

Lecture - Current Developments in the Turkish Foreign Policy

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Good evening and welcome, it's a great pleasure to join you here in the auditorium here at Coventry University. The last time I was here was like yourselves, as a student about 40 years ago.

I will talk to you today about Turkish Foreign Policy. This is certainly a challenging topic, which I will introduce the topic in 3 parts – 1) Historic Perspective in 3 stages 2) Ideas of the main parameters of the policy/Policy conduct 3) Conclusion – question whether there is change or continuity in the policy.

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, policy can be characterised to go through 3 main stages.

- 1) 1923 – 1947 – Naturality and low level of involvement in International Affairs
- 2) The cold war years – 1947 onwards to end of cold war in 1991 (Disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991)
- 3) 1991 onwards – Regional Power

Stage 1: The founders of the new republic were very suspicious of the international environment – not interested in extensive international engagements. They were happy they successfully conducted a war of national liberation, and interested in consolidating their own power and regime they had built. And reconstructing the economy which was destroyed by prolonged wars. Foreign Policy was characterised by a low level of involvement in international affairs. Turkey tried to resolve some of the issues of war through peaceful means, i.e. Turkey gained sovereignty over the Turkish states through negotiation of the Montre convention of 1936. New war was in the making - 1930's. Turkey made alliances with the major parties, but each Treaty stipulated conditions that would prevent the country from being dragged involuntarily into wars with other alliances. This was a successful policy – as a result, Turkey managed to stay out of the 2nd world war.

In the 2nd stage, 1947 – 1991, the cold war years: period where Turkey became interested in its own national security, to find the solutions to its challenges of its own national security by becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Towards the end of WW2, the main feature of the New World Order was already beginning to take form. The USSR expressed an interest in revising the Montreal convention on the status of the Turkish states and Turkey's borders in the East, where Turkey went to join the Western camp for security reasons. In 1944, towards the end of the war –

Turkey declared war on Germany and took part in the activities leading to the establishment of the United Nations. Turkey initiated a transition from a single regime to a multi party politics in 1946 to confirm its intention to become a part of the democratic Western community of nations and Turkey was exposed to socio-economic problems, hence rise of communism. Turkey made it possible to convince the western countries that it was necessary for Turkey to receive assistance from the US in 1947. Turkey after becoming a member of NATO sent troops to Korea to show it would be willing to deliver on its commitments in 1952. Turkey joined the Council for Europe in 1949, became a founding member of OECD IN 1961, OSCE IN 1973, applied for associate membership in EEC in 1958 and obtained an associate member status by signing the Ankara Treaty in 1963, 50 years ago. There was no EU then, but Turkey is still not a full member of the EU today. When Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952, there was focus on the Northern and Southern Flange in relation to the danger of communism at the time.

Foreign Policy as shows the importance of security, and has close allie relations and development of special relations with the US, was important, due to links with NATO.

Why did Turkey form close and special relations with the US at the time? Turkey felt very much exposed to security threats. NATO/Western Alliance, led by the US, mobilised the external support needed to maintain the standing of Turkey as a very important security asset.

In the closed defence partnership with the US, there were problems/issues too, where the most controversial issues escalated from Cyprus. President Johnson warned Turkey in 1964 that if Turkish military action against Cyprus produced response from the USSR, Turkey would not be assured NATO defence.

In 1974, ten years later – when Turkey intervened militarily to protect the lives of Turkish Cypriots, the US congress imposed an Arms Embargo on Turkey that lasted 3 years.

The main characteristics of stage 2 -Turkish Foreign Policy are important transatlantic relations, special relations with the US and integration with European Euro-Atlantic Euro-Asian structures becoming a member of all these institutions.

Stage 3 – In Turkey’s case, economic change proceeded the end of the war and the demise of the USSR by about 10 years – the Auselt period. In 1981, Turkey started to make changes to its economic policies, which had implications on the Turkish Foreign Policy conduct. i.e. from Import orientated economy growth to an export led economic growth is the main change. In January 24,

1980, Turkey scrapped a set of rules and regulations – measures taken to protect the value of the Turkish Lira. This development led to Income substitution to export led growth.

The policy shift pressured Turkey into looking for export markets and search for relationships that it had neglected earlier due to economic motives. USSR and other Middle East and others became targets of Turkish economic opening, as Turkey developed into a trading state and now shaping its foreign policy accordingly.

As Turkey's economy has registered major advances in recent years, its exports are growing rapidly. Turkey is now widening its geography to the Balkans, Middle East, N Africa, Iran, Central Asia, China and Latin America. TODAY, Turkey has become the 16th largest economy in the world and the 6th largest in Europe. Today, Turkey tries to balance a variety of interests and considerations of its foreign policy. National interest is very important in foreign policy.

The first sub period of the 3rd stage in terms of data from 1991 onwards, is characterised as the disintegration of the former Soviet Union to 2007, where during this period, Turkish foreign policy maintained its strong western orientation and also became proactive and expanded its geographical reach.

The second sub period I would characterise as 2007 onwards – policy has become more autonomous and challenging.

Turkey in 1991 to 2002 and in 2002 – 2007 has become more proactive and more important regional actor in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea and countries in the East. With the end of the cold war, Turkey joined other allies in expanding its relations and building ties with newcomers to the system. In 1992, the Turkish International Corporation Agency was formed to reach out to the new members. After 2002, foreign policy became even more proactive. The Middle East becomes a major area of interest. Arab Israeli conflict is a major concern for Turkey and visibility in North Africa surges. In 2002, this is when the Akth party came to power. But there is a problem with the Turkish foreign policy as no matter how much proactive it becomes, it faces problems as well. There is a general feeling with Turkish Politicians and the general public that the allies of Turkey did not provide sufficient support to Turkey

Turkey had a goal of becoming a member of the EU in spite of its frustrations. In 1999, Turkey had declared its interest for membership. Successive governments did not challenge the principle that Turkey's interests lies within the West.

Turkey co-operated with the allies by enforcing a no fly zone in Northern Iraq in 2003, sent troops to Afghanistan, participated in peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia, Lebanon and Turkey continues to commit to the Western Security system.

Turkey is developing its relations with the US and Russia. At the time, Turkey was also playing the role of facilitator / arms broker, i.e. in 2008 participated in talks with Israel and Syria, as well as Israel and Palestine authority, as well as Bosnia/Serbia. Russia at the time was becoming a very important trade partner (\$30bn trade volume), due to Turkey getting its natural gas from Russia.

Turkey also buys its oil from Russia. Turkey has signed its first agreement to build a nuclear power plant. Turkey exports textiles, machinery, cars, brown and white goods to Russia and has many construction projects. Russia also sends the 2nd largest group of tourists to Turkey (3 million) after Germany. These both countries have also recently cancelled the tourist visas.

Turkey has introduced in its foreign policy a “zero problems with neighbours” policy, which has been quite successful from 2007 onwards to 2009. How can we measure whether it has been successful or unsuccessful?

After 80 years of foreign policy conduct, the policy is in 3 strands – Transatlantic relationship, Religious and Ethnic ties for the Middle East, Balkans and Central Asia and National interest/regional powers with neighbours.

The main target for the zero problems policy can be defined as re-integrating Turkey with its surroundings, improving Turkey’s relations with its neighbours, pursuing more proactive and dynamic Turkish foreign policy. There has been an increase to resolve the Cyprus issue, an attempt to end any animosity with Syria. In 2009, Turkey and Armenia signed the two protocols.

Turkey has broken ground in reconnecting with the Balkans, the black sea region and middle east. The foreign policy agenda of Turkey is no longer dominated by chronic disputes regarding energy, and as a result, Turkey’s neighbourhood started to be perceived as having cooperation and partnership (2009).

Zero problems policy is the way, based on pragmatism and importance of national interest – but is it sustainable? In 2010 – the challenges to the policy begin. Today, such challenges continue and increase. The major challenge comes from the Middle East and North Africa.

The process of change will take place in an orderly fashion, as Turkey believes that sustainable security and stability is only possible through meeting the legitimate aspirations of people. Comprehensive reforms should be supported and implemented. Violence and use of force against people is un-acceptable. Sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and political unity of each country have to be preserved and respected. Transformation should be led and owned up by the people themselves, as we should not let these processes be hijacked by radicals, who seek sectarian, ethnic or ideological strife across the region. Again, we have to be realistic as this transformation will not happen overnight, but over decades and over a new generation, therefore we have to be very patient.

It's worth noting that the scope of change and dynamics differs from one country to another, therefore the one size fits all cannot be valid.

There is a tendency to show Turkey as a model to all these countries in the region. Every country has its own historic experience in terms of its development. Turkey has a very unique historic example, as it came out of the liberation war in 1923 and established a free democratic society by the foundation of the republic of Turkey. In the last 90 years of Turkish Democratic experience.

There are two very special characteristics of the Turkish example – the Turkish secular model and the Democratic Parliamentary system, developed in line with historic models. Other countries may wish to adopt Turkey's example, but they will need to see their own historic experience. The Turkish historic model is a source of inspiration.

There has been criticism of the Turkish Foreign Policy in the last several years. Is Turkey drifting apart from the West? Questions asked include Is Turkey turning its back to the transatlantic commitments to NATO? Is Turkey's bid for membership no longer a priority? Is Turkish interest particularly in its neighbourhood be characterised as "naïve automatism?" Is Turkish foreign policy being transformed, based on sectarian religious emphasis?

Turkey's not confined to or be driven by an east/west nexus, but a balancing act between all the interchangeable and inter-dependent issues that directly impact Turkey.

Thank you.

