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**BRIDGE OR FRONTIER? TURKEY'S POST-COLD
WAR GEOPOLITICAL POSTURE IN THE MIDDLE
EAST, CENTRAL ASIA AND THE BALKANS**

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DRAFT**Bridge or Frontier? Turkey's Post-Cold War Geopolitical Posture in the Middle East, Asia**
and the Balkans*Central*
*2***Introduction**

Before analyzing the way Turkey has adapted its external policies to the geopolitical conditions of the post-Soviet world and, how it has responded to the challenges and opportunities presented by the new circumstances, it is important to discuss briefly the consequences the Soviet Union's collapse for the character and dynamics of the international political system and various regional sub-systems in which Turkey is involved. This analysis should be followed by a short assessment of the balance of negative and positive consequences of these systemic changes for Turkey's regional and international position.

Systemic Consequences of the Soviet Union's Disintegration

The end of the cold war, followed by the Soviet Union's collapse on December 1991 have drastically altered the character of the international political system and, the dynamics of inter-state relations. First, the disintegration of the Soviet Union's external and internal empires has changed the bi-polar character of the international political system to one which is often described as unipolar. What the latter term means, in fact, is an international system in which the United States has an overwhelming military preponderance and, the West, collectively, is economically dominant. It further means that there is no single power or a coalition of countries which can constitute a credible counterweight to the West's economic and military power.

This situation does not mean that the West has total freedom of action and the capacity to reorder the world according to its own liking and preferences. Nor does it mean that the West can

easily translate power into influence in the sense of making others behave as it wishes. It does, however, mean that in the post-Soviet era the West's freedom of action and its ability to project force abroad have both been enhanced, since it no longer has to be concerned with the reaction of a significant rival, such as the Soviet Union, as it was during the cold war.

This enhanced Western freedom of action and ability to project force into far flung areas was most dramatically demonstrated during the Persian Gulf war of January-March 1991, even before the official collapse of the Soviet Union when the United States introduced close to 500,000 military personnel into the Persian Gulf, an act which would have been inconceivable during the cold war. The other example is the introduction of NATO forces, into Bosnia.

The elimination of a significant counterweight to the West has also deeply affected the balance of influence between the West and other countries, especially those which are in a militarily and economically weak position. Again, this shift in the balance of influence does not mean that the Western powers can force other countries to do exactly what they want. But it does not mean that they can more easily take punitive measures against those countries of whose policies they disapprove, since they no longer have to be concerned about potential Soviet gains. A good example of this new situation is the U.S. policy towards Iran which substantially hardened after the Soviet Union's disintegration.

The elimination of the Soviet Union has also deprived the weaker countries of an alternative source of military and economic assistance further shifting the balance of influence in favor of the West.

Impact on Regional Politics and Balances of Power

The disintegration of the Soviet Union has also fundamentally altered the dynamics of regional

politics, especially those regions which are situated in the proximity of the former Soviet Union, such as the Middle East and the Balkans.

In terms of the overall balance of power the Soviet Union's demise has enhanced the position of pro-Western countries and, undermined those of countries which were close to the Soviet Union and, thus has reduced the impact of anti-Western states in shaping the pattern of regional politics. A good example of this situation is a serious erosion of Syria's influence in shaping Arab and Middle Eastern politics, including those regarding the issues of peace with Israel.

Iran has been another Middle East country whose position has been undermined by these systemic shifts as the United States has been able to pursue a punitive policy towards Iran without fearing Soviet inroads in that country.

Other consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union have been: 1) The erosion of cooperative dimensions of relations among a number of regional countries because of the elimination of the common Soviet threat. A good example of this is the deterioration of Turkish-Iranian and Iranian-Pakistani relations; 2) The intensification of the conflictual aspects of relations because of the resurfacing of old enmities which were suppressed during the cold war because of the common fear of Soviet expansionism; 3) The development of new alliances; and 4) Competition for influence in the post-Soviet space.

Impact on Turkey

The Soviet Union's disintegration has had such wide ranging systemic ramifications that it has left very few countries unaffected. However, the impact of this event has been stronger on those countries, notably Turkey, which have had common borders with the Soviet Union and, a long

history of interaction with the Russian empire before the advent of Communism. On balance, Turkey has benefitted from the systemic changes triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union as the following points illustrates: First, the collapse of the Soviet Union has weakened Turkey's enemies and rivals such as Syria, Iraq and Iran; Second, the weakening of its rivals has relieved Turkish foreign and security policy from certain constraints and has increased its options; Third, the collapse of the Soviet Union has opened up new areas for Turkish economic and political activities extending from the Balkans, to the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan; and Fourth, Western predominance in the international system has benefitted Turkey which is a major ally and partner of the West.

Two of the concrete examples of how these changes have affected Turkish policy are the strategic alliance concluded between Turkey and Israel, and the Turkish threat of the use of force against Syria if it did not end its support to the PKK and continued to shelter its leader Abdullah Ocalan. It is extremely unlikely that Turkey could have embarked on either of these courses if the Soviet Union was still standing.

On the negative ledger the Soviet Union's disintegration has created a belt of actual or potential instability in Turkey's vicinity, be it in the Caucasus or in the Balkans, which could potentially, although not very likely, involve Turkey in regional conflicts or face it with difficult choices.

Turkish Responses to the Post-Soviet Geopolitical Environment

In order to understand the process of how Turkey has responded to the post-Soviet world and, has developed the basic frame work of its foreign policy to fit the new circumstances two points must first be noted: 1) This process of adjustment and response to the post-Soviet regional and

international dynamics has not yet been completed and, therefore, Turkish policies vis a vis a range of areas and issues are likely to evolve in light of new developments, especially the evolution of the Russian situation and policies. 2) The creation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923 and the consolidation of the Communist power in Russia nearly coincided. What the latter point implies is that for sixty eight years Turkish foreign policy at regional and international levels was to a considerable degree determined by the fact of the proximity of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War years this fact played a determining role in shaping the character and direction of Turkey's foreign policy.

The consequences of this proximity for Turkey's security and other interests were mixed. On the one hand, it made Turkey vulnerable to Soviet pressures, including its efforts to internally destabilize the country and, on the other hand, it enhanced Western interest in Turkey and led to its inclusion in the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Membership in NATO gave Turkey a strong Western security guarantee as well as a seat in the highest councils of the West, plus economic and military benefits. Of course, Turkey was not always enchanted with policies and attitudes of its allies regarding issues that it considered to be of vital importance to its security. Nevertheless, it has, by and large, considered the benefits of its Western alliance outweighing its inconveniences. In particular, the powerful military, the bureaucracy, especially the foreign ministry and, in the last few decades, the vibrant entrepreneurial class have supported Turkey's West-centered policy.

Another factor which should be taken into account in this connection is the modern Turkey's vocation to become a Westernized country and an integral part of Europe. Turkey's other geographic aspects, notably the fact that the bulk of its territory is in Asia and, that it

borders both Iran and the Arab world, as well as its Islamic culture, have exerted their influence on its regional policies and, at times, have led to differences of opinion with its Western allies. Nevertheless, often, Turkey's regional choices have been affected by its overall Western orientation and more importantly its Western vocation.

This does not mean that Turkey has always agreed with its Western allies policies towards regions which are of importance to its interests, or that at times it has not hesitated to follow policies that differ from those of its allies.

However, this has been within certain limits, namely that Turkey has been careful that its regional policies do not strain its ties with its Western allies beyond a certain point unless such policies relate to an issue--such as Cyprus-- that Turkey views to be vital to its national interest. Three additional points need also to be noted before examining the process of Turkey's adjustment to the post-Soviet world namely that: 1) the post-Soviet patterns of international and regional relations have not yet been consolidated and, are in a state of flux. This means that all countries would need a flexible approach to many issues in the coming years; 2) In many respects the post-Soviet era began before the official end of the Soviet Union, with the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union's external empire which started with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

Therefore, those countries which had been a particular focus of cold war competition began to feel the impact of these changes as early as 1989 and, had to reassess their new geopolitical position and security environment and, rethink the old underlying premises of their foreign and security policies. Because of its central place within the geopolitical environment of the cold war era Turkey was one of the first countries to undergo this process; 3) even before the

collapse of the Soviet Union, the process of Glasnost and Perestroika had eliminated most of the barriers to communication and interaction between various peoples of the Soviet Union and their ethnic, linguistic and religious kins in the neighboring areas. This enhanced interaction not only had raised new questions regarding issues such as ethnic and cultural identity and the direction of external relations for various Soviet republics, but also for their neighboring countries.

Given the considerable number of Turkic peoples in the Soviet Union, plus Turkey's historic links with many of these peoples Turkey was deeply affected by these developments. An important aspect of the impact of these events was the triggering of debate in Turkey regarding its own identity and, the necessity of reassessing some of basic foundations of its security and foreign policy.

Period of Anxiety: 1987-1990

Turkey received the end of cold war with feelings of anxiety and expectation. This mixed reaction derived from a concern on the part of Turkey that the warming of East-West relations would reduce its strategic importance to its Western allies and, this diminished significance would then translate into less economic and military assistance and, perhaps a harsher Western attitude towards human rights issues in Turkey. Nor these concerns were totally unfounded. Indeed, in the late 80's a number of U.S. lawmakers, including such influential figures as the former Republican senator Robert Dole, were expressing the opinion that U.S. should reduce its assistance to a group of countries, which included Turkey, on the grounds that the end of the cold war had diminished their importance for the United States. (1)

Meanwhile, although the relaxation of internal politics in the Soviet Union had created opportunities for Turkey to expand its ties with the Turkic-speaking populations of the U.S.S.R,

it was, nevertheless, clear that as long as the Soviet Union remained intact, even in an altered state, there would be limits to Turkish presence and, Russia would remain the principal actor in this space. This factor, plus the fact that the traditionally prudent streak of Turkish foreign policy was still strong at this time meant that while a variety of Turkish political, cultural and other groups became active in various republics of the Soviet Union the Turkish government remained cautious in its approach towards developments there. (2)

This desire not to become embroiled in the Soviet Union's internal disputes was best illustrated during the 1989 crisis in Azerbaijan triggered by the Armenian-Azerbaijani disputes which led to the introduction of Soviet troops into Baku in January 1990.

President Turgut Ozal, who at the time, was visiting the United States, when asked about Turkey's reaction to these events said that the Azerbaijan crisis was more of concern to Iran than to Turkey because the Azerbaijanis were Shi'a. This statement, however, generated a strong and negative reaction on the part of a considerable segment of the Turkish population and political elite. For example, Bulent Ecevit the leader of the Democratic Left Party, warned that Turkish neglect would force Azerbaijanis into the arms of Iran. There were even disagreements between Ozal and his foreign minister Mesut Yilmaz on this subject. (3)

Conditions prevailing in the Middle East at the time also did not offer much opportunities for Turkey to prove its continued importance for its Western allies. In the summer (August) of 1988 Iran had just concluded a humiliating ceasefire agreement with Iraq and, was in the throes of a deep national soul searching about the result of not only the war with Iraq, but also 10 years of a revolutionary Islamic government. Not only the revolution had lost its elan, the very system it had created was under serious questioning by the people.

Iraq, meanwhile, was still viewed by the West in a bening light, although some of its neighbors, notably Kuwait, were beginning to feel uncomfortable with the imbalance that Iran's defeat had created in the Persian Gulf.

In short, there were no exceptional circumstances which could enable Turkey to assume a new role which would compensate for the erosion of its strategic significance.

Yet, this period while a time of anxiety and uncertainty for Turkey was neither an inactive episode in terms of Turkish diplomacy, nor a stagnant one in terms of new thinking about the underlying premises of Turkish foreign policy and how they should be reassessed or revised in response to the new circumstances.

On the diplomatic front, Turkey under the leadership of its then prime minister and later president Turgut Ozal intensified its efforts to become integrated into the European community (EC), as it was then called. As a result of this strategy, in 1987, Turkey applied for full membership of the EC, although it was adviced against doing so by a large number of existing members.

EC's refusal to accept Turkey's application accelarated the process of new thinking in Turkey about alternative strategies to follow. One such idea was that Turkey should forge a close bilateral strategic and trade alliance with the United States. But, as noted earlier, at the time the atmosphere in the U.S. was not very propitious to such schemes. It was also during this period that Tukey began to develop the idea for a Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone. The first important step towards preparing the ground work for the establishment of BESEC was taken before the collpase of the Soviet Union during a meeting in Ankara in December 1990 in which deputy foreign ministers of Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet Union took part. (4)

On the intellectual front, a number of political analysts and key politicians were beginning to openly challenge the underpinnings of Turkey's foreign policy, especially its prudent and non-interventionist dimensions. One important aspect of this rethinking was a reassessment of the Ottoman past and, efforts to develop a modern version of Ottomanism as a framework for a new Turkish world view and foreign policy.

The Turkish journalist Cengiz Candar was an important proponent of this view. It should be noted here that the emergence of the neo-Ottomanist school of thought was partly the culmination of a ten year old process of rehabilitation of Turkey's Ottoman past. As Edward Mortimer put Ozal "had debanked the orthodox Kemalist vision of history with its near deification of Ataturk and the denigration of the Ottoman past." (5) The underlying theme of the neo-Ottomanism was that Turkey should no longer be bound by the strait-jacket of the Kemalist theory or, at least, the particular interpretation of Ataturk's thinking that was accepted during most of the life of the modern Turkish republic. Some Turkish scholars have recently been questioning this interpretation as representing Ataturk's views accurately. (6)

Once freed from this partly self-imposed limitations the neo-Ottomanists, such as Candar, recommended that Turkey "must develop an imperial vision", while stressing that this vision should not be interpreted as "expansionism or adventurism". Rather this vision meant the "free movement of people, ideas and goods in the lands of the old Ottoman empire". (7)

This period also saw a revival of pan-Turkist ideas, although they were more fully elaborated after the Soviet Union's fall. Many intellectuals, political analysts and, some officials began to talk about the need to shed old taboos against pan-Turkism. Thus professor Aydin Yalcin wrote that pan-Turkism was an idea whose time had arrived. According to him, the

collapse of the Soviet Union and the discreditation of Communism "had finally given a public expression and support to pan-Turkism." (8) However, this new version of pan-Turkism was different from the earlier concept in that it essentially aimed at creating a Turkic group of countries within which Turkey would play a leadership role economically and politically rather than a closely knit political union.

The following quote from the head of the Turkic Department of the Turkish foreign ministry, Bilal Samir expresses this new vision. According to him, Turkey's efforts to develop ties with the Turkic republics could lead to the emergence of "something similar to the Nordic Council, the Arab League, or the Organization of American States." He then asked "What is more natural than Turkey taking the lead in creating such a grouping?...This is not Pan-Turkism in the wrong meaning, it is not expansionism...The Nordics, the Arabs, the Latins and others have such groups. Why should not the Turkish people?" (9)

Period of Euphoria 1991-1993: Turkey as the Center of a New Eurasia

By the late 1990, events which were taking place in the Soviet Union and in the Middle East not only would ease Turkey's concerns regarding the erosion of its strategic significance and its value to its Western allies, but would give it--and others--a new appreciation of its potential as a significant player in three sensitive regions namely, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Balkans. Furthermore, these developments would enhance Turkey's value to its Western allies. They would also give rise to a Turkish version of Eurasianism according to which Turkey would be the epicenter of a land mass extending from the northern Caucasus to the Great Wall of China and from the Adriatic to the Persian Gulf.

These important developments were the Persian Gulf crisis and war of August 1990-

March 1991, and the acceleration of the disintegration of the Soviet Union leading to its official end in December of 1991.

Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait: Implication for Turkish Policy

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and, the ensuing events which led to the formation of an international coalition against Saddam Hussein and, eventually to the war of 1991 initially faced Turkey with a difficult choice. The basic dilemma faced by Turkey was the following: To remain neutral in the conflict or to become an active participant in the anti-Saddam coalition.

The decision to go either way was not an easy one. A solid majority--65%--of the Turk's favored a neutral posture. A non-negligible number of officials of the Turkish foreign ministry also leaned in this direction. They felt that Turkey's traditional policy of minimum involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts had served it well and, that there was no need to alter that policy. It is also worth noting that Turkey's defence minister at the time resigned over policy disagreements regarding the Persian Gulf conflict.

It was against these oppositions that President Ozal opted for Turkey's full engagement in the anti-Saddam coalition, arguing that the changes triggered by the end of the cold war necessitated a more activist and less cautious Turkish policy at regional and international levels. He perceived the opportunities that the Iraq crisis offered Turkey to demonstrate its continued strategic importance to its allies. Thus he talked about the pivotal role that Turkey should play in setting up the post-war structure of the Middle East, including its becoming a pillar of the post-war security system in the Persian Gulf. Many of these expectations did not materialize. But this was largely because no regional security system was set up for the Persian Gulf and, the Gulf states opted for bilateral security arrangements with the Western countries. The way the Gulf war

ended also created new difficulties for Turkey in dealing with its Kurdish problem. There was also loss of income because of the closure of the pipeline exporting Iraqi oil through Turkey.

Nevertheless, the shift produced in the regional balance of power by the Gulf war, largely because of the enhanced U.S. military and political presence in the Persian Gulf and the weakening of the anti-Western countries in the Middle East, created new policy options for Turkey in the Middle East and enhanced its relative power vis-a-vis its neighbors and hence its freedom of action.

The best example of this new configuration has been the strategic and political alliance formed between Israel and Turkey and, the Syrian-Turkish showdown over Syria's harboring of Abdullah Ocalan the PKK leader. (10) This showdown ended in a clear victory for Turkey since Ocalan was expelled from Syria and was caught in Italy in November 1998 while returning from Moscow. (11)

The Collapse of the Soviet Union: Turkey as the Model for Post-Soviet States

By the early 1991, especially after Michael Gorbachev's New Union Treaty presented in March failed to gain acceptance and the political infighting continued in Moscow, it had become clear that the Soviet Union as then constituted would not last much longer. Given the fact that a considerable number of the Soviet Union's constituent republics were inhabited by Muslims the question of their future ideological orientation and, hence to a great extent, their foreign policy choices had become of serious concern to Turkey's Western allies and to Turkey itself. The main concern was that these countries might be influenced by radical Islamist ideas, especially those similar to the views espoused by the Islamic government in Iran and thus fall under its sway.

The antidote to an Iranian-inspired political ideology and system of government was

considered by the West to be Turkey's secular ideology and form of government. Thus already by 1991 the so-called Turkish model was promoted by the West as the best alternative to Communism. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 intensified this process. Furthermore, as early as January 1992 the United States embarked on a policy of preventing Iranian inroads in the Caucasus and Central Asia and, in general weakening and isolating it. (12) This policy was further refined by the Clinton Administration in the context of its Dual Containment strategy.

These developments enhanced Turkey's value to its allies as barrier against the Islamist contagion and Iranian influence in the post-Soviet Muslim states and, strengthened its position among the latter as the favored partner of the West.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, moreover, intensified the shifts in the regional balance of power triggered by the Persian Gulf war by depriving the anti-Western countries from their supporter. As an ally of the West Turkey was a beneficiary of this new configuration of power.

Policy Consequences

The result of this favorable geopolitical circumstances was increased Turkish activism in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. A detailed account of the forms that this activism took is neither necessary here nor within the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that it was multi-dimensional--economic, cultural, political and security--and, involved the government and, the private sector both economic and political. (13) One aspect of this activism which is worth noting because it has current relevance is Turkey's campaign to become the main export outlet for the energy resources of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The greatest success of the Turkish diplomacy in this period was in Azerbaijan when the

pro-Turkish Azerbaijan Popular Front and its leader Abul Fazl Elcibey came to power in June 1992. Elcibey idolized Ataturk and, in the past, he had expressed the wish that someday Turkey and Azerbaijan would form a federation or confederation. During the short-lived Elcibey presidency Turkey also established security relationship with Azerbaijan, including the training of the Azerbaijani military personel, a relationship which would survive the fall of the APF government and Elcibey. (14)

There were some efforts at reconciliation with Armenia, but they fell victim to the dynamics of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as certain deep-rooted historical factors. In the Middle East, this period marked the beginning of a process of forging a close Turkish-Israeli partnership, which according to some analysts extended to the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. (15)

Initially, concerns over the negative implications of the Arab-Israeli peace for Turkey's security and strategic importance and, the desire to gain the support of the American Jewish community for Turkey were the primary motives behind Turkey's rapprochement with Israel. The following quotes from a series of articles written by former Turkish ambassador to the U.S. and which appeared in "Miliyet" indicates this line of reasoning.

In one article Sukru Elekdag wrote that "The Israeli lobby in the United States is far superior to all other ethnic lobbies put together. Whenever this lobby has worked for us, Turkey's interests have been perfectly protected against the fools in the United States. The development of relations between Turkey and Israel and the formalization of their de-facto alliance will place this lobby permanently on our side." (16)

Meanwhile, there was a concern that peace between Israel and the Arabs would reduce

Turkey's importance for Israel and, might also shift the military balance against Turkey in the southeast, because after resolving the Golan dispute Syria would be able to move its troops to the Turkish border. (17)

During this period Turkey also finalized the process of the creation of BESEC. The Turkish foreign minister invited his counterparts from Bulgaria, Romania and the Soviet successor states of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Russian Federation which had been involved in the initial talks while the Soviet Union was still in existence together in Istanbul on 13 February 1992. The aim of the meeting as stated at the time was to enable the successor states to renew their commitments and prepare for the signing of the declaration on Black Sea Economic Cooperation. During this meeting it was also decided that Greece and Yugoslavia could attend the planned summit meeting as founding members of BESEC provided that they applied to the Turkish foreign ministry before May 1992, which they did. Later it was also agreed that Albania could join BESEC as a founding member and, eventually Armenia also became a member.

The summit meeting and the founding conference were held on 25 June 1992 in Istanbul and thus BESEC came to official existence as a regional economic organization. The creation of BESEC is the best example of an important aspect of Turkey's post-Soviet foreign policy strategy namely the use of regionalism as an instrument of both mitigating conflictual aspects of inter-state relations as well as a vehicle for expanding Turkish influence in a non-threatening manner.

Other Balkan Issues

Despite the fact that the Ottoman empire had had a long and pervasive political and cultural

presence in the Balkans and, the existence of considerable number of Muslims in the region as well as the presence of Turkish citizens of Balkan origin until the outbreak of the Bosnian crisis Turkey did not have an active Balkan policy.

Of course, policies such as the creation of the BESEC and the promotion of regional cooperation had a Balkan dimension, but it was not specifically designed to address issues related to the Balkans. Nevertheless, two factors seem to have influenced Turkish outlook towards the Balkans. The first has been an increasing feeling among considerable segments of Turkish people that Turkey has a moral responsibility for the Muslim population of the Balkans. The pressure of the public opinion understandably became strongest during the height of the Bosnian crisis.

The second factor which somehow runs counter to pressures emanating from the public opinion has been Turkey's determination to avoid any action that might be interpreted as adventurism or the pursuance of any irredentist claim towards former Ottoman territories and, consequently cause difficulties in Turkey's relations with its Western allies. (18)

The result of the interaction between these two contradictory factors has been a Turkish policy that has tried to influence events in the Balkans but essentially within multilateral frameworks such as NATO, OSCE and the United Nations. Turkish handling of the Bosnian crisis illustrates Turkey's efforts to reconcile these two influences. Turkey tried hard to argue the case of the Bosnian Muslims within the U.N. and NATO and, undertook other diplomatic activities in this direction, including in its capacity as the president of the OIC, but it scrupulously avoided to take any unilateral action. (19)

Similarly, Turkey did not allow public concern over the Balkan Muslims and, a sense of

moral responsibility towards them to affect the development and improvement of its relations with individual Balkan countries. This has even been the case where the Muslims in question have been ethnic Turks. The best example of this approach is the evolution of Turkish-Bulgarian relations which after a difficult period in the 1980's now seem to have entered a cooperative stage. (20) In short, if one were to analyze Turkish post-Soviet foreign policy within the paradigm of daring versus caution, as one scholar of the Turkish scene has done, in regard to the Balkans caution has predominated over daring. (21)

Nevertheless, developments in the Balkans, especially the break up of Yugoslavia and the dynamics that they have set in motion, have had negative consequences for aspects of Turkey's relations. For example, they have exacerbated other conflictual dimensions of Greek-Turkish relations. Nevertheless, both countries' desire not to endanger their other interests, especially as they relate to their membership in NATO, has, so far, limited the extent of damage that Balkan developments could have done to their ties.

Moreover, in the last few years the gradual improvement in relations between Athens and Tirana coupled with the easing of tensions between Greece and the FYRM have reduced the negative impact of Balkan developments on Greek-Turkish relations without, however, eliminating it.

Nevertheless, the opening up of the Balkan countries after the fall of the Soviet Union has triggered a degree of competition between Greece and Turkey for economic and political presence in the Balkans.

The Period of Disillusionment: 1994-1996: Russia Flexes Its Muscles

During the period of political infighting within the Soviet leadership between the pro-Gorbachev

and pro-Yeltsin elements the latter had encouraged nationalists and pro-independence movements within various republics. Moreover, statements by such key liberal figures as Andrei Kozyrev to the effect that in future Russia's greatness should be measured not in terms of its size but in terms of the well being of its people, coupled with the talk of a Euro-Atlantic Partnership encompassing Russia, Europe and, the United States seemed to indicate that Russia had abandoned any desire of exerting a controlling influence over its ex-colonial possessions.

However, this perception was a misreading of the Russian thinking. Russia--including the Euro-Atlantists--had never forgotten Russia's intrinsically Eurasian character, nor had they abandoned what they saw as its civilizing mission in the post-Soviet states. The difference was that the Euro-Atlantists believed that they would be able to perform this function in partnership with the West. More importantly, the Russians felt that a strong Russian presence in the post-Soviet space, especially in the south, was essential for the maintenance of the security of the Russian Federation. (22) In short, Russia continued to see itself as the main hub and center of the Eurasian land mass, a vision which inevitably clashed with Turkey's view of itself as the principal link between Asia and Europe.

The Eurasionist school of thinking in Russia became stronger as the so-called Russo-Western honeymoon came to end by the mid 1993. This development in the Russian thinking led to a more interventionist Russian policy in the former Soviet Union, especially in the Caucasus. It also led to active Russian campaign to ensure the transport of Caspian energy resources through the Russian port of Novorossiysk. This Russian objective was another challenge to Turkey's desire to be the main transit hub for the Caspian energy.

The new Russian activism in the Caucasus contributed to the fall of the pro-Turkish

government of Abul Fazl Elcibey and, later the stationing of Russian troops in Armenia and Georgia.

Elcibey's fall was viewed with dismay in Turkey because they suspected Aliev of being Russia's man. (23) However, these fears were proved to have been exaggerated, and Turkish-Azerbaijani relations remained close under Aliev.

Events in Central Asia, too, developed in a direction which fell short of Turkey's earlier expectations. The Central Asian countries were eager to develop relations with Turkey and, to form a loose kind of Turkic grouping symbolized by the periodic Turkic summits. But they were even more keen to assert their independence and, to diversify the range of their diplomatic and economic contacts and, in short, to become full participants in the international arena rather than junior partners in a grand Turkic coalition under Turkish leadership. (24)

The participation of these countries in Western security institutions, most notably in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program and, their signing of association agreements with the European Union has helped the process of their integration within the international community. This in turn, has reduced their need for an intermediary be it Turkey, Russia or some other country.

However, as events later would show, the pessimistic mood that gripped Turkey after the change of government in Azerbaijan and, renewed fears about Russian neo-imperialism were exaggerated. In the following years, Turkey consolidated its position both in Azerbaijan and Georgia and, maintained its good relations with the Central Asian countries. Turkey has also gained the support of the Caspian countries for the export of their energy through Turkey.

Indeed, what was viewed by Turkey as a major blow to its aspirations to become the

critical center of a new Eurasia was, in fact, the beginning of a process of regional shifts and realignments in response to the entry of new actors and the gradual integration of the post-Soviet space into the international political system.

These developments in the post-Soviet space, nevertheless, had an important impact on Turkey's thinking regarding its foreign policy priorities. By demonstrating the limits of a Eastward looking strategy, these real or perceived disappointments, shifted Turkey's attention towards Europe and the question of its integration within the European institutions. They may also have contributed to the acceleration of Turkish-Israeli rapprochement.

The Erbakan Interlude: 1996-1997

The Turkish Islamists' world view and their vision of Turkey's regional and international roles were in sharp contrast to those of Turkey's traditional elites. Consequently, the kind of foreign policy they advocated for Turkey was also different from one pursued by Turkey throughout most of its existence in its present form and within its present boundaries.

To put it very simply, the Islamists believed that Turkey should replace its Western orientation with an Islamic orientation. Thus, according to the Islamists, Turkey should leave NATO and abandon its aspiration to become part of the EU. Instead it should expand its relations with Islamic countries, play a leadership role within the Islamic world and, create an Islamic common market.

Thus when in June 1996 Necmettin Erbakan the leader of the Islamist Refah party became Turkey's prime minister within the framework of a coalition with the True Path there were expectations of a significant shift in the orientation of Turkish foreign policy and serious anxieties among Turkey's Western allies regarding potential changes in Turkey's approach to

regional and international issues. (25)

Indeed, during the brief premiership of Erbakan there were some steps towards improving and expanding Turkey's relations with Muslim countries. (26) This strategy had both a bilateral and a multilateral dimension. The latter dimension was reflected in the establishment of a so-called group of eight which included Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh. (27)

Yet, regarding the essentials of Turkey's foreign policy, including its NATO membership, the question of its relations with Israel, and the Customs Union with the EU the Erbakan government did not make any changes. This passivity reflected the impact of several factors: 1) The limited mandate of Rifah. It is important to note that Rifah had only captured 21 percent of popular vote; 2) Continued influence of the secular military and political elites; 3) The realization of the costs of imprudent changes of strategy such as withdrawal from NATO; and 4) The disappointing results of Islamic diplomacy. (28)

Renewed Confidence and the Emergence of New Alliances: 1997-Present

Since the end of the Erbakan interlude Turkish foreign policy has been characterized by an effort to consolidate gains made in the former Soviet space and in the Balkans in the past several years and, the formation of a new strategic alliance with Israel which will have important consequences, both of a positive and negative nature, for Turkey's relations with its neighbors and beyond.

Despite the fears which were generated by Russia's activism in the Caucasus and Central Asia regarding the renewal of Russian hegemony which would lead to an inevitable Turkish retreat from these regions, events in the last few years have led to a weakening of Russian grip

over the post-Soviet space.

The most important event was the Chechen war which demonstrated the inefficacy of brute force in reestablishing Russian control not only over former Soviet states, but also over the non Russian members of the Russian Federation itself. The Chechen war has also made it much less probable that Russia would resort to the use of force to prevent the slippage of its influence in the former Soviet space.

The second event has been the worsening economic and political crisis in Russia itself which has further reduced its ability to use economic incentives and instruments to reestablish a controlling influence over the former Soviet States. Furthermore, the heavy-handed policies of Russia vis-a-vis some Soviet successor states, such as Georgia, have backfired and, have encouraged them to balance Russian influence by expanding their ties with other countries, including Turkey.

The failure of Russia's efforts to regain control over the post-Soviet space have not translated into an absolute Turkish gain because of factors discussed earlier. But within the limits of a more realistic Turkish view of what it can achieve in the former Soviet States which has been emerging since 1995, Turkey's position and influence in these countries has improved and stabilized. The most dramatic departure from traditional Turkish policy has been the alliance with Israel. The alliance has obvious benefits for Turkey in terms of enhancing its military, industrial, and technological capabilities. The costs are mostly in terms of relations with Arab and Muslim countries. The unhappiness of these countries about Turkish-Israeli ties was clearly demonstrated during the Islamic summit of December 1997 in Tehran. However, in view of current military and strategic balance internationally and in the Middle East coupled with the

economic difficulties of Arab states it is unlikely that this unhappiness could be translated into a serious joint Arab or Arabo-Islamic challenge to Turkey. (29)

Nevertheless, the Israeli-Turkish alliance has contributed to some closing of Arab ranks, an improvement in Arab-Iranian relations and emerging cooperative arrangements which go beyond the Middle East as traditionally defined.

Conclusions

The end of the cold war, the Persian Gulf war of 1991, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union have dramatically altered the character of the international political system and the subordinate regional sub-systems, especially those situated in the proximity of the former Soviet Union.

These changes were triggered because of a shift in the balance of power in favor of the West and its regional allies, the re-emergence of old conflicts, the surfacing of new disputes, plus the reappearance and religitimization of old ethno centric political ideologies.

These changes have necessitated a process of rethinking and reappraisal of old premises of foreign policy on the part of many countries. Moreover, the balance of benefits and losses resulting from these systemic changes has not been equal in the case of different countries. Turkey as a neighbor of the former Soviet Union and a country with extensive historical, cultural and ethno-linguistic links with many of the peoples of the Soviet Union has been affected by these changes.

These changes have triggered discussion about the validity of the basic premises of Turkey's traditional foreign policy, including the balance between an Eastern and Western orientation. They have also given currency to old and, largely discarded, ideologies such as pan-

Turkism, and elicited debate about what should be the balance between daring and caution in Turkey's approach to the new circumstances. In adjusting to these changes Turkey has passed through various phases extending from excessive optimism to extreme pessimism and, a brief experimentation with an Islamic ally-oriented foreign policy. To its credit, however, Turkey has not allowed its policy to be determined by the excessively unrealistic and perhaps adventurous impulses unleashed after the Soviet collapse. Rather, it has endeavoured to achieve its goals through legitimate bilateral and multilateral channels. And in this it has greatly benefitted from the current configuration of international and regional power and the active support of its allies.

Now after ten years since the end of the cold war Turkey seems to be reconciling its various interests and aspirations and striking a balance between continuity and change and daring and caution in its foreign policy.

All in all Turkey has been a beneficiary of the post-Soviet systemic changes although its new environment is not without risk.

Footnotes

- 1) See: Duygu Bazoglusezer "Turkey's Grand Strategy Facing A Dilemma" The International Spectator, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, January-March 1992, "In the spring of 1990, The American Congress pressed for the passage of strongly anti-Turkish resolution that threatened drastic cuts in annual military aid" p. 25.
- 2) These groups included Islamist and ultra-nationalist elements as well.
- 3) Other opposition figures also reacted negatively to President Ozal's statement see: "Ozal, Yilmaz far apart on Azerbaijan" Turkish Daily News, January 23, 1990.
- 4) On the beginning of BESEC see: Oral Sander "Turkey and the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation" in Kemal H. Karpat (ed) Turkish Foreign Policy: Recent Developments, Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
- 5) Edward Mortimer "A Tale of Two Funerals: Reviving Islam Challenges Ataturk's Legacy of Secularism" Financial Times Surveys: Turkey May 7, 1993.
- 6) For example, some scholars have challenged the view that dictum peace at home, peace abroad was coined bu Ataturk.
- 7) On Candar's view see Sami Cohen "Contact with Central Asian States: A Foundation for Pan-Turkism" The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, August/September 1992.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Ibid.
- 10) On Israeli-Turkish alliance see: Daniel Pipes "A New Axis: The Emerging Turkish-Israeli Entente" National Interest, No. 50, Winter 1997-1998.
- 11) On Syrian-Turkish crisis see: "Turks Give Syria Last Warning" Washington Post, October 7, 1998.
- 12) On U.S. attitude towards Iran's presence in Central Asia see: Thomas L. Friedman "U.S. to Counter Iran in Central Asia" New York Times, February 6, 1992.
- 13) For examples of Turkish activities see: Kemal H. Karpat "The Foreign Policy of Central Asian States, Turkey and Iran" in Kemal H. Karpat (ed) Turkish Foreign Policy op. Cit..

II.

- 14) Aliev after coming to power agreed that Turkey should continue to train Azerbaijani military personnel. See: "Azerbaijan Asks Turkey to Train More Officers" RFE/RL Daily Report, No. 2, January 1994.
- 15) See: "Israel and Turkey in the New World Order" Israeli Foreign Affairs, Vol. VIII, No. 5, May 31, 1992.
- 16) See: "Paper Views Common Interests with Israel" Milliyet, November 7, 1994.
- 17) See: The third part of the above article in Milliyet dated December 4, 1994.
- 18) On Turkey's Balkan policy see: Gulnur Aybet Turkey's Foreign Policy and its Implications for the West. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies, 1994. PP. 31-43.
- 19) Ibid.
- 20) Recent visits by Turkish and Bulgarian leaders to each others' countries, including Prime Minister Yilmaz's visit to Bulgaria in early November reflects this improved atmosphere.
- 21) See: Malik Mufti "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy" Middle East Journal, Vol. 52, No. 1, Winter 1998.
- 22) On Russian thinking in this regard and various schools of thought see: Mohaiddin Mesbahi "Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus" Central Asian Survey, Vol. 112, No. 2, 1993.
- 23) For a certain period Turkey continued to support Elcibey and refused to recognize the new government. See: Shireen T. Hunter The Trans-Caucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict, Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies/West view Press, 1994.
- 24) On the evolution of the Central Asian countries foreign policy see: Shireen T. Hunter, Central Asia Since Independence, Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1990.
- 25) See: Steven Erlanger "Islamic Turkey Perturbs West" International Herald Tribune, August 12, 1996.
- 26) Iran was among the countries especially targeted by Erbakan partly for economic reasons.
- 27) On Erbakan's foreign policy see: Philip Robins "Turkish Foreign Policy Under Erbakan" Survival, Vol. 39, No. 12, summer 1997.

III.

28) A particular embarrassing and sobering incident was the fiasco of Erbakan's visit to Libya during which Colonel Gadhafi criticized Turkey's treatment of its Kurdish population.

29) See: Alain Gresh "Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and their Impact on the Middle East" Middle East Journal, Vol. 52, No. 2, spring 1998.

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