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THE TURNING POINT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKIYE: TURNING EAST

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Abstract

In the late twentieth century, after the end of the Cold War, the world underwent a significant transformation, leading to a multipolar system. This shift was characterized by the rise of various regional powers seeking to play a prominent role in global politics. The Republic of Turkiye, in particular, has been actively seeking to assert its position in the contemporary international order.

This article examines the complexities of Turkish foreign policy, analyzing its legal framework, current aspects, priorities, and strategic approaches. Additionally, it explores the shift in Turkish foreign policy towards Eastern regions, away from its historical dependence on the West and towards the concept of "Turkish World", particularly in relation to Turkic-speaking countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition, the paper provides theoretical insights into the impact of foreign policy and diplomacy on various stakeholders, as well as the potential of soft power tools in the pursuit of foreign policy goals.

KEYWORDS: The Republic of Turkiye, foreign policy, Justice and Development Party, diplomacy, soft power, The Organization of Turkic States, Turkic world concept, people's diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, world is greater than five, SCO.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Republic of Turkiye has expressed its desire to transform into a secular state, moving away from its historical status as a predominantly religious country. The question remains: can Turkiye achieve this goal? To answer this question, it is essential to examine several important aspects.

Geopolitical Context: Turkiye's strategic location as a bridge between Europe and Asia makes it a significant player in the complex dynamics of the Middle East, North Africa, and the South Caucasus

regions. Its involvement in mediation efforts and conflict resolution initiatives in these areas has garnered attention from influential global players[1]. This unique positioning gives Turkiye the potential to significantly influence regional affairs and shape the future course of events in the region.

While geopolitical factors are undoubtedly crucial, they are not the only determinants of Turkiye's future. Other factors such as economic development, social stability, and political reforms also play significant roles in determining Turkiye's

path towards becoming a modern, secular state. A second significant factor is Türkiye's geostrategic position as a member of NATO. This has a significant impact on the global stage, as Türkiye is second in terms of military strength within NATO, after the United States[2]. Türkiye also has one of the top five military bases in the world and is a key member of the G20. The country's growing and stable economy supports a robust geoeconomic framework, making Türkiye a crucial member of the global economy. Its geoeconomic significance lies in its role as a strategic conduit for oil and gas transportation between Europe and Asia[3]. This makes it a key player in global trade. In today's international relations, Türkiye plays a critical role in economics, trade, and energy. Its importance in these areas makes it a valuable ally for some countries and a rival for others[4].

Following the end of the Cold War, Türkiye's concept of the "Turkic world," frequently espoused during religious ceremonies by Turkish officials, has propelled the country to the forefront as a catalyst for new forms of integration. In order to achieve this, Türkiye has devised a series of strategies and initiatives[5].

For example, Türkiye is the founding member and driving force behind the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), which has emerged as a key player in shaping geopolitical dynamics in the Eurasian region. The OTS has become an important platform for cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries, promoting economic, cultural, and political ties between them. In today's globalized world, it has become clear that military solutions to conflict are often insufficient. This is evident in the case of the United States-led capitalist system during the Cold War, which effectively defeated socialist countries like the former Soviet Union[6].

Today, nations are turning to more sophisticated methods of influence, recognizing the limitations of solely relying on military power. Soft power exerts a longer-lasting impact than hard power, as it does not rely on military might but rather on cultural, economic, and diplomatic means to influence other countries. In an era of globalization, countries are increasingly recognizing the significance of utilizing soft power in their international relations,

as it allows them to establish mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships. In this regard, the Republic of Türkiye also commits to utilizing soft power in its foreign relations. Its soft power has particular significance not only within the Turkic-speaking community but also extends to Europe, Africa, and the Arab world. This influence stems from the deep sense of patriotism and nationalism fostered among Turkish communities abroad[7].

The President of Türkiye rarely uses English at summits or other international events, preferring to communicate in Turkish instead. Türkiye is a significant candidate for regional leadership in the Muslim world, with the necessary resources and potential to achieve this position. The country has the potential to become one of the most significant nations globally, but in order to achieve this status, Ankara must first address domestic challenges and issues related to Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, as well as maintain a delicate geopolitical balance with major global powers. This essay will explore some crucial aspects of Türkiye's foreign policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the process of preparing this study, we have consulted the scholarly works and publications of various international and local experts. Of particular note are the contributions of Uzbek scholars who have researched the formation of Türkiye's foreign policy and its conceptual legal framework. These include A.Kasimov, A.Jalilov, H.Azimov, M.Abdurazzokova, N.Kasimova, B.Imamov, A.Sharipov,

S.Buranov and S.Jurayev.

Additionally, we have reviewed the works of notable Turkish scholars, such as Ali Balçi, Tefik Rüştü Aras, Yücel Bozdağioğlu, Kadir Sancak, Mehmet Seyfettin Erol and Yavuz Güler. The research has also considered the articles of Russian scholars V.A.Avatkov, D. Urmanov, and A.I.Zubkova. The research explored the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye as well as speeches, lectures, and statements made by leaders and politicians.

METHODOLOGY

The article employs a variety of analytical methods,

including historical research, comparative political analysis, and systematic, meaningful event-based analysis.

RESULTS

In today's global landscape, international relations play a crucial role in shaping the modern world. These relations significantly impact the processes of globalization, democratization, and redefine the balance of power between nations. In this era, regional actors are increasingly asserting their influence on the international stage, seeking to strengthen their position.

One such country is the Republic of Türkiye. Its strategic location at the intersection of different continents and civilizations provides an ideal platform for establishing relations with other countries and people. Following World War II, Türkiye adopted a more Western-oriented approach on the international stage, albeit with certain restrictions on its freedom of action in foreign policy. During the latter stages of the Cold War, however, Türkiye emerged as a significant player, supported by NATO, a major military alliance in the West. This was due to its status as the southern frontier of the alliance and its hosting of the second-largest armed forces within it [1].

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a series of developments in countries bordering Türkiye, resulting in the formation of new independent nations with cultural and ethnic connections to Türkiye[2]. Towards the end of the 20th century, Türkiye started to play a more significant role in international affairs. In recent years, under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), Türkiye has become increasingly active in international affairs, presenting numerous opportunities for the country. This increased participation on the international stage was a result of Türkiye's decision to discontinue its pursuit of EU membership. Some have seen this as a departure from a "traditional approach" in favor of a new strategy. Following the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) assumption of power in 2001, Türkiye's foreign policy experienced a significant transformation. Under the leadership of the JDP, the priorities of Türkiye's international relations shifted, with a clearer articulation of

national interests.

The JDP-led government embarked on a regional course, implementing a policy of "soft power" with neighboring countries. This marked a departure from the traditional role of a minor partner of the United States in the region, and represented a strategic shift in Ankara's approach to foreign relations. This shift has manifested itself in an intentional shift in Ankara's diplomatic emphasis towards the East, reflecting a wider aspiration to become a significant player in regional affairs. Türkiye's involvement in addressing regional conflicts goes beyond mere mediation, as it actively seeks to establish itself as a major global center of power, openly pursuing this goal.

Despite these ambitions, Türkiye has consistently shown its willingness to serve as a mediator in reaching a diplomatic and positive solution to the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Furthermore, it has successfully resumed the flow of grain, fertilizer, and energy supplies that were disrupted by the crisis, demonstrating that Türkiye's impact on the global stage is growing, not only in its regional sphere, but also within international political systems. This increase in prestige is beneficial for both regional and global stakeholders. In the early 1990s, with the emergence of independence for the Central Asian republics, Türkiye's "soft power" began to gain prominence in regional politics. Under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party, efforts to strengthen this presence intensified, leading to a perception that Türkiye was emerging as a leader in the region.

Economic, humanitarian, cultural, and educational initiatives were seen as key strategies in exercising soft power, and Türkiye pursued initiatives in these areas in Central Asia. These initiatives focused on sectors such as education, culture, society, the economy, religion, and foreign policy, aiming to promote a positive image of Türkiye in the region and beyond.

The current phase of international relations is marked by a shift from the bipolar order of the Cold War era to a more multipolar world order. The bipolar confrontation that characterized the past is now a thing of the past as the world is evolving

towards a new, more diverse and complex landscape. This new era requires a different approach to diplomacy and international relations, and Türkiye is seeking to play an active role in shaping this new order. Since the latter half of the 20th century, there has been a paradigm shift in the conduct of international relations. Instead of pursuing objectives exclusively through coercive measures, states have begun to envision and pursue their objectives through engagement and collaboration. This shift began to take shape towards the end of the Cold War, as a bifurcation emerged between the concepts of "soft power" and "hard power" in foreign policy.

The contemporary foreign policy of the Republic of Türkiye has been influenced primarily by the global geopolitical changes associated with the transition from a bipolar world order to a multipolar one. Despite this, its civilizational identity remains distinct.

In addition to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which led to the emergence of new independent states, some of which are ethnically and culturally linked to Türkiye in the territories that were formerly part of the Soviet republics, Türkiye's increased engagement in Central Asia and the South Caucasus have also contributed to its failed attempts to join the European Union. Following another crisis in bilateral relations between Ankara and the EU, which led to the suspension of Türkiye's accession negotiations in 1989, the importance of Eurasian geopolitics in Turkish foreign policy has increased significantly. Between 1997 and 2002, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, İsmail Cem, significantly expanded the "New Eurasian Project" and advocated the concept of "The Order of Eurasia," in which Türkiye would play a crucial role due to its unique position as a bridge between Asia and Europe. The Turkish government aims to enhance Türkiye's international political influence by revising Eurasianism and the Turkic identity in a more practical manner. Closer relations with other Turkic countries and Ankara's potential role as a bridge between Europe and Asia have been additional motivations for the country's desire to join the EU[8].

As the Republic of Türkiye continues to integrate into Western societies, it has adopted a more diverse approach to its foreign policy. This reflects a change in its perception of its role in the evolving global political landscape. These factors have influenced the direction of Turkish political discourse and shaped public opinion regarding the future of the country and its place in global politics. Over the past few years, there has been a notable shift in the political discourse of Türkiye towards the rejection of closed-mindedness and the pursuit of increased independence in foreign policy. This shift has been influenced by the movement of rural populations with deeply rooted religious beliefs to urban areas, where religious traditions are becoming more prominent in Turkish society. The country sought a fresh direction, a coherent set of ideologies and principles that could unite diverse segments of society, reviving a sense of national identity among Turks as a great and independent nation. This was the vision articulated by JDP, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan[9].

The rise of this political party, led by a charismatic figure like Erdoğan, was a natural response to the changing global political landscape and Türkiye's historical trajectory. The JDP has successfully crafted a vision for Türkiye's future, one that resonates with various segments of Turkish society. It blends elements of Western developmental models with traditional Eastern values and Islamic principles.

At present, the "Vision - 2050" programme serves as a primary roadmap for defining the long-term goals of the nation. Its main objective is to revise the country's foreign policy by transitioning from historical ties to modern political relations. This involves establishing friendly relations with all neighboring countries and key actors, as well as strengthening Türkiye's position on the global stage. The programme emphasizes the importance of implementing the principles and characteristics of a "middle power", such as strategic depth. A critical component of this programme is "Vision 2023", which preceded it. This programme outlines the primary long-term economic goals of Türkiye and shapes Ankara's foreign policy direction. These goals include Türkiye's economy being among the

top ten most developed economies globally by 2023 based on GDP, reducing inflation and interest rates, increasing total Turkish exports to \$500 billion, and achieving a GDP of at least \$2 trillion for Türkiye[10].

The main objectives of the policy are also to reduce the unemployment rate by 5% and increase employment by 50%. Some tangible external achievements of modern Türkiye under this programme include the expansion of its geopolitical influence in Latin America, the Pacific region, minor Asia, and Central Asia. Additionally, Türkiye has increased its engagement in resolving international disputes, thereby enhancing its position as a significant regional actor.

The ideological underpinning of the foreign policy pursued by the current Turkish government traces its roots back to a notable statesman who served as Prime Minister of Türkiye from 2014 to 2016 - Professor A. Davutoğlu. His concept of "Stratejik derinlik" (Strategic Depth), which has become an integral part of the formal foreign policy of the Republic of Türkiye over the past fifteen years, is supported by both the government and people. During the Cold War period, Türkiye's foreign policy toward the constituent republics of the Soviet Union did not have a distinct approach. Even during the final stages of the Cold War and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Türkiye continued this policy of non-involvement in the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, after the declaration of independence of almost all the states of the former USSR in 1991, Türkiye's foreign policy experienced a significant transformation. Türkiye was the first country to recognize the newly independent states that emerged from the former Soviet sphere of influence. Since then, under the leadership of the JDP-led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Türkiye has reshaped its foreign policy to take into account its cultural, historical, and geographical characteristics as well as the current geopolitical dynamics[12].

The previously dominant pro-Western foreign policy orientation of Türkiye has given way to a more nuanced approach that reflects the country's unique position in the global arena. The current

trajectory of Turkish foreign policy is shaped by a complex interaction of domestic and external factors, leading to a multifaceted engagement with the international community.

In the context of Türkiye's increasing global presence, it aspires to play a more prominent role on the world stage and solidify its status as a significant player in global affairs. The emergence of individuals with innovative perspectives and a solid ideological foundation has significantly influenced the core principles of Türkiye's foreign policy, as reflected in official documents. These core principles include policies related to Turkic solidarity and Türkiye's status as a prominent member of the Islamic community. These principles serve as the guiding principles for the government's actions as a significant player in international relations, contributing to broader goals.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the foreign policy of the Republic of Türkiye during the early 21st century reveals a clear shift in Ankara's strategic direction, indicating a departure from its earlier position as a regional player towards a more practical and globally-focused approach. This transformation is evident in the rise of the JDP to power in 2001, which was accompanied by a significant change in the country's external policy discourse, particularly a shift away from traditional alignment with Western countries. This shift is evident in influential figures such as Rajab Tayyip Erdogan's discourse, who has advocated for a "pivot to the East" as a strategic priority for Turkish leadership. Erdogan's statements, including "The European Union is not our only option," "There are more than five countries in the world," and "Why should we not consider joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)", reflect this changing perspective.

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