polar system was becoming stronger over time, so the AKP government shaped the foreign policy according to the nature of politics in the world. The interests of Turkey have changed that is why the Turkish government also changed the foreign policy according to the region especially in the Middle East. Turkey started to move from the Western world to the Eastern world and towards the

Islamic world. It can be called Neo-Ottoman foreign policy of the AKP which has a core objective to dominate the region and play a vital role in the Muslim world and international politics.

The newly elected Foreign Minister of Turkey Davatuglu developed the Turkish foreign policy on the concept of strategic depth mean to play a role in every field and in every region in Europe, Eastern Balkan, Caucasias, Central Asia, Caspian, and Gulf and in the Black Sea as a power.

Infect these multi-polar regional identities as well as Turkey's historical and legacy mandate a foreign policy that is multifaceted with the main goal of promoting good neighborhood with all, to replace disagreement with cooperation to seek innovative mechanism and channels to resolve regional conflicts to encourage positive change in the region, and to build cross-cultural bridges of dialogues and understanding (Murinson, 2006).

The Foreigner Minister Devatogulo described in his book all the efforts which he made as an advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to establish and enhanced turkey's relations with the European and Islamic states. The geo-political importance of Turkey has increased for the Western world because Turkey is located in the centre of political activities like Middle East, Balkan and Central Asia. Turkey is playing an active role in these regions.

According to his point of view –as was the case during the Ottoman Empire – Turkey must serve as the epicenter for regional events, rediscovering its historic and geographic identity along with balancing the approach towards all global and regional actors and building strong economic linkages with all regional states (Davutoğlu, 2008.)

The government of AKP not only enhanced the trade relations of Turkey toward the neighboring states but also improved her bilateral relations with Syria, Iran, Greece and Russia. All such efforts demonstrate that the AKP is pursuing its zero problem policy with its neighbors, improving its relations explicitly with Islamic regions but also reaching the non-Islamic government (Kanat, 2010).

The Turkish Foreign Minister wrote that their foreign policy is not based on Islamic sentiments; he says that there should be a balance in relations with the states and international organizations. In this trend must be recognized a deep degree of pragmatism which underlines significant continuity concerning AKP's foreign policy activism. (Hale, 2009)

If analyzed the Turkish foreign policy under the government of AKP can be divided into different periods in which Turkey focused on Europeanization and Eurasianism. Turkey wanted to improve its relations with regional states and the Islamic world but Turkey also did not ignore the Western world or European region. What distinguishes this strategy is that the Western orientations is still a strong

element of Turkish foreign policy but will likely continue in a more flexible form (Öniş & Şuhnaz,).

Many elements become the cause of changes in the foreign policy of Turkey. The prominent elements can be the changes at the internal level and the international level. The Turkish government gave importance to its identity, culture and historical values. Turkey is struggling to consolidate democracy while preserving secularism. It will be an interaction of the domestic factors that will determine the Critical equilibrium and path of new activism in Turkish foreign policy (Çağaptay, 2007).

In the past few years of AKP governance, Turkey's foreign policy was transformed from that of hard power to soft power and recent internal and external development have contributed to Ankara's soft power potential (Oğuzlu, 2007).

But the most important thing is that the relationship between the army and government changed and that is why the Turkish government enhanced the process of de-secularization. The government is working on the consensus developing for resolving the different issues and problem which were not addressed by the preceding government in Turkey.

It was the Soviet threat only that compelled Turkey to make relations with the Western world and the US. But after the cold war, the Turkish foreign policy changed and in the time of AKP in 2003 Turkish government refused to provide help to the US and UK against Iraq. This was a clear message that Turkey believes good relations with the neighbor and Turkish foreign policy will be shaped according to the desire of the Turkish nation. Turkey also wants to establish good relations with the European Union to fulfill the gap that emerged due to the Turkish stand against the US war on Iraq. But at the same time, the growing anxiety about the exact nature of Turkey's future relationship with the European Union added additional currency to the idea of pursuing a multifaceted foreign policy (Hale & Özbudun, 2011).

According to the realist school of thought, Turkey is an emerging economic power and in the region, she will secure her interest and with the Western world, she will also work for securing her national interest on the regional level as well as internationally.

According to the AKP government, the European Union accession process is seen through the perspective of its value that depends on the realizations of Turkish economic interest abroad and on the democratic dynamics domestically (Hale & Özbudun, 2011). Turkey is playing a vital role in the politics of the Middle East. Some scholars are arguing that it is due to AKP's hidden Islamist agenda and this is also the proof that Turkey is moving towards the East. In 2007, AKP won the election and Ahmet Davutoglu a professor of international relations became the Foreign Minister and he reshaped the whole policy. But when Arab spring came the criticism started on the Turkish foreign policymakers because Turkey could not play a vital role in this regard. And she could not save the government of the Mursi that was

removed after a military coup. On the other hand, Turkey failed to achieve membership of the European Union so such factors affected the Turkish foreign policy and Turkey started to move towards the Asian states. Meanwhile, the structure of the Middle East was also changing. In 2000 Turkey's trade with European Union was 57.7 percent, with Asia was only 10 percent, with Latin America its trade was 0.9 percent and with other non-European states, its trade was 9.7 percent. In 2012, the trade partners of Turkey were the same but the trade ratio changed. Its trade with EU was 37.6 percent with Asia its trade become 15.4 percent, with Latin American states its trade become 1.6 percent with Africa 1.7 percent and other states its trade ratio increased by 13.3 percent. These figures show the great change in Turkish foreign policy. In other citable examples are the Turkish stand on the Freedom Flotilla, Turkish rapprochements towards Iran, Sudan and tense relations with Israel and Armenia.

The military coup on 15th July 2016 was failed with the help of Turk masses who resisted practically. This coup showed the distorted relations of Turkey with the Western states, especially with the USA. After the removal of different internal hurdles, Turkish president visited Russia and restored her relations with the Putin administration.

The Turkish president also accused the US and the Western world to support the military coup or rebellion and also demanded the US to hand over Fatah Ullah Gulin to the Turkish government, because he was considered to be a severe incident in which hundreds of Turks lost their lives. The Obama administration refused the Turkish government's request and they demanded proofs in this regard.

Turkey, who was going against the Russian policy over the Syrian crisis suddenly, normalized its relations with Russia. Turkey had shot down a Russian jet on its border with Syria on 24 November 2015(BBC News English 24 Nov 2015), due to which relations between Turkey and Russia became worse. Russian President Putin said that plane which had two crew members was flying at an altitude of 6,000 meter when it was hit by an air to air missile. The Russian jet was crashed in the mountainous area of the Syrian province of Latakia, one pilot and one marine were dead. On the other side, Turkish officials claimed that two warplanes of unknown nationality had violated the Turkish air space near the town of Yayladagi in Hatay province and planes were warned 10 times and asked them to change their direction. But the planes disregarded the warning and then the Turkish Air Force had to hit those Jets.

But Russian favour to the Turkish government and the Turkish president's visited to Russia after failed military coup normalized all this and this was not acceptable for the US and the Western world.

Turkish Foreign policy in the South Caucasus

In examining the foreign policy of Turkey in the South Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan, and its impact on the Azerbaijan-Iran relations, it is necessary to divide

its foreign policy into two parts. The era before the AKP came to power, in which Kemalist policies guided the foreign policy of this country, and the rise to power of the AKP since 2002 in which the foreign policy has been based on new principles, and in academic circles is remembered as a neo-Ottomanism (Taspinar, 2011). Turkish foreign policy principles derived from Kemalist westernism policy in the Turkish constitution of 1937 were based on the following six principles: 1. Nationalism, 2. Secularism, 3. Republicanism, 4. Populism, 5. Statism, and 6. Reformism. These features first led to Turkey's resignation of regional issues, and secondly, became close to the West to exploit the country's economy due to some needs such as modernization, (Baran, 2010) and strive to be recognized as a European nation, and be accepted in the Western Civilization (Omidi & Rezai, 2011). After the collapse of the Soviet Union different states emerged on the map of the world. Turkey started to establish its foreign relations with the newly established regional states. The main interest in this region for Turkey the energy resources. And that is why it is the top priority in Ankara's foreign policy to establish friendly and bilateral relations with these states. Turkey also wants to play a vital role in three main states in the south Caucasus region named Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. But Turkey here established good relations with Azerbaijan and she is only the most reliable and economic partner of Turkey.

Turkey is the immediate neighbor of South Caucasus and Caucasian countries and having historical roots in this region when the Ottoman Empire dominated the region in its glorious time. Now in the recent time, Turkey is a regional power and she is facing challenges in this region and two other states those are also regional power and having strong influenced are Russia and Iran. But disputes between Iran and Azerbaijan in the energy field and its transfer are other most important issues, which are the underlying disputes between the two countries since the first years after the founding of Azerbaijan (Blandy, 1998). But Turkey and Russia are two major power and active in this region. The notable thing is that these two states are never directly involved in conflicts with each other. Even Turkey was in the Western camp when the cold war was started after World War 2 in 1945. The Russian government adopted a careful approach here and also and Turkey also showed good intention to establish good relationships with these states.

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party won the election and made government and they introduced transformation in Turkish foreign policy on a high-level. The foreign policy adviser of Turkish prime Minister Eurdigne gave a new foreign policy to Turkey on the new patterns. The foreign policy objective of the country is the establishment of a stable region around. Nullifying the problems with neighbors is based on some core principles include:

- i. Equal security for all
- ii. Economic integration
- iii. Coexistence of different cultures

- iv. High political participation
- v. Understand the relationship between security, stability and development (Yesiltas & Balci, 2013).

Turkey developed her relations with the neighboring countries so that economic and social development can be achieved. One of the mechanisms of influencing and managing the region for Turkey is first, the formation of regional organizations such as the Organization of Black Sea cooperation and TRACECA in the framework of common economic and security interests (Solat, 2012). And Turkey wants to balance its relations with the other states in the neighbor and other regions. Turkey is not feeling the pride to use a Western state for itself. And she does not want to play her role in the political system as a Western state. When Turkey started her role in this region it faced issues due to other states, like Transportation of oil and gas of the region through ways other than Iran. Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan and Baku - Yerevan - Ankara routes are the lines opposite to the proposed routes of Iran to transport Azerbaijani and the Caspian Sea oil, and are supported by the U. S. and Turkey at the same time (Rafi & Mazloumi, 2012). The newly established government realized her economic needs and interest in the energy sector so she started to work for the construction of the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan pipeline in 2005 this project increased the role and importance of Turkey in the region. This pipeline also became the base of the other pipeline project Trans Adriatic Pipeline and Trans Anatolian Pipeline. These projects have a great influence and got importance in the energy sector. These projects were for the reduction of the European market on the Russian energy resources but the role of Turkey increased in this region.

The role of Turkey in regional politics increased when she played a role in Nigarno Karabakh twenty years ago when in 2008 a conflict or limited war broke out between Russia and Georgia Turkey play a balanced role here also between these states even in March 2014 when Russia annexed the Crimea the government of Justice and Development Party avoids confrontation with the Russian government in the diplomacy. The Turkish government from the very beginning wanted to stable its relations with the South Caucasus states but ups and downs in these relations came when internal changes occurred and when the Russian government behaved aggressively. Turkey's relations with Azerbaijan are examples but relations between Turkey and Armenia were not good since long, even the genocide of Armenians by the Turks is a historical issue which is cited time and again by the Armenian government. After the Soviet Union's disintegration the issue of Nicarno Karabakh arose and Turkey fully supported Azerbaijan. The international community also recognized the rights of Azerbaijan on Nicarno Karabakh. When Turkey raised this issue in response Armenia raised the issue of genocide of 1915.

Georgia has a short history as an independent state after the fall of the USSR. Georgia had a complicated and problematic past since it became independent. At the same time, it is a reality that it is a weak and small country. It has a difficult neighborhood position with Iran, Russia and Turkey which are confused about each other's activities in the South Caucasus (MacFarlane, 2012). Turkey established its

domination by Ottoman Empire and ruled her territory for a long time. In 1991 after the emergence of Armenia, there was an opportunity for Turkey and Georgia to establish relations and they started to establish good relations with each other because they are complimentary for each other because:

- i. Georgia is an entrance territory to the Caucasus and Central Asian region
- ii. Hydrocarbons of the Caspian Sea reach through Georgia to the Turkish ports and other markets of the world

There are two main reasons that increase the importance of Turkey for Georgia i.e

- i. Turkey is a gateway towards Europe to Georgia and the Turkish membership of the EU also increases the importance of Turkey.
- ii. Because of the conflicts of Georgia with Russia it is necessary for Georgia to establish good relations with Turkey so that she can balance the power of both in economy and military.

Different issues sometimes affect the relations between these two states these issues are religious social and political one of such examples is the Revolution of Roses in 2003. Sometimes these changes affect or suspend the relations with the other states but it was the Turkish foreign policymakers who worked for better relations for these states and ignored the minor issues.

Azerbaijan's Victory in the War with Armenia and Turkish Role

Nicorno Karabakh is a territory that was the major cause of conflict in South Caucasus state Azerbaijan and Armenia. It was the territory of Azberjan and the international community also recognized it as a part of Azerbaijan but it was occupied by ethnic Armenian groups with the support of the Armenian military in 1990. However, officially, Armenia denies being a party to the conflict (Kruger, 2010).

Turkey and Azerbaijan had strong military-economic cultural and social relations. The Turkish president Eurdogne used the phrase, 'one nation two states' to describe the nature of their relationship. However, Turkey and Armenia remained in a state of conflict since the time of the Ottoman Empire as Armenia accused Turkey of killing 1.5 million Armenian people in genocide but Turkey rejected this accusation strongly and never accept it.

In 2002, Justice and Development Party set up the government and reshaped the Turkish foreign policy in which friendly relations with the neighboring countries were the top priorities even in 2008, Turkey adopted the policy of rapprochement towards Armenia. But all the Turkish efforts were proved to be useless and Armenia lost this chance then the Turkish government and Azeri government drew closer further. Azerbaijan and Turkey increased the military relations and Turkey provided

military officers for the training of Azerbaijan armed forces and became the third-largest weapon supplier to the Azerbaijan after Israel and Russia.

The Turkish government changed the strategy and notion of zero problems with neighbors, it started to frame her policies on the realistic approach to work for the only interest of Turkey. Turkey played a vital role and became bolder for the military support of Azerbaijan. It is a reason that in the recent times Turkey was involved in military bases in Iraq, Syria and Libya and she also used a hard power approach in dispute with Cyprus and Greece over maritime border and energy resources.

In July clashes started between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the border and in September a full-fledged war broke out in the region between these two states. Turkey encouraged the Azerbaijan for this so that Azerbaijan could achieve a decisive military victory. It seems that Turkey wanted to make Azeri forces fully prepared for this military venture. Both the states held the military exercises in July August 2020 and Turkey left her two F 16 for Azerbaijan. Turkey's military export increased six folds in the year 2020 including Turkish manufactured Bayraktar TB2 drones.

The Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is considered to be pro-Western so this was the best time because this time Armenian leadership was not supported by Russia. The regional power Russia is working with both the state in a balance paradigm. The Azeri administration was hopeful that Russia will not react offensively against the Azeri attack on Nagorno Karabakh on such a level that can be a hurdle for Azerbaijan to achieve its interest in the region. The other reason is that Azerbaijan's relations with Russia were also good.

The Azerbaijan army used the drones made by Israel and Turkey. On 6 October 2020 Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu met Azeri president Ilham Aliyev and ensured the favor to Azerbaijan.

The government of the Justice and Development Party fully support the Azeri forces' military operations on the border and Nagorno Karabakh and that is why the Western world showed concerns in the beginning and then criticized the Turkish role in this war and accused Turkey to play a dangerous role in this region to destabilize the regional peace. On the other side, Turkey ignored pressure from the West and its military support continued to Azerbaijan. The public in Turkey and Azerbaijan also wanted to continue the war against Armenia till the decisive victory as it was the golden chance for Azerbaijan so there was pressure on the Azeri government, not peace deals or any type of dialogue till the victory in Nagorno Karabakh.

The Azeri forces got success in the military field and at least 10 November 2020 with the help of the Russian government Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a treaty that ended the war in the South Caucasus region. In this war, Azeri forces succeed and occupied a large area of Nagorno Karabakh and the remaining area which was under the Armenian army would be handed over to Azerbaijan

according to the peace treaty. Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia signed a treaty to end the armed conflict in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called the deal "incredibly painful both for me and for our public."

The new peace deal increased anger in Armenia, as the public started to protest in front of the Armenian parliament, for the resignation of the political leadership of Armenia.

The peace deal, which was signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenia's prime minister, The deal had the main agenda that Azerbaijan will hold all territory of Nagorno-Karabakh that was occupied during the war. Armenia will also hand over the other areas of Nagorno Karabakh in the next few weeks. Azerbaijan said that the deal is the declaration of the victory of Azerbaijan and a defeat for Armenia.

In an address, President Putin said that Russian forces will be deployed as a peacekeeper in the border areas. In this treaty, the Turkish government also worked with the Putin administration.

According to Russian President Putin, both the states will exchange the war prisoners according to the peace deal; all economical and transport contacts will be unblocked. In Azerbaijan, there was an environment of celebrations everywhere in the state. The Azeri president Aliyev declared the agreement of historical importance and complete victory of Azerbaijan on the other side Armenian PM said that his decision had been based on deep analyses of the combat situation and in discussion with the best experts of the field. This is not a victory but there is not defeat until you consider yourself defeated. But in fact it was a decisive victory of Azerbaijan and history will not forget the role of Turkey.

Why Turkey Played the Vital Role

It is an open secret that Turkey supported Azerbaijan in the conflict of Nagorno Karabakh since the beginning of the issue about 30 years ago and the President Eurdogne's administration in late 2020 played a role in the victory of Azerbaijan with the following main objectives:

- i. Turkey supported Azerbaijan because they believe in one nation two-state ideology, Azerbaijan is the biggest regional ally of Turkey and it is an important state for the Turkish energy sector and growing economy.
- ii. Turkey imports gas from Azerbaijan raised 23 percent in 2020 SOCAR is an Azeri state oil company and it is the largest foreign investor in Turkey.

- iii. Turkey also wants to play as the hegemonic state in this region and wants to play a vital role in the region in the future.
- iv. Turkey is playing important role in the region and does not want to leave a space for the Russian role because if Turkey does not play a vital role and shows neutrality then Russia will try to play her role.
- v. The other main role is to play a psychological card towards Russia that Turkey finished the Russian role or minimized her role so in future Turkey can give a tough time to the Russian policies in the Middle East.
- vi. The Turkish role reduced the Russian influence in Azerbaijan. And it gave the message that Russian domination in the future can be reduced or challenged at any time.

The Turkish community and Azeri community are feeling superiority in the region internally the government of Justice and Development Party government acquired favor from the opposition means internally Turkish government became stronger and popular again .

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