Strategic Culture of Turkey before the AKP Rule and its Reflections to Turkish Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Turkey has been in the centre of global developments during the last century because of its geographical location. The sense of being surrounded by enemies is the most important characteristic of the Turkish strategic culture pre-AKP period which has been named Republican strategic culture. In this line, in the literature, it is believed that the Turkish security policy is decisive and inflexible. Looking at the history of Turkey, it can be seen that this determination and lack of trust in others is the product of its strategic culture. This means that Turkish politicians will pursue the goal in any possible way until they achieve the desired result. Thus, one of the characteristics of Turkey's strategic culture in the last century was the lack of trust in rivals and neighbours. Factors such as the continuous wars with Russia and other neighbours, the betrayal by some citizens in the Middle East and Balkans, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, incitement of minorities by rivals and Turkey's suspicions of neighbours and great powers in the form of strategic culture have influenced Turkish foreign policy since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 to 2002. This importance is to extent that Turkey refused to enter the Second World War and pursued a decisive policy to defend its interests in some historical stages, such as the Cyprus crisis in the 1970s.

Thus, this article reviews the Turkish strategic culture in the last century and its evolution process.

Keywords: strategic culture, Turkey, security mentality, Independence War, national security

1. Introduction

Due to its independence form, Turkey has acted in the Western line in foreign policy until the end of the 20th century. As heir of the Great Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey was established as a result of a difficult period of struggle with the strong actors of international politics in the earlier 1920s. After the First World War, the major international and regional actors of the 1920s such as Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and Greece occupied the Ottoman Empire's territories. This has made a traumatic mentality in the Turkish foreign and security policymakers and they have argued that Turkey is surrounded by four sides by the enemy (Erdağ & Kardaş 2012, p. 74; Mufti 2009, pp. 15-16). According to the perception that this has produced, Turkey is in a central location and the source of the threat can arise at any moment by any country (Yeşiltaş 2012, p. 76). As a result of this mentality, Turkish bureaucrats and politicians decided to adopt a status quo policy and non-intervention in other countries' conflicts. Although this policy evolved in the 1980s and Turkey tried to evade this mentality, it maintained the mainline of Republican politics.

Beginning with the new world order and globalization, the international system has become more complex. In addition to interdependence in the economic sphere, new crises emerged and world politics faced new challenges. In this sphere, Turkey tried to adopt a new strategy in its foreign and security policy. Moreover, in such a complex environment, unilateral and isolated foreign policy was no longer sufficient. Thus, Turkey has started to follow actively its interests in the international area and as a result, developed its policies in this direction. This change was manifested by the development

of relations with the Russian Federation, which was the successor of the Soviet Union as an old enemy. The relations with Russia started with Suitcase Trade since the 1990s and turned into a Strategic Partnership in the 2000s. In the 2000s, Turkey's "Zero Problem with Neighbours" policy and the importance of neighbours in Russia's strategy has played an important role in the transformation of their relations to a high level. On the other hand, the increasing importance of Eurasian geopolitics brought about the consolidation of their relations (Erdağ & Kardaş 2012, pp. 76-77).

The strengthening of relations with the Russian Federation, as the heir to the Soviet Union and as one of the old bipolar systems' leaders, showed an evolution in Turkish foreign and security policy. This was the first step and Turkey followed the line by developing its policy to the regions that were anonymous for Turkey for at least 70 years like the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. Turkey has asked a playmaker role in the international system using multidimensional and balanced diplomacy. Therefore, Turkey turned from unilateralism to multilateralism in the 2000s. Turkish officials asked to play a role in both international and regional issues, and thus Turkey followed a strategic policy to achieve this goal. As a result, Turkish officials softened their security policies mainly focused on foreign policy issues.

2. Importance of the Issue

As an emerging power, Turkey has been at the forefront of the Middle East and neighbouring areas' issues since the 2000s. The rise of Turkey has caused some opposition from regional and international actors. Many international actors oppose the emergence of new actors, in other words, other powerful rivals, and therefore oppose the emergence of challenger actors like Turkey. In this framework, it is important to recognize the evolution of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy in the form of strategic culture. Thus, understanding the Turkish strategic culture provides a deep understanding

of the country, which is useful for academic researchers. Given the various mental assumptions about Turkey's foreign and security policy, this study shows that Turkish domestic and foreign policy has been influenced by various events in its turbulent history in the twentieth century. Although Turkey's foreign policy changes with the change of governments, the continuation of the basic principles have been an unchangeable rule.

3. Methodology

To understand the Turkish perception of international relations, it is inevitable to review the Turkish authorities' speeches, articles, and books. These resources are the first-hand resources and open the way to analyze Turkish strategic culture. In this respect, the legacy of the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the main source of Turkish security and foreign policy. Turgut Özal is the other important official that leaded Turkey to a new stage in the 1980s. Other important officials are a set of new politicians who changed Turkey's fate. They believe that without Turkey, no political turbulence and interactions can be identified in the region, and this indicating that Turkey is an inevitable and axis actor in the region (Davutoğlu 2002, p. 137). Other statements by Turkish officials, such as presidents and foreign ministers, also form the basis of the research, although most of them are not mentioned in this study.

4. Turkey's strategic culture

The strategic culture of nations is reflected in their foreign policy. This pattern can also be seen in Turkey's foreign and security policy. To understand Turkey's strategic culture, one must examine its turbulent past. But the scope of this essay is before 2002 and to analyze this period it is inevitable to studying Turkey's history from the establishment of the Republic. Thus, looking more closely at the history of the last

century, there is a vicissitudinous historical period that made the contemporary Turkish policy and strategic culture.

Marcus Templar claims that homogeneity, feeling of insecurity, and risk aversion are some of the most important characteristics of Turkish strategic culture. The homogeneous principle is that Turks generally belong to one ethnicity and one religion. Insecurity means that Turks care about physical security, distrust their neighbours and feel that the enemy is everywhere. In addition, Turks do not trust foreign forces and need 200 kilometers of a safe zone along their borders to feel safe. According to the third principle, if the success rate of an operation is not 100 percent, the Turks will not operate because failure can endanger national pride (Templar 2015, pp. 3-4). According to Mufti, the feeling of insecurity has so far had negative consequences for Turkish politics. (2009, p. 174). Templar is exaggerating in his thinking about Turkish strategic thinking because looking at history; there are numerous wars in which Turks have been successful or unsuccessful. Even if these claims were true, they were due to the enormous number of enemies of the Turks throughout history and the numerous wars between them.

5. Republican strategic culture

The heavy defeat in the First World War led to the imposition of the Sèvres Treaty to the Ottomans. This treaty plays an important role in the formation and development of the Republican strategic culture of Turkey. In this treaty, the entire Ottoman territory was destroyed in Arabian and Balkan geography. Also, numerous islands were given to Greece. It also recognized a wide Armenian state in northeast Anatolia and envisioned an independent territory for the Kurds. The Straits came under international control and important port cities were given to Italy and France, and only a small area between Istanbul and Ankara remained under Ottoman rule. However, this treaty was not implemented due to the War of Independence which started in 1919 and ended in 2023.

Therefore, the Turkish army under Mustafa Kemal Pasha expelled Armenians, France, Italia, Great Britain, and Greece from Turkey by a set of destructive wars (Mufti 2009, pp. 15-16). After the devastating independence war, the Republic of Turkey was founded on burnt and lost lands. The important effect is that the psychological trauma that this war created had engulfed the minds of Turkish politicians by the end of the twentieth century.

This historical sense, known in the literature as the Syndrome of Sèvres, has formed the idea system that Turkey is constantly surrounded by enemies. In such a mental environment, the importance of the Turkish Armed Forces has been emphasized since 1923 and afterward, the army as Turkey's savior has played a vital role in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. After the Independence war, veterans turned to politics and entered the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM). However, a strong military base in Turkey's political arena was also institutionalized (Arslan 2006, p. 7). In this regard, Mustafa Kemal Pasha (Atatürk) states in a speech that the achievements of the Republic and its importance are owed to the Turkish army: "We owe this success to the sympathy and cooperation of the Turkish people and its invaluable army" (Başbakanlık 2003, p. 9). During the presidency of Turgut Özal, he had a close relationship with Doğan Güreş, the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, and this shows the importance and weight of the military throughout the Republic era, even in a liberal period like Özal's rule (Hürriyet 2008).

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, there were riots backed by Great Britain. The Assyrian uprising in 1924 was directly supported by British forces (Bilgiç 2016, p. 97). Also, the Sheikh Said's rebellion in 1925 and Ağrı uprising between 1926-1930 was supported by Great Britain, Greece, and Italy directly or indirectly (Sarikoyuncu Değerli 2008). The next rebellion was led by Seyid Riza in 1937-38, who there are documents that it also supported by foreigners (Arabaci 2017). These Kurdish uprisings led to pessimism and suspicion about other states and played a significant role

in the development of the strategic culture of the Republican period. Its resumption in the form of foreign-supported terrorism in the 1980s expanded this suspicion. In addition, the terrorist attacks of the Armenian organization Asala against Turkish interests from the 1970s to the 1990s (Gunter 2011) intensified this strategic sense.

Given what has been said, Turkey's Republican strategic culture is a result of a painful process. For example, after Atatürk's step-daughter success in a military operation against insurgents in Tunceli Province, Atatürk says to her that "I'm proud of you, Gökçen. And not only me, but the entire Turkish nation that follows this event is proud of you ... We are a soldier nation. Between seven and seventy, men and women, we were created as soldier" (Cited in Altınay 2004, p. 13). By this conceptualizing, the importance of the army in Turkish politics could be understood. Hence, in order to analyze Turkish foreign and especially domestic policy, it is inevitable to study the process of establishing the modern Turkish state.

Likewise, the Arab leaders' joining the Ottoman enemy front during the First World War and Syria's claim over the Turkish lands especially Hatay Province has been a crucial element of the Republican strategic culture. The transfer of Mosul to Iraq is another factor of Turkish strategic culture during this period, which is also mentioned in the Turkish National Pact (Renda 2011). The policies of the Western actors towards Turkey on issues such as Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s and the PKK terrorism during the 1980s and afterwards, have also led to the strengthening of anti-Western thought in Turkey's strategic thinking.

The National Pact was approved by the Chamber of Deputies of the Ottoman Empire in January 1920. According to the pact, the Turkish state must take back in due course the areas occupied by enemies during the First World War or bring a solution to those regions. The areas which are predominantly inhabited by the Turks in northern Iraq such as Mosul and Kirkuk, northern Syria, the Caucasus, western Greece, and western Bulgaria, have been considered within Turkey's national borders. Thus in this

pact, Turkey has tried to show to the occupier states and to the world that it was resisting the enemy's invasion (Doğanay 2001; Marttin 2018).

Some of Republicans believe that no European country has neighbours with enemies like Armenia and Greece. Even none of the European countries have enemy-like Greece, Armenia, Syria, South Cyprus, Iraq, and Iran. Also, there is no European country that has a secular Muslim-majority society like Turkey who has become a model for the rest of Muslims. No European country has sacrificed thousands of its people for decades-long ethnic conflict provoked from abroad (Alaranta 2014, p. 49). Consequently, the main lines of Turkish strategic culture were formed in such an atmosphere which could be divided into five categories. The first feature is the sensitivity to the homogeneity and unity of its territory. The second one is related to Sèvres Syndrome, which means that foreign forces, even allies, are not at all trustworthy and every country has a hostile capacity, so there is always a threat to national security. The third is a limited understanding of security that only cares about sovereignty and territorial integrity and avoids dangerous and risky steps. The fourth is the unwillingness to grant any concession to competitors and the strong desire to maintain the status quo. In the end, there is a reluctance to enter the conflict of other countries and lead the country into erosion conflict (Evans 2014 a).

5.1. The importance of army (TSK)

The Ottoman army, which fought for years on different fronts, was intertwined with the people in the war of independence. In this context, the militaristic discourse was a topic beyond inter-party and inter-group debates, and it had become a national issue in the 1920s and later on. One of the most important goals of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after the Independence War was to keep the army out of politics (Burak 2001, p. 148). But he did not insist on this, because he knew the role of the military as the

protector of the secular system (Yıldırım 2010). In line a stronger adoption of the army within the people, in 1923, it was proposed to add programs such as physical education and scouting, inspirational poetry, national anthem, drama, and military parades to primacy schools curriculum. Moreover, in 1924 the same curriculum proposed to secondary schools. In 1926, military education was added to the curriculum of high school and teacher training centres. The most interesting feature of this period was that the rank of the trainer was a captain-level officer and included a 15-day training camp. Such programs consolidated the role of the armed forces in the new system (Gündüz 2017, p. 6). This importance is reflected in Article 34 of the 1935 Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law: The task of the Armed Forces is to defend and protect the Turkish homeland and the Republic of Turkey (Dorronsoro & Gourisse 2015, p. 67). Therefore, the army is obliged to protect the national interests of Turkey and by this; it has been internalized as an exceptional institution in Turkey. In this context, the army has consolidated the thought that Turkey's position is unlike any other country because it is geographically located in the strategic region and due to this geographical location, the Turkish Armed Forces have a unique characteristic. This institutionalization is also seen in the creation and strengthening of the Turkish National Security Council (MGK). This means that the existence of the council is due to the geographical and geopolitical position of the country (Yeşiltaş 2012, pp. 1-2).

The founders of the Republic tried to form a military nation after a difficult conflict. Although the army's role was to preserve the Republic and the homeland, the army consolidated its role in the Turkish foreign policy. This achieved a milestone with the Cyprus operation in 1974 and reinforced the military's role in Turkish foreign policy. The operation proved the importance of the military in the Republican strategic culture of Turkey. Besides, with the advent of the PKK's terroristic attacks in the 1980s, the status quo based security policy changed to the active military operations as needed. Thus, a 50-year-old pattern was abandoned and a serious and resolute foreign policy

pursued. This means that the security-based Republican strategic culture became an active foreign policy tool in the 1990s. Especially regarding Turkey's neighbours, there was no doubt about the use of force or the threat of using force to pursue foreign policy goals. In the Kardak Crisis in 1996, the Turkish Armed Forces forced the Greek authorities to soften their policy towards Turkey (Dimitrakis 2008; The Irish Times 1996). In addition, in 1998, the Turkish Armed Forces threatened the Syrian government with direct retaliatory attacks because of hosting the PKK terroristic group and its leader. This coercive and decisive policy compelled the Syrian government to the expulsion of PKK from the northern areas of Syria (Oztig 2019). This event proved that Turkey would use the army if its vital interests are at stake.

5.2. The impact of the Soviet Union on Turkish strategic culture

After a painful period, Turkey became a neighbour with the Soviet Union. In 1920, intending to export the Bolshevik Revolution to the world, the Soviet Union claimed some areas of Turkey in the name of Armenia. But with the fierce reaction of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the Soviet Union abandoned its territorial demands. Thus, in 1921 the Moscow Treaty signed between Turkey and the Soviet Union (Bilge 1997). However, the internationalization of the Straits in the Lausanne Treaty strengthened the USSR's position in its demands of Turkey. After a long process, the Montero treaty was signed in 1936 by 117 countries. Although the treaty ended the Soviet Union's never-ending demands on Turkish straits, it did not end Turkey's concerns about USSR (Ulgul 2010, pp. 16-19).

The USSR's threats towards Turkey at the end of World War II reinforced Turkey's historical distrust of the Russians (McGhe 1990, 14). Under these pressures and threats, Turkey joined NATO in 1953 (Ürer 2003 p. 270; Alaranta 2018, pp. 5-6). Thus, the constant Soviet threats played an important role in consolidating Turkey's

security-oriented strategic culture and its foreign policy to be a part of the Wstern Block in the Cold War.

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not eliminate the Russian threat against Turkish national security. Even the Russian Federation continues its provocations if it has immediate interests. For example, after the crisis between Russia and Turkey in 2015, a Russian warship was seen in the Bosphorus with soldiers with shouldered rocket launcher (The Guardian 2015). Therefore, the Russian threat continues to be one of Turkey's perennial security threats and plays a crucial role in the security thinking of Turkish policymakers.

5.3. Turgut Özal's revisionist strategy

Özal was raised in intellectual centres established in the 1970s. These intellectuals presented a mix of Turkish culture with Islamic values. In that time these groups believed that there have been fundamental similarities between pre-Islamic Turkish culture and Islamic civilization. They believed Islam is an especial factor for the Turks and in this respect, the Turks were serving as soldiers of Islam (Zürcher 2017, p. 293). Thus, Özal, who grew up in such an intellectual environment, began to question traditional Republican (Kemalist) values. In a speech, for example, by dividing traditional Turkish foreign policy into two periods of Ataturk and İnönü, criticized İnönü, calling his foreign policy timid, passive and introverted (Mufti 2009, p. 63).

Changes in the discourse meant a shift in Turkish foreign policy from passive to an active state. Therefore, Turkey began to explore its region. Özal's realistic thinking and perception of Turkey's role in the region was reflected in Turkish foreign policy activities in the 1980s and 1990s. Turkey perceived itself in wide geography, and even it was a belief that Turkey was an inevitable part of the region and should play a role in regional politics. As Kemal Mufti has cited it, Özal left the Republican paradigm in the

strategic sense of Turkey (2009, p. 63). This means that Özal turned from an unwillingness policy to an active participation policy in the region and wanted to contribute to the creation of new world order through the military. Therefore, he promoted Turkey's active role in international operations such as the Gulf War in 1990-1991 (Danforth 2008, p. 89). In his remarks, he made the following statements about the benefits of participating in the Gulf War: "We will have two cards. A card will be with the Western countries and the other one will be with the Muslim and Arab countries. The greater weight in the East will mean the greater in the West as well" (Akçay 2015, p. 179).

In a general assessment, the characteristics of Turgut Ozal's strategic culture added a new set of believes in Turkish foreign policy. Acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity of Turkey strengthened him in domestic policy. Also, he had the ambition to reform the international order and rebalance the West and East affairs. By this, he could bring his ambition to reality and make Turkey the region's most important political, military and economic power. Moreover, his policy was international activism and even a policy of interventionism, especially in the Middle East as mentioned before. Finally, his policy and perception of security was far beyond national integrity and he connected Turkish national security with International security (Evans 2014 b). According to Özal, Turkey has had valuable assets that was not able to see for a long time. For Özal, the reason for this was the caution of some politicians and their fear of themselves. But Turkey must enter a new phase with its material and spiritual assets because it has the potential to improve its position not only domestically but internationally as well (Benli Altunşık 2014, pp. 32-33)

5.4. A Document, a Strategy

One of the most important documents related to Turkey's strategic and security policies is the Turkish National Security Policy Document, which is a product of the Republican period. The existence of the document appeared for the first time in the 1990s and it is so important that has been called the second constitution by experts. The document is written by the secretariat of the National Security Council (Özdemir 2006, p. 72). "Continuity is a key for government activities. Therefore, the fundamental responsibility of the government is conducting its activities with the planned and specified manners. One of these manners is to maintaining national security and to determine and detect national security policies. The National Security Policy Document has been prepared for this purpose" (Aday Memur Hazırlayıcı Eğitimi 2019, p. 19)

This document is constantly modified and contains contemporary threats and no one knows exactly about the contents of it. Totally, it refers to protecting Turkey from domestic, regional and international threats. Also, the secular government structure, special attention to sensitive areas inside Turkey, the Cyprus issue, support for the unity of the education system, rejection of the Montero Treaty amendment, attention to Syrian claims over Hatay Province, the PKK terrorism, the crisis in the Middle East and Armenian claims over the 1915 events have been discussed (Hürriyet 2004; Memurlar 2005; MGK 2015). The contents of this document are updated periodically and are compiled and extended according to the threats of the day.

6. Conclusion

This article attempts to briefly describe the evolution of Turkish strategic culture in the period of 1923-2002. Given that strategic culture is the product of geography's relationship to the history and culture of a society, Turkish strategic culture is also a

function of these categories. The strategic thinking of the Republican period was affected by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Although Turkey's strategic culture has been the product of empires in the long past, this paper examines the impact of the events of the last century. The geographical extent of the Ottoman Empire decreased from 2.5 million square kilometres to 783,000 kilometres that has been achieved by a horrific war in early 1920s. If Turkey had not been won in the war of independence, its territory today would not have exceeded 200,000 square kilometres. The Soviet Union (Russia), the Kurdish riots, Armenians, Arabs, Greece, Italy, Great Britain, and France each played a significant role in consolidating the Republican strategic culture. Even in spite of widespread changes in the strategic culture, there are still clues to this kind of thinking in Turkey. Therefore, for understanding domestic, and especially foreign policy of Turkey it is inevitable to understand its strategic culture.

The difficult times in the last period of Ottoman Empire's rule and the independence war between 1919 and 1923 left a deep scar on the minds of the Turkish government that, although some politicians tried to eradicate, they failed. Many domestic laws in Turkey are designed based on this difficult history. Turkey's domestic politics have witnessed many tragic events in the twentieth century, so it is clear that foreign policy problems could be reflected in domestic politics. These problems culminated in decades such as the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and the Turkish military, opposed to any change, intervened in domestic politics to prevent internal chaos by a coup, which was not in line with Turkish democratic standards.

The post-Soviet era and systemic pressures forced the educated elite of Turkey to provide a broader definition of Turkey's political and social identity. Therefore, the change of rulers in the 2000s changed the Turkish security-basic strategic discourse. This broad definition has caused widespread changes in all aspects of Turkish political and social aspects. And by taking some dimensions of the Republican era, Turkish strategic culture experienced a new age of restoration and as a result, tolerance in foreign

policy is the product of this transformation. The Islamic identity led to a hybrid strategy that combined of ideology and real politics in foreign policy towards the Islamic and East World. At the same time, Turkey maintained its ties with Western actors and even tends EU membership.

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