
ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATION

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29-06-2010

THE RISE OF TURKEY AND THE CYPRUS PROBLEM

The purpose of this presentation is to offer an analysis of recent developments concerning Turkish foreign policy with a view to encouraging your comments, rather than your questions. Your interpretation of the moves of the Turkish diplomacy will be of value to all of us, and will certainly help us to gain a better understanding of the situation. I intend to refer to the new strategy of Turkey, and to some of the changes that have occurred affecting the Cyprus problem, and also to the positive and negative aspects of this strategy, before reaching my conclusions.

It is generally accepted that the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu to the Foreign Ministry has greatly contributed to the rise of Turkey. The new strategy of Turkey is based on his theory of “strategic depth” and neo-Ottomanism. Through his Ottoman lenses, Davutoğlu sees Turkey as being concurrently part of the Middle East and the Caucasus, Europe and Asia, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. We will explore how this is implemented in practice.

The end of the Cold War, and the fall of the Soviet Union created new opportunities for Turkey to expand its zone of influence in the Turkish speaking countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. At the time, the excuse was to bar Iranian influence. American funds were given to Turkey to develop television programmes, and to provide books for this purpose.

With Russia, Turkey used its economic influence. The volume of their bilateral trade is forty billion US dollars, with Turkey importing sixty-five percent of its natural gas, and forty percent of its oil from Russia.

With Bulgaria, their relations are normalized, since the Turkish minority of Bulgaria is represented in the country’s coalition governments.

In the Balkans, which represents a stepping-stone for Europe, Turkey established her position by participating in the peacekeeping operations of the UN, NATO, and the EU, in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and in FYROM, investing in various projects, and supporting the Muslims of these countries.

There have been big changes in the Middle East. Firstly, regarding Israel, we are all aware of what happened in Davos when Prime Minister Erdoğan attacked the Israelis, for the bombing of Gaza, in front of Shimon Peres. We also know that Erdoğan received the leader of Hamas. There are, however, several other events that we should mention, such as the fact that Turkey cancelled military exercises with Israel, in accordance with the Treaty of Military co-operation of 1996, and instead held common military exercises with Syria. Ten years ago, Turkey was ready to go to war with that country, because, as you know, Syria was supporting the PKK. More importantly, there is the recent development concerning the

blockade of Gaza, and the fact that Turkey did not allow an Israeli military aircraft to pass via her airspace. This represents another escalation.

Within the framework of the Middle East, Turkey has made visits to Iraq where they were speaking with the Kurds, and to Iran, where President Gül was received at the highest level by Ayatollah Khamenei, despite the fact that he is the leader of a NATO country and an ally of the US. I should also mention here, that even when Rasmussen was in the process of being elected as Secretary General of NATO, Turkey created some problems at the beginning, saying that he comes from a country that attacked Muslims, and by having indecent pictures published of Prophet Mohammed in the press. We, therefore, observe that Turkey has openly chosen the Arab camp.

In general, through a multi-dimensional foreign policy, Turkey managed to project the image of a strong regional power. They participate in peace-keeping operations all over the world. They promote economic co-operation with various countries, especially in the Caribbean and Latin America. As you know, they are the sixth largest economic power in Europe, and the seventeenth in the world, hence their participation in the G20. They pay visits at the highest level to various countries, and have done so in more than sixty countries, in order to promote their interests at an international level.

Without producing a drop of petrol or natural gas, they are energy players. East and West need Turkey as a transit country, as it is demonstrated by the NABUCCO, and South Stream projects.

As a result of all these efforts, Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, gaining an additional margin of diplomatic maneuvering.

Having such capital at his disposal, Prime Minister Erdoğan visited President Obama last December, reciprocating Obama's April 2009 visit to Turkey. Allow me to open a parenthesis here, and make a reference to the US-Turkey relations. President Obama had a stepfather from Indonesia, who was a Muslim, and Obama lived in Indonesia for some time. So he has been influenced by the Muslim faith. In his mind, therefore, there was a mixture of democratic values from his American mother, and the Muslim faith from his stepfather. Due to this mix of values he was of the belief that Turkey was the model to be projected. In this respect we should not forget that Obama's first visit overseas after his election was to Turkey and that he described US-Turkish relations as "*a model partnership*", asking the Europeans in Prague to accept Turkey into the EU.

On the basis of the above, we observe the importance of Turkey for the US and NATO. We also note that there is support for the European perspective of Turkey that serves American interests, and the question is why?

As you know, the European Parliament has its British "cousins" to support it, as it has the representatives of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. These people no longer have the security umbrella of the Warsaw Pact, and they do not trust the Germans and the French, so they look towards the Americans. There are also occasional "allies" such as Aznar's Spain or Berlusconi's Italy. Imagine having an additional ninety or more, parliamentarians from Turkey, which is more than those of Germany. This would be a substantial means of controlling the European Parliament.

We should also keep in mind the strategic importance of the Muslim world for the US, since terror emanates from there.

Regarding the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister to Washington, we should mention that they discussed various issues of common interests, but it is remarkable to note that, on four issues that are of capital importance to the US, Erdoğan said "no".

On the question of Afghanistan, Turkey was asked to send more troops as other NATO Member States did but the answer from Erdogan was “I will not send Muslims to kill Muslims”.

On the question of Iran, they were asked to apply stricter sanctions, but Erdoğan’s reply was that “they are not effective.” In actual fact, when the draft resolution was discussed in the Security Council to apply stricter sanctions against Iran, Turkey voted against it, although Washington backed that decision.

On the question of Armenia, a Protocol has been signed to normalize the relations between the two countries; they have to open the borders, and establish diplomatic relations. The Americans wanted to extradite the implementation of that protocol. Erdoğan answered that a condition should be met: the withdrawal of Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh. Likewise, a negative answer was given on the question of mending fences with Israel. We, therefore, observed that Turkey is making an effort of disengagement from the US through the differentiation of its policies on many international issues. Erdogan said clearly that: “We look towards the West, without neglecting the East”.

Let us turn now look at some changes that have occurred as a result of the Turkish efforts, which also affect the Cyprus problem. A good example is the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). In the past this Organization has had a pro-Cypriot stance, which was due to a number of factors:

- a) The Arabs under the Ottoman Empire suffered economic, political, racial and linguistic oppression.
- b) Cessation of minorities represents a menace to certain Arab countries.
- c) Turkey is a member of NATO and a US ally, something that provokes the sentiments of certain hard-line Arabs, like Kaddafi.
- d) Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel.

Together all of these factors have created a negative climate towards Turkey.

The friendly feelings of the Arab world towards Cyprus were confirmed after the Turkish invasion of 1974. At the time, Makarios visited Sadat of Egypt, Boumediene of Algeria, and Tito of Yugoslavia to ask for help. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) created a contact group which prepared the draft for Resolution 3212, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1974.

Turkey’s failure to associate itself with the Non-Aligned Movement in whatever form, led it to the Organization of Islamic Conference, in order to promote its interests. Working methodically, after the illegal declaration of the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”, and upgrading its participation in the work of the organization, Turkey gradually managed to have its positions on the Cyprus problem accepted in the texts of the Organization of Islamic Conference, by using its Islamic influence.

In January 1984, I was present at the Islamic summit in Morocco, where, for the first time, Turkey was represented by General Evren, the Head of State. This took place two months after the illegal UDI. Until that time, they had been sending either a Foreign Minister or an Ambassador. On that occasion, however, and ever since, they are sending someone from the highest level.

At the beginning, in the text of the OIC, reference was made to the full equality of the two sides, including the right of the Turkish-Cypriots to be heard and represented at all international fora. After the referendum on the Annan Plan in 2004, Turkey exploited the negative climate affecting our side, and managed to pass onto more advanced positions.

Turkey interpreted the separate referenda as underpinning the existence of two states in Cyprus. In the text, there was an appeal to end the so-called “isolation”, and a call for an effective solidarity with the Turkish-Cypriots. Even the request to upgrade the status of the “Turkish Muslim people of Cyprus,” as

they are registered in the OIC, from observers to full members, was presented as being made by the “Turkish-Cypriot side of Cyprus”.

More importantly, it was decided that the “Turkish Muslim people of Cyprus” should continue to participate in the work of the OIC with the name provided for in the Annan Plan. It is obvious that they wanted to conceal the reference to the “Turkish-Cypriot Constituent State”. Last, but not least, Turkey managed to have Mr. Ihsanoglu, a Turk, elected as Secretary General of the OIC.

In general, the climate in the Arab world has changed in favor of Turkey, whose arguments are now more persuasive. It seems that economic and other interests are influencing traditional friends of Cyprus. A good example can be seen with Syria, which allowed the maritime connection of Latakia with the illegal port of Famagusta, although Cyprus is voting in favor of the Arab positions concerning Golan Heights. In a more recent example, Lebanon presented amendments, in favor of Turkey, to the UNSC Resolution concerning the renewal of UNIFCYP.

In the past, the European Court of Human Rights had been doing justice to our cause. A good example can be seen in the Loizidou case. Recently things have changed. Political, and certainly not legal considerations, produced the decision recognizing the so-called Immovable Property Commission (IPC) as a means of exhaustion of local remedies. Within the framework of the Council of Europe, we should also mention the election of a Turk to the Presidency of the Consultative Assembly. This represents yet another factor in favour of Turkey.

In the United Nations, efforts are being made to use the renewal of UNFICYP, as a means of exercising pressure on our side. We have already referred to the recent Security Council Resolution, and the tabling of a Turkish draft. However, we must not forget the mid-2009 unprecedented efforts of the Security Council, which raised questions about the future of UNFICYP, aiming at the revision of its mandate. The warning showed how the climate is changing, and at the same time reflected a broader international impatience, with the continuation of one of the UN’s longest-running peacekeeping operations.

On the basis of the developments that have been mentioned, we observe that the new Turkish strategy has positive and negative aspects. By being stronger, and more prosperous, today’s Turkey is more inclined to defy the European Union, than in the past. We have already referred to Turkey’s negative stance on American demands. EU members are now openly asked by Turkey to choose between the seven hundred and fifty thousand Greek Cypriots, and the commercial and strategic opportunities in Turkey, a country of seventy-five million.

Knowing that France and Germany, among other countries, are against its accession to the EU, Turkey is de-motivated by the sense that whatever it does, it will not be accepted by Europe, and that even if it helps solve the Cyprus problem, core EU states would find another issue to block accession. Why then make concessions on Cyprus?

By using its Arabic influence in the Middle East, Turkey is presenting itself as the big Islamic power which can create problems for Israel, more effectively than Iran, without calculating political costs and alliances, if it is to expose Israel. The other side of the coin has negative connotations. Turkey’s stance is embarrassing to some similarly US-allied Arab states, such as Egypt and Saudi-Arabia, who have shied away from confronting Israel despite popular demands to do so.

By projecting itself as the champion of the Muslims in the region, and providing a fresh path for the Arabs, one might expect a strong reaction from these countries in the future. On the other hand, the advantage that Turkey could offer in bringing together people like Hamas and Israel has definitely gone. The region has, therefore, lost its mediator.

It is common knowledge that following the recent killings, by Israeli forces, of nine Turkish activists, on board a ship that tried to cross the Israeli blockade of Gaza, the relations between the two countries have hit rock bottom. As it was expected, the reaction of the Jewish lobby in the US was furious. US lawmakers warned Turkey that its ties with Washington would suffer if it continued to follow an anti-Israeli path. At a news conference, Republicans and Democrats denounced Turkey for supporting the activists. However, the lawmakers criticized the Turkish opposition to a recent UN Security Council resolution, extending punitive sanctions on Iran for its nuclear program, which was strongly backed by Washington.

As for the cost that Turkey might pay for its stance, Mike Pence, the third highest Republican in the US House of Representatives, said he was ready to re-evaluate his past reluctance to support a congressional resolution denouncing as genocide, the World War One era killings of Armenians by Ottoman forces. It seems as though the law-makers in the US are gradually becoming aware of the hypocritical stance of Turkey. On one hand it projects itself as an anti-occupation power, denouncing the occupation of Palestine, and on the other hand, it illegally occupies the northern part of Cyprus, and refuses to recognize the genocide of the Armenians.

From the picture, which I have adumbrated, we can conclude that the rise of Turkey within the regional, and international framework, is a reality. There are certain weaknesses in its Neo-Ottoman policies that Cyprus should exploit, in particular the expected reactions of the Jewish lobby, and some core Arab states. Moreover, there is an ongoing conflict between the deep state, the secular Kemalist establishment, and the AKP, the Islamist past of Erdoğan. We do not know which of them will have the upper hand in the end. In this respect, we should not forget that wrong calculations made by the West in Iran, at the time of the Shah, brought Ayatollah Khomeini into power.

In conclusion, I feel that, regarding the question of Cyprus, Turkey will never give in to pressures. This is a pessimistic conclusion, but as you know, a pessimist is an optimist who is well informed.

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