

PICTURE STORY

Turkish foreign policy: from status quo to soft power

April 2009

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Over the last decade, Turkish foreign policy has undergone a profound – and unprecedented – transformation.

"Turkey," Philip Robins could still write at the beginning of the decade, "is a status quo power."

"The ideological change related to the emergence of a hegemony of liberal values, with their emphasis, in the political domain, on democracy, pluralism, human rights and civil society. [...] Turkey just did not connect with the spirit of these normative changes. [...] By the early 1990s, rather than being transformed by liberal, exogenous factors, Turkey was retreating from such values as a process of de-democratization began to take hold."

As Robins put it back then, "history tells Turks to be suspicious, especially of their neighbours, who covet their territory or seek to erode the greatness of the nation through devious means."

Some of that suspicion remains, but much of it has melted away. The European Union, wrote Kemal Kirişci in 2006, "has succeeded in having an impact on Turkey's 'culture of anarchy', moving the country out of a Hobbesian world toward the Kantian one." A multifaceted foreign policy of "zero problems with neighbours" has taken root, vastly improving relations with countries like Russia, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Greece. Even in the case of Armenia – where diplomacy has been hostage, for the most part, to historical disagreements – a rapprochement appears to be in the offing.

A tangible shift in trade patterns, a sign of a diversified foreign policy portfolio, has also taken place. Since 2002, exports to neighbouring and Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Romania and Ukraine) have risen year after year – from 11 percent of total exports in 2002 to 20 percent in 2008. Imports from these countries, over the same period, have jumped from 15.5 percent to 27.6 percent. Turkey, under the AKP, has also signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, Albania and Montenegro.

Turkey's new geopolitical position, argues Ahmet Davutoğlu, the most influential foreign policy thinker in Turkey, "has to be seen as a means of gradually opening up to the world and transforming regional into global influence. [...] Turkey is both a European and Asian, Balkan and Caucasus, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean country."

As Graham Fuller sees it, Turkish foreign policy is now freeing itself from the legacy of "decades of Kemalist oriented history instruction [that] indoctrinated the country to think negatively about the Islamic world in general and the Arab world in particular."

Perhaps the most poignant description of the new face of Turkish foreign policy comes from a non-expert, however. US President Barack Obama, in his address before the Turkish Parliament on April 6, had this to say:

"I know there are those who like to debate Turkey's future. They see your country at the crossroads of continents, and touched by the currents of history. They know that this has been a place where civilizations meet, and different peoples come together. And they wonder whether you will be pulled in one direction or another. Here is what they don't understand: Turkey's greatness lies in your ability to be at the center of things. This is not where East and West divide – it is where they come together."



Table of contents

Ismail Cem and the breakthrough in 1999	6
Davutoglu and the policy of "zero problems with neighbours"	9
Philip Robins, on foreign policy and the national security state	12
William Hale, on geography and international politics	15
Graham Fuller, on a new Turkish Republic	17
The 2001 AKP party programme: a new foreign policy vision	19
Larrabee and Lesser, on Turkey's double burden	21
Kemal Kirisci, on Turkey's shift from Hobbes to Kant	24
Turkish critics in Washington	26

Ismail Cem and the breakthrough in 1999



Ismail Cem

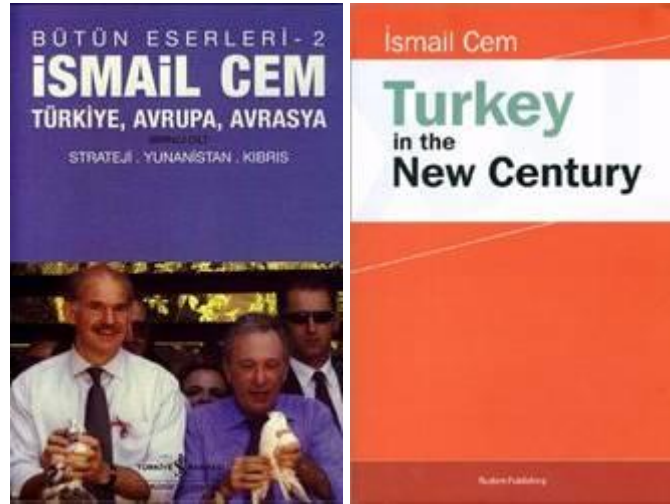
Ismail Cem served as Turkey's foreign minister in two different governments between 1997 and 2002.

Cem was at the centre of a foreign policy transformation that saw Turkey move from a country snubbed at the 1997 EU summit in Luxembourg (when it was denied EU candidate status) to an EU candidate state in Helsinki two years later.

It was a profound transformation. As late as September 1998, the impression of increasing cooperation between Armenia, Greece and Iran had caused such irritation in Turkey that Ismail Cem himself went to Tehran and accused Greece of attempting to "recruit Muslim soldiers to take part in new Crusades." Little suggested at the time that Turkey was about to be embraced by the EU, and by Greece above all, as a prospective EU member state.

In *Türkiye, Avrupa, Avrasya*, a posthumously published book, Cem recalls his years at the Ministry – which, as the book makes clear, helped articulate the vision of a "zero problems with neighbours" policy.

"When I came to the Ministry I realized that our relations with many of our neighbours were not good, and I thought at least some of the blame must lay with us. We adopted a principle where, for every positive step towards Turkey, we would respond with two positive steps."



Türkiye, Avrupa, Avrasya – Turkey in the New Century

Inspired by his conviction that "we need a Turkey that has friendly relations with the regions with which it shares history and culture," Cem's "positive steps" diplomacy was to mark a profound change in Turkey's engagement with its neighbours. It was also a change that some in Ankara regarded with suspicion.

1999 saw three events that were to leave a lasting imprint on Turkish foreign policy: the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan; a diplomatic opening with Greece, following two devastating earthquakes that shook both sides of the Aegean; and the decision, made by the European Council in December 1999, to approve Turkey's candidacy for accession to the European Union.



It was in bringing about a revolutionary transformation in Turkey's relations with Greece that Cem was to leave his most important mark. Relations with Greece had gone from bad (fight over the Imia rocks in the Aegean in 1996) to worse. In 1999, after PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured after hiding in the Greek embassy in Kenya, they had reached a nadir.

On 14 February 1999, US president Bill Clinton went as far as to warn that violence in Kosovo could draw Greece and Turkey – two NATO allies – into war.

A sequence of events that began within days of Clinton's remarks was to prove that the tide in Turkey and Greece was changing. On 18 February 1999, Greece's foreign minister, Theodoros Pangalos, was forced to resign in response to his role in the Ocalan affair. He was succeeded by Giorgios Papandreou, a longtime supporter of Greek-Turkish rapprochement. In July 1999, Papandreou made a symbolic move – in the face of strong opposition by Greek nationalists – by issuing a statement on the legal status of the Turkish minority in Greece, suggesting that Muslims who felt themselves to be Turks should be allowed to call themselves Turks.

In August 1999, a huge earthquake hit the Marmara region in Turkey. In September, a smaller one struck Athens. The earthquakes produced an unprecedented show of sympathy and solidarity by ordinary Turks and Greeks, challenging entrenched notions of "the other" and producing a visible change in attitude in the Turkish and Greek media. As Larrabee and Lesser point out, the response to the earthquakes was to provide "domestic cover" for a series of diplomatic initiatives – started by Cem and Papandreou – and "insulate them from strong domestic criticism." The new spirit of détente was to bear fruit: in December 1999, Greece formally withdrew its long-standing opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union.

Türkiye, Avrupa, Avrasya was published in 2009, two years after Cem's death. Though it contains few clues as to when the different chapters were actually written, it offers good insight into the way Cem thought about the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy in recent years:

"In recent years Turkey is seriously questioning its role and function in international relations, both seeking and creating answers. [...] When I first took this seat and said 'We are also European and Asian,' there were strong reactions. But then the importance of this was understood and it was supported."

"The development of Turkey's strategic position and the new awareness of this in Turkey have played a role in the progress we've made towards the EU."

"After 1997, Turkey has made leeway in the Middle East to the extent that it has become prominent in the West."

Further reading

- Ismail Cem. *Türkiye, Avrupa, Avrasya*. Kultur Yayınları, 2009
- Ismail Cem. *Turkey in the New Century*. Nicosia, TRNC: Rustem, 2001

Davutoglu and the policy of "zero problems with neighbours"



Ahmet Davutoğlu

Ahmet Davutoğlu, dubbed "the Turkish Kissinger" by former US ambassador Mark Parris, is widely credited with having provided the intellectual framework for Turkey's foreign policy under the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) government. Born in the conservative Anatolian city of Konya, Davutoğlu graduated from a German international school in Istanbul and obtained a PhD from Bogazici University. He then went on to teach political science at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, before returning to chair the International Relations department at Beykent University.

In 2001, Davutoğlu authored "Strategic Depth" (*Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*), as he was about to move from academia into a job as chief foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. A quick read through the AKP's 2002 political programme – or through President Abdullah Gül's and the prime minister's foreign policy speeches – shows that their authors kept a copy of "Strategic Depth" within reach.



"Strategic Depth"

In Davutoğlu's book the arguments in favour of a renewed relationship between Turkey and its near-abroad are laid out in full. During the Cold War, Turkey's geopolitical influence was used as a trump of the Western Block, writes Davutoğlu. After the fall of the USSR it was necessary to re-interpret Turkey's geopolitical role, "overcoming the strategy of conserving the status quo. [...] In this understanding Turkey has to redefine its position [...] and gain a new understanding within the international framework." Turkey's new geopolitical position, he argues, "has to be seen as a means of gradually opening up to the world and transforming regional into global influence:"

"In fact, Turkey is both a European and Asian, Balkan and Caucasus, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean country."

Davutoğlu's book offers a comprehensive articulation of what was to become the AKP government's "zero problems with neighbours" doctrine.

"It is impossible for a country experiencing constant crises with neighbouring states to produce a regional and global foreign policy [...] Relations with these countries have to be detached from the long and difficult process involving politics and bureaucrats. A broader basis, focused largely on intra society relations, including economic and cultural elements, must be found. [...] A comprehensive peace plan and a package to develop economic and cultural relations have to be put into place simultaneously to overcome security crises with the closest neighbours."

"Particularly in our region, where authoritarian regimes are the norm, improving transport possibilities, extending cross-border trade, increasing cultural exchange programs, and facilitating labour and capital movement [...] will help overcome problems stemming from the role of the central elites."

Further reading

- Ahmet Davutoğlu. *Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu*. Küre Yayınları, 2001.
- Ahmet Davutoğlu, "[The Clash Of Interests: An Explanation Of The World \(Dis\)Order](#)", *Perceptions*, December 1997 - February 1998, Volume II - Number 4.

- Ahmet Davutoğlu, "[Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007](#)", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 / No. 1 / 2008, pp. 77-96
- Speech by Ahmet Davutoğlu: "[Turkey in 2008](#)", at the Henry Jackson Society, 11 June 2008
- Speech by Ahmet Davutoğlu: "[Turkey's Top Foreign Policy Aide Worries about False Optimism in Iraq](#)", Council on Foreign Relations, 19 September 2008

Philip Robins, on foreign policy and the national security state



Phillip Robins

A former Middle East correspondent for the BBC and The Guardian, **Philip Robins** entered academia in the 1980s. In 1987, he joined Chatham House, a prestigious think tank, where he later founded the Middle East Programme. Having taken up a teaching post at Oxford University in 1995, Robins published *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* in 2003.

The book covers Turkey's role in a changing international system, players and processes, and the role of ideology and history in policy making.

Writing at the turn of the century, Robins could not have predicted the changes that Turkish foreign policy would undergo after the 2002 elections. His book's greatest value, therefore, lies not in detailing where current Turkish foreign policy is heading, but in showing where it came from (and how far it had to come).

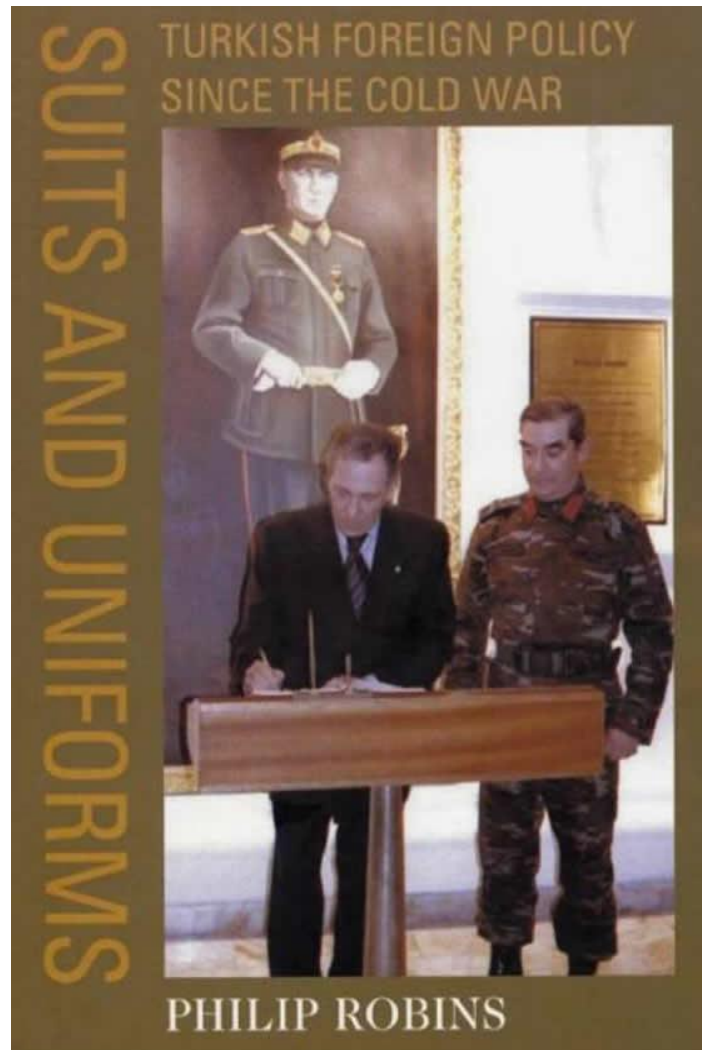
"History", as Philip Robins puts it, "tells Turks to be suspicious, especially of their neighbours, who covet their territory or seek to erode the greatness of the nation through devious means."

"Turkey is a status quo power. [...] Turkey's foreign policy elites remained wedded to the sanctity of borders, of states, of multilateral institutions and of norms of conduct, even when it became clear that systemic changes have rendered some of these continuities no longer tenable."

Robins stresses the huge "normative gap" that opened up between Turkey and other European countries in the 1990s:

"The 1980s saw the beginnings of a new norms based approach to international affairs, especially in Europe and the developed world. [...] The ideological change related to the emergence of a hegemony of liberal values, with their emphasis, in the political domain, on democracy, pluralism, human rights and civil society. [...] Turkey just did not connect with the spirit of these normative changes. [...] By the early 1990s, rather than being transformed by liberal, exogenous factors, Turkey was retreating from such values as a process of de-democratization began to take hold."

This normative gap, Robins notes, was to have a tangible impact on Turkey's standing in the world. In the 1990s relations between Turkey and the international human rights community "deteriorated precipitously". In 1996, Freedom House labelled Turkey as "partially free", placing it in the same category as Kuwait.



Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War

Articles of the Turkish Penal Code at the time did not distinguish between acts of violence and thought. Between 1991 and 1994 thousands of claims of torture were submitted to human rights organisations; thousands of mystery killings took place; by the spring of 1996, some 3,000 villages had been razed to the ground in southeast Anatolia, as the state battled the PKK.

National politics, to a large extent, had been hijacked by an opaque and unaccountable "deep state" or "national security state", which was justified by the need to fight Turkey's enemies, particularly the PKK in South East Anatolia:

"The methods of the deep state involved the use of force, physical and psychological intimidation, extra-judicial killings, and the creation of a cordon sanitaire through the razing of villages and the displacement of rural populations."

Robins notes that Turkey had nine foreign ministers between July 1994 and June 1997, reflecting profound governmental instability. Foreign policy was set by the National Security

Council (NSC) – an "advisory" body in name only. Chaired by the President of the Republic and composed of civilian and military members, the NSC was in fact a conduit for the military to give (and impose) its views on different policy issues. Its Secretary General was a senior officer. The NSC was also represented on civilian institutions like the High Board for Radio and Television (RTÜK) and the Commission for Higher Education (YÖK).

It was here, and not in the cabinets, that foreign policy was made in the late 90s:

"[The NSC] dispenses 'advice', but in practice it is virtually unheard of for cabinets and parliaments publicly to question its views, and it is a proud claim made by the NSC secretariat that there are no examples of recommendations in the realm of foreign policy that have remained unimplemented."

Reading Robins' book today one realises the extent to which Turkish foreign policy has evolved as a result of Turkey's democratisation. A number of major structural changes have taken place. As of 2003, for example, the NSC is a purely consultative body – having no authority to demand the government to follow up on its recommendations – with a civilian majority and a civilian Secretary General. In addition, the NSC is no longer represented in civil institutions.

In recent years Turkey has also made efforts to close the normative gap with the rest of Europe through a variety of reforms affecting the quality of its democracy. Steps have been taken to eliminate torture as an instrument of state policy. Alleged members of the so-called deep state, including senior military officers, have recently been put on trial in civilian courts.

In 2003, Robins was able to write that "it is no coincidence that Turkey has not been a non-permanent member of the Security Council since 1961." In the fall of 2008, Turkey was elected to the Security Council – and, given the progress achieved over the past few years, this is no coincidence, either.

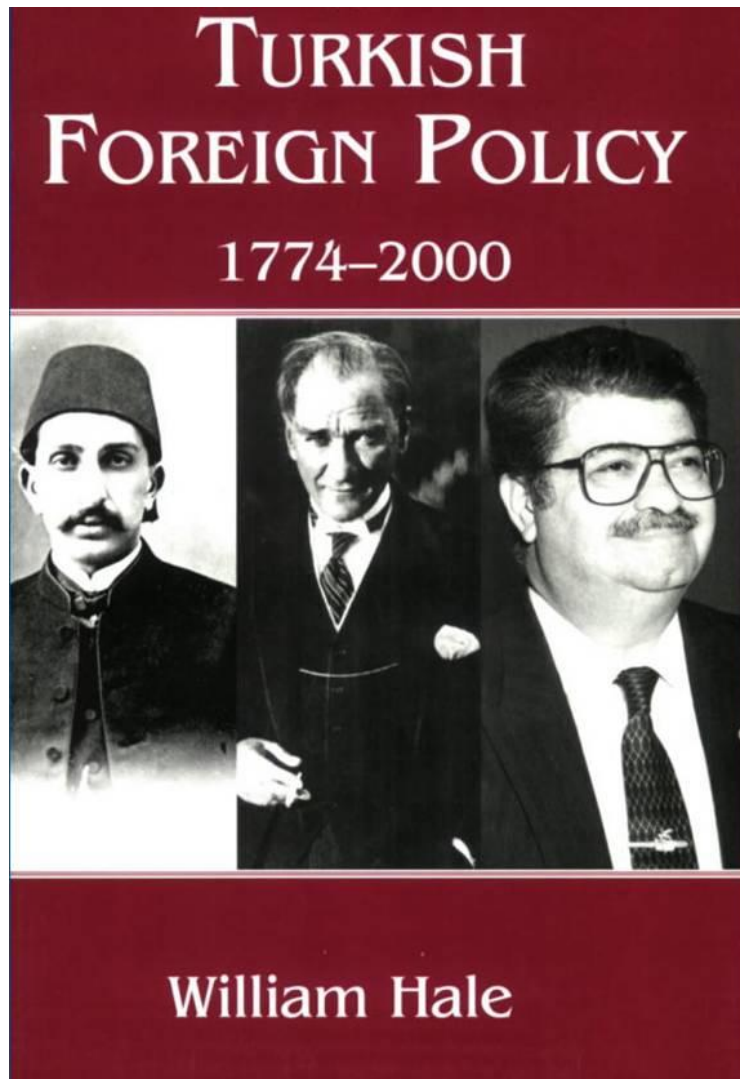
As Robins argues in a recent interview with *Today's Zaman*, a new balance has emerged in Turkish foreign policy.

"Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party is definitely more geographically rounded than was the case before. In previous years, the overwhelming priority was on 'Western' issues, from NATO to relations with the US and of course with the EU. The Middle East and the Islamic world more generally were regarded as lower priorities, largely ignored or simply reduced to one or two core issues, such as terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. Under the AK Party relations with the Middle East have been revalued, but without devaluing those with the West."

Further reading

- Philip Robins. *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*. C. Hurst & Co: London, 2003.
- "Turkish foreign policy hostage to domestic political problems", interview with Philip Robins, *Today's Zaman*, 12 May 2008.

William Hale, on geography and international politics



William Hale: Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000

Having published *The political and economic development of modern Turkey* (in 1981) and *Turkish politics and the military* (in 1994), **William Hale**, the former head of the Political and International Studies department at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, decided, in the late 1990s, to focus his research on Turkey's international relations. The result was *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, touted by *Foreign Affairs* as "fully rounded diplomatic history at its best".

Though it opens with the late 18th century and closes with the beginning of the 21st, Hale's book covers the history of Ottoman diplomacy in a single 30-page sweep, as if in a hurry to delve into the story of the Turkish Republic. Hale doesn't altogether forsake or ignore the Ottoman legacy, however. Instead, he highlights several elements of continuity in Turkey's foreign policy across the ages – linking the Empire's "balance of power" politics with Cold War Turkey's "status quo" posture, to cite one example, and highlighting the impact of Turkey's geographical position on its international relations.

"Turkey is the only state, apart from Russia, with territory in both Europe and Asia, and is affected by and affects international politics in both south-eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, in Transcaucasia and the southern regions of the former Soviet Union, and in

the northern part of the Middle East. Historically, Turkey's most strategically significant asset has been its control of the straits of Dardanelles and Bosphorus, on which Russia had depended for direct maritime access to the Mediterranean, and the only route through which Britain, France and later the United States could challenge Russia in the Black Sea (or try to assist it, during the First World War). [...] The fact that Turkey's geographical position is one in which the interests of several great powers intersect has also given its foreign policy-makers a degree of flexibility not open to states which are likely to be dominated by a single great power (the case of Mexico and the United States being an obvious example)."

Further reading

- William Hale. *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000*. Frank Cass: Portland, 2001

Graham Fuller, on a new Turkish Republic



Graham Fuller

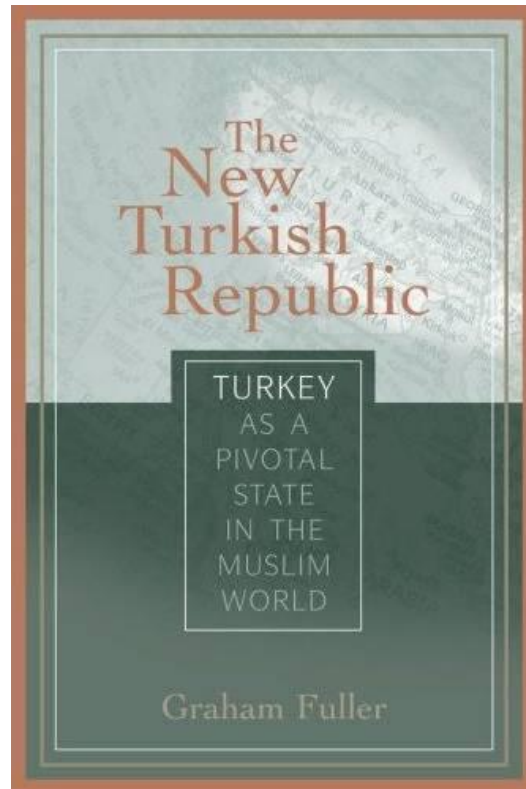
In 1982, after twenty years in the Foreign Service – having worked mostly in the Middle East – **Graham Fuller** was appointed the CIA's National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia at the. In 1986, he moved up the Agency chain, becoming Vice-Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, with overall responsibility for all national level strategic planning.

In 1988, Fuller left government. Soon thereafter, he began writing on the Middle East, Central Asia, and – having served there as a diplomat – on Turkey. In 2008, he authored *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, the first English-language book to offer a comprehensive analysis of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP government and its implications for US interests in the Middle East.

Fuller sets the scene by highlighting, like Robins, the role that ideology and nation-building have played in the Turkish Republic's foreign policy until the 1990s.

"Decades of Kemalist oriented history instruction indoctrinated the country to think negatively about the Islamic world in general and the Arab world in particular."

"While the republic did face genuine external enemies, Kemalist ideology tended to incorporate a fear of external powers and conspiracies as a key element in its world outlook. This paranoia toward the outside world helped both to preserve Turkey's domestic power and to justify an authoritarian approach to guarding the nation against external threats."



The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World

Fuller sees the birth of a new Turkish foreign policy.

"New social classes within Turkey view their Islamic and Ottoman heritage with greater respect and pride, diluting the country's old, elitist, strictly western orientation."

"The Turkey that the West has grown comfortable with over the past half century actually represents a transient geopolitical aberration from a long term norm to which it is now returning."

"No matter what the future holds, one thing is certain: Turkey as the old, predictable and loyal American ally is a thing of the past."

Further reading

- Graham Fuller. *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*. United States Institute of Peace Press: Washington, 2008

The 2001 AKP party programme: a new foreign policy vision



When it comes to foreign policy, the AKP government's line is anything but ambiguous, as even a cursory reading of **the 2001 AKP party programme** reveals. The document, inspired by Ahmet Davutoğlu's "strategic depth" doctrine, sets out some of the guiding principles of Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP. The following are some of its more relevant points.

Focused on stability and problem-solving

"Turkey is an element of stability in the region where it is situated, with its democracy, economy and its attitude of respect for human rights. With these qualities, it shall take more initiative in the spots of crisis in regions neighboring Turkey and try to make a more concrete contribution to the solution of the crises."

A multifaceted foreign policy

"Turkey's robust democracy, pluralism, economy, secularism, culture, military, demography, and its central geographical position on the confluence of cultures, markets, and resources, as well as several conflicts mandate us a foreign policy that is forward-looking, proactive, innovative, and, ultimately, multifaceted. This requires dealing with contagious conflicts in our neighbourhood which happen to be some of the most resilient, complicated, and equally important for global affairs."

With several alternatives

"The dynamic circumstances brought about by the post cold war period have created a suitable environment for developing a foreign policy with several alternatives. ... In this new environment Turkey must also rearrange and create its relations with centers of power with alternatives, flexibly and with many axes."

And intent on forging good relations with neighbors

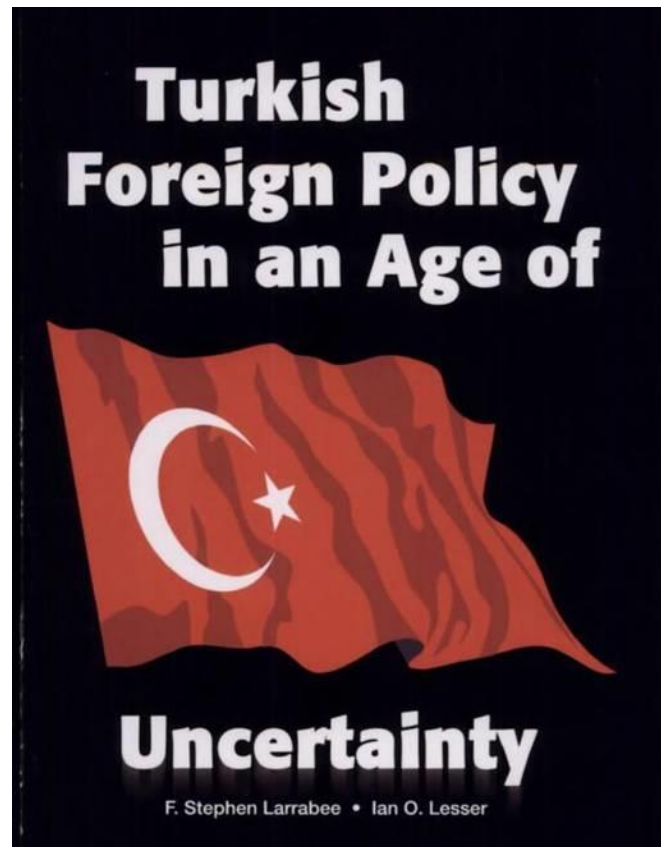
"Our Party is of the opinion that the regional security environment makes an important contribution to economic development. For this reason, Turkey shall make more efforts for providing security and stability in its near surroundings, shall increase its attempts to maintain good relations with its neighbors based on dialogue, thus it shall contribute more to the development of regional cooperation."

The AKP government was to remain faithful to the vision outlined in its party programme. Since 2002, relations with countries like Russia, Syria, Iran and Greece have improved vastly. Even in the case of Armenia – where diplomatic relations are hostage to historical disagreements – a rapprochement appears to be in the offing.

A tangible shift in trade patterns, a further sign of a diversified foreign policy portfolio, has also taken place over the last few years. Since 2002, exports to neighbouring and Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Romania and Ukraine) have risen year after year – from 11 percent of total exports in 2002 to 20 percent in 2008. Imports from these countries, over the same period, have jumped from 15.5 percent to 27.6 percent. Turkey, under the AKP, has also signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Syria, Egypt, Albania and Montenegro.

A number of ambitious and highly praised mediation efforts are evidence that Turkey has adopted a more proactive foreign policy and begun to assert itself as a regional broker. Ankara has moderated in talks between Lebanese factions; between Iraq and its neighbours; between India and Pakistan; between Pakistan and Afghanistan; between Syria and Israel; and between the PA and Hamas. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has recently offered to mediate between Iran and the US.

Larrabee and Lesser, on Turkey's double burden



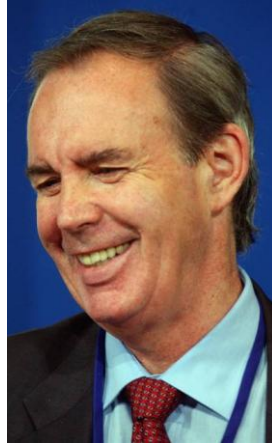
F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser: Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty

In 2003, scholars F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian Lesser teamed up to publish *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, an extensive survey into the strategic and security issues facing Turkey in the new millennium. In 2007 Larrabee takes another look at Turkish foreign policy in an article in *Foreign Affairs*.

Unlike the champions of "strategic depth", the authors believe (in *Age of Uncertainty*) that engagement in the Middle East could spell problems for Turkey's relationship with Europe and the United States. "The deeper its involvement in the Middle East," they write, "the more problems this poses for Turkey's Western orientation and identity."

In the same breath, however, they emphasise Turkey's potential as a strategic liaison between the US and the Muslim world.

"The war on terrorism and the U.S. desire to bolster moderate voices in the Muslim world, have reinforced Turkey's strategic importance to the United States."



F. Stephen Larrabee

The authors also examine the notion of Turkey as a "bridge" between the West and the Muslim world. In doing so, they stress Turkey's double burden: that of its Ottoman past and its secularist, Western-oriented present.

"Arab nationalism emerged in large part from the struggle against Ottoman rule, a reality that has left its mark on the outlook of secular nationalists across the region. Arab opinion, especially in Egypt and to a lesser extent elsewhere, tends to regard Turkey as a former colonial power whose regional aspirations should be treated with suspicion. At the same time, Islamists around the Middle East tend to reject the Western orientation of modern Turkey and are understandably hostile to the strongly secular character of the Atatürkist tradition. Some Arab modernizers, notably Bourghiba in Tunisia, have found the Turkish model attractive. But, in general, Turkey and Turkish regional policy have been regarded with suspicion. This tradition has been reinforced by Ankara's membership in NATO and its Cold War alignment with Washington at a time when Turkey's Arab neighbours were either non-aligned or aligned with the Warsaw Pact."

"The civilization to which Atatürk and his successors have aspired was centered in the West. The Arab Middle East, by contrast, has symbolized Oriental backwardness for generations of Turkish elites."

All this, say Larrabee and Lesser, could make greater Turkish engagement in the Middle East somewhat more difficult – but it will not stop it.

"The Middle East will nonetheless continue to be a leading area of activism in Turkey's external policy. Turkish policy toward the region will likely be more assertive, less cautious, and less multilateral in character than elsewhere."



Ian Lesser

Turkey, they conclude, "will be neither a bridge nor a barrier in relation to the Middle East but rather an increasingly capable and independent actor – a more significant and possibly more difficult regional ally."

Writing in the July / August 2007 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Larrabee is more sanguine in his analysis, however.

"Turkey's recent focus on the Middle East [...] does not mean that Turkey is about to turn its back on the West. Nor is the shift evidence of the "creeping Islamization" of Turkish foreign policy, as some critics claim. Turkey's new activism is a response to structural changes in its security environment since the end of the Cold War. And, if managed properly, it could be an opportunity for Washington and its Western allies to use Turkey as a bridge to the Middle East."

In the same piece that Larrabee also raises one of the most pressing issues in Turkey's policy vis-à-vis the Middle East: its future relationship with the Kurdish administration of Northern Iraq

"Ankara also needs to accept that a durable solution cannot be imposed by external forces; it can only come about as a result of an accommodation between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds. This does not mean Ankara must recognize or accept an independent Kurdish state in Iraq, but it will need to open a dialogue with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership."

Over the past few months, Ankara has done just that – with positive effects.

Having come to terms the new Iraqi constitution, which establishes a federal structure in Iraq, Turkey has engaged with Kurdish authorities in Northern Iraq to crack down on cross-border attacks by the PKK. In mid-March, Turkey hosted Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, who went on to reassure Turks that an independent Kurdish state in Iraq was "impossible". Later that month, President Abdullah Gul became the first Turkish head of state in more than 30 years to visit Iraq. During the trip Gul broke an old taboo by referring to the Kurdish administration of Northern Iraq as "Kurdistan" (the region's official name in the Iraqi constitution).

Further reading

- F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser. [*Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*](#). Rand: Santa Monica, 2003.
- F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, July / August 2007.

Kemal Kirişci, on Turkey's shift from Hobbes to Kant



Kemal Kirişci

Kemal Kirişci, professor at Boğaziçi University's department of International Relations and author of numerous works on Turkish politics, published "Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times" in 2007.

For help in illustrating the change in Turkish foreign policy over the past decade, Kirişci turned to a political scientist's favourite duo: Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant.

Hobbesian culture, as Kirişci puts it, is "characterised by a deep mistrust of the international system and reliance on self help rather than any cooperative schemes for solving conflicts." Kantian culture, on the other hand, exists "when states share a body of common values and norms, often associated with pluralist democracies, and enjoy friendly societal relations too."

"Traditionally, Turkish thinking towards international relations has been deeply influenced by the Hobbesian vision. The international environment has traditionally been seen as anarchical and therefore creating the imperative need to be militarily strong and to be prepared to use military force for 'win-lose' outcomes."



Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times

The political and economic transformation of the past decade, however, has brought Turkish foreign policy far closer to Kantian values. It is the European Union, writes Kirişci, which "has succeeded in having an impact on Turkey's 'culture of anarchy', moving the country out of a Hobbesian world toward the Kantian one."

"Domestically, the country has become much more open to pluralism and much more at ease with its cultural and ethnic diversity. [...] This transformation of Turkey has major implications in terms of the European integration project in general and in particular with regard to this project's ability to 'export' or expand the zone of stability, peace and prosperity – the zone of 'democratic peace'."

Nothing illustrates the new "win-win" approach to foreign policy better than the shift in Turkey's position on the Cyprus issue in 2003-2004, argues Kirişci. Without a new willingness to take risks, to challenge the status quo, and to invite public criticism of entrenched assumptions and positions – signs of a civilianisation of foreign policy – Turkey's endorsement of a solution to the Cyprus' division (on the basis of the Annan Plan) would have been practically impossible.



The European transformation of Turkey – "the engagement of Turkey by the European Union and the principle of conditionality that the EU employs with candidate countries" – has helped Turkey develop a new "soft power" foreign policy vis-à-vis the Middle East, writes Kirişci. This transformation has not gone unnoticed.

"More and more Arab officials have openly welcomed Turkey's relations with the EU and have made statements to the effect that they consider this to be something positive in terms of their own economic and political development. Ironically, an Arab media that once used to bitterly criticise Turkey's western vocation during the Cold War and in the 1990s today is presenting Turkey's membership in the EU as a test case."

Further reading

- Kemal Kirişci, "[Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times](#)", European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Chaillot Paper - n°92, September 2006.

Turkish critics in Washington



Soner Cagaptay – Zeyno Baran

Two Washington-based Turkish analysts – **Soner Cagaptay** and **Zeyno Baran** – have been among the most vocal critics of Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP. Both have also questioned whether the increasing civilianisation of Turkish policy making in recent years has actually been a good thing. If a military coup against the AKP were to take place, Baran wrote in December 2006, "it would not necessarily translate to a nondemocratic Turkey. More likely, it would simply mean the end of Turkey's current 'Islamist experiment' and a return to a more conservative government – stalwartly secular, yes, but a democracy nonetheless. Ironically, this Turkey might ultimately be seen to be a better member of Europe than today's."



Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey

New Elections, Troubling Trends

Soner Cagaptay

Policy Focus #67 | April 2007

"The AKP, which came to power in 2002, has since undermined Turkey's traditional pro-Western foreign policy orientation," Cagaptay wrote in "Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey", a 2007 publication.

"Turkey's ensuing drift away from the West to be at equal distance to all 'geocultural basins' around it is the most important paradigm change in Turkish foreign policy since the beginning of the Cold War."

"The AKP is moving Turkey in a direction where growing anti-Western public opinion increasingly checks Turkey's commitment to the West."

In a 2009 commentary published in *The Washington Post*, Cagaptay issues even more dire warnings.

"Ankara's rapprochement with Tehran has gone so far since 2002 that it is doubtful whether Turkey would side with the United States in dealing with the issue of a nuclear Iran. [...] If Turkish foreign policy is based on solidarity with Islamist regimes or causes, Ankara cannot hope to be considered a serious NATO ally."

Zeyno Baran tends to agree. The number of Turks with a positive view of the U.S. has dropped steadily, from 52 percent in 2000, to 30 percent in 2002, to only 13 percent as of June 2008, she notes in a recent paper. "No alliance between two democratic countries can survive such negative perceptions; the United States can no longer afford to take the partnership for granted." Responsibility for this trend, she argues, lies not with decisions taken by the US government (such as the war in Iraq, hugely unpopular in Turkey), but with the AKP government.

TURKEY: PARTNERSHIP ON THE BRINK

— Zeyno Baran —

Is Turkey turning away from the United States? On the surface, it certainly looks that way. The number of Turks with a positive view of the U.S. has dropped steadily, from 52 percent in 2000, to 30 percent in 2002, to only 13 percent as of June 2008, according to the most recent Pew poll. Seventy percent of Turks consider the U.S. an "enemy." These numbers are particularly dismal compared to those of other countries polled: only 60 percent of Pakistanis, 39 percent of Egyptians, and 34 percent of Russians and Chinese hold the same views.

The numbers are all the more shocking given the strategic partnership, reinforced by NATO, that has existed between Turkey and the United States for over half a century. No alliance between two democratic countries can survive such negative perceptions; the United States can no longer afford to take the partnership for granted.

When asked, U.S. officials as a rule are dumbfounded by the negative poll results. They simply cannot understand how these results have come about, given the hospitality they receive and the overwhelmingly positive stories relayed by American tourists. Of course, in a country of over 70 million people, American officials and tourists mainly have exposure to a minuscule group which tends to be the most accustomed to dealing with Westerners.

One could argue that Turkey is simply one of many countries in which the popularity of the U.S. has plummeted due to the policies of the Bush administra-



ZEYNO BARAN, a native of Turkey, is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Eurasian Policy at Hudson Institute. Her work focuses on strategies to thwart the spread of radical Islamist ideology and to promote democratic and energy reform processes across Europe and Eurasia.

"Turkey is undergoing an identity crisis, and it is not certain that it will emerge from it with a pro-Western orientation. Faced with political and economic challenges, Ankara may turn inwards and adopt a more nationalistic and Islamic identity, making it an outlier in the NATO alliance. Given its geography – neighbouring Iran, Iraq and Syria to the south, Russia and Ukraine to the north, the Balkans to the West, and the Caucasus to the east – Turkey's tilt away from the Atlantic Alliance would have grave consequences for America's interests in these volatile regions."

Baran criticises the doctrine of "strategic depth" as foreign policy à la carte. "Instead of acting as part of the Western alliance," she writes, "this view puts Turkey in the middle, where it can pick and choose when and in what form it will act in unison with the West and when it will

act on its own." In a similar vein, she accuses Davutoğlu and other AKP foreign policy makers of turning away from the US in favour of strengthened ties with the Muslim world.

Further reading

- Soner Cagaptay, "[Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey](#)," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #67, April 2007.
- Soner Cagaptay, "Turkey's Turn from the West", *The Washington Post*, 2 February 2009.
- Zeyno Baran, "[Turkey: Partnership on the Brink](#)", *Journal of International Security Affairs*, Fall 2008 - Number 15.
- Zeyno Baran, "[The Coming Coup d'Etat](#)", *Newsweek*, 4 December 2006.