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Turkey: Stretching the bow towards the east so that the arrow can hit the West

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After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Turkey felt that the ancient world had collapsed, and its fears of harbouring a Soviet neighbour were now extinguished. A new world was in the making for Turkey, in which its Western ally did not live up to its promises despite Turkey's earnestness towards such alliance. Turkey, then saw that the power of a having leading Western ally was fading away as on one hand its grip on the global system started to loosen, and whilst on the other hand, other emerging forces were competing to gain control and who were even capable of shunning Western demands, and if not even impose their will on the West.

Having lost sight of previous certainties and with looming anxieties, Turkey was required to look into the past, to assess its outcome and sense guidance in its experience in order to explore how to move forward, whilst making use of its opportunities and avoiding its potholes. The book *Strategic Depth: Turkey and its Role in the International Arena*, by Ahmet Davutoğlu, presents an answer to such a difficult problem that is being faced by his country at this moment in time.

Davutoğlu is not the only example of those making great efforts to search international forces for a position in the new international order by addressing the same problem in a similar manner, albeit in a different direction. A large number of distinguished researchers, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Haas, Henry Kissinger and Dennis Ross, have questioned how the new world will be after the Cold War, and what role America will play in it.

This effort will continue in the countries that have enough self-confidence to seek to reserve themselves a high position in the emerging order before it settles without them or at their expense. The more a country is ready to solve this problem, which is currently being faced worldwide, the sooner it is likely to avoid choosing the wrong path.

Turkey between the world that is fading away and the world that is being born

While solving this problem, Davutoğlu takes into account Turkey's unique situation concerning its geography, history and role. So, he speaks elaborately of these aspects and moves away from the general problem, which affects the entire world, the death of the ancient world and the birth of a world which is still in the process of forming, to the characteristics of the problem in the Turkish context. He concludes that Turkey's interests do not always coincide with the interests of the West, and that one of the certainties that formed the basis of Turkish politics—that Turkey needs the West more than the West needs Turkey—is not true at all. On the contrary, the West currently needs Turkey, or even more than that. He says, for example, that Europe will not become a world power unless it includes Turkey within its walls.

The Turkish problem which Davutoğlu addresses is composed of a number of factors:

- 1- The demise of the Soviet Union is the single most important factor. Turkey is no longer afraid of Russia's expansion at its expense, or that it will be helped by the West as in the past, despite the fact that a huge number of countries have seceded from the Russian bloc with risks of fragmentation or opportunities to strengthen the bonds of rapprochement with the Turkish-speaking budding republics. Turkey is no longer looking at the adjacent Arab countries through the lens of the Cold War; to antagonise the socialist camp, such as Syria and Iraq, and ally with the countries of Western axis to repel Communist expansion in its neighbourhoods.
- 2- The outcomes of Turkey's alliance with the West were not as much as its sacrifices. It received membership in NATO thanks to the blood its soldiers shed

in the Korean War, but the Western countries continued to look at it as a country located on the outskirts guarding the borders adjacent to the communist camp, which is the role that we find in the writings of Western strategists, including the famous theorist of the Clash of Civilizations Samuel Huntington. However, after the success of this guarding assignment within the policy of containment, which culminated successfully, Turkey was unrewarded. Instead, it only harvested ashes; Europe rejected its annexation in 1989, President George Bush sided with its rival Greece and the U.S. Congress abated the \$ 150 million budget for military assistance allocated to Turkey.

- 3- The priorities of Turkey do not always correspond to the priorities of its Western allies; while it was approaching Syria the American Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, protested and warned Ankara to improve its relations with Syria and Iran as part of U.S. strategy which aims to change their "bad" behaviour. Turkey also refused to allow U.S. troops pass through its territory to invade Iraq, for fear of repercussions, such as the emergence of a Kurdish state on its borders which may be a precedent on which Turkey's Kurdish population would base their demands for secession, but America ignored these concerns. Davutoğlu presents a complete picture with the differences between the priorities of Turkey and Western countries, and realises the need for his country's policy to be independent and place its national interests at the forefront.
- 4- The centre of global competition is no longer between the capitalist West and communist East. It has moved to what is known as the arch of crisis, which includes mainly countries of the Arab and Muslim world, from Palestine to Pakistan, through Iraq and Afghanistan, where the major powers are squabbling over resources, roles and positions. It is here where political awareness is growing, where the feeling of frustration dominates the hearts of the largest human cluster in the world that desires revenge. Turkey finds itself in the middle of this arch, and it has to choose to either be a factor thus increasing the state of disorder, to the detriment of its own self, or play a role in stability. It sorely needs to do so in its own interest, since reducing internal tension decreases the dominance of the military over political decisions, and strengthens the economic growth that needs a safe environment to attract capital. Besides, the reduction of external tension enables Turkey to obtain necessary resources such as oil and ensures large foreign markets for its products.
- 5- Turkey no longer feels bitter towards the Arabs as was the case during the era of the formation of the republic in the hands of Kemal Ataturk, who had wanted to break away from the Arabs on the pretext that they had blocked his country's possession of the secret of Western power, and because they had sold the Ottoman Empire in order to gain a position in the Western alliance. Turkey itself sought Western alliance to join the Western family, but to no avail after waiting at the West's doors for a long time. It remained in the middle of its Arab neighbour, from whom it wanted to break away and a European neighbour who was as reluctant to live up to its promises. Should it be out of its reach to get what it wants from the second, it is easy to reconcile with the first given that the causes of estrangement are no more, while the need for each other economically and politically is growing.

These factors constitute new dilemmas for Turkey, mainly related to the alliance with Western powers. There is no way for the earlier problem faced by Ataturk himself to continue when he thought that Turkey's future was in absolute accordance with the West culturally and systematically. However, the Ataturk solution to this problem reached a dead end, as the West which continues to close its doors in the face of Turkey, and there is no

longer a single power in the international leadership, thus there must be a new solution to achieve the same old goal.

Davutoglu: Searching for a way out of the darkness

No wonder Dr. Davutoğlu is the keeper of the new solution to this old problem, he belongs to a conservative family who is well-connected to the Islamic heritage, and is well-versed in Western culture, which allows him to take advantage of the scientific tools that enable him to have a profound insight into Turkey's movement in a turbulent world.

He is an icon of the all forces that currently lead Turkey, and who shares a commitment to three main goals: to maintain a policy which is socially conservative, politically democratic and economically liberal. Davutoglu's history profile combines this trilogy, which has become known among the right-of-centre members of the Turkish population a force which currently forms the basis of the ruling Justice and Development Party.

It is in the interest of this new force that Turkey comes to terms with its historical legacy. The Turks increased their hostility to Western policies. Such a sentiment must be considered for winning the elections. The emerging social forces that consist of new entrepreneurs, on which the Justice and Development Party is based, are interested in seeing the dominance of the Turkish army which is anti-traditional, and the legacy of the East diminishing, and as such it will be possible to remove the barriers with neighbouring Arab countries and thus allow business to thrive.

Davutoğlu belongs to these new forces which have emerged in Turkey as a response to the impasse reached by the Ataturk experience. He has the sensitivity and the genius that has enabled him to acquire a comprehensive insight into the experiences of his own country. He concluded that his country needs a new approach that is different from the previous ones, and that it would not succeed until it puts its own interests first within its move internationally, by pursuing an independent foreign policy with multiple axes and by becoming the initiator and the decision-maker in its own affairs.

This is the gist of Dr. Davutoğlu's theory, a deep meaning for the theory of the centre, which turns Turkey into a regional power capitalising on the policy of stability to double the return on national resources.

Turkey's cards in the game of regional leadership

Davutoğlu sees, however, that Turkey currently has the means to achieve this option. Turkey is geographically a central country, because it is positioned amidst several large areas; Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa and across the Mediterranean to the Caucasus, the Balkans, and several seas. It can easily move through various major areas in quest for its own interests.

It is also historically a central country as it includes many variations of humans, different races, languages and religions. It is a microcosm of its surroundings, and if it is able to achieve coexistence within its internal components, then it will make that a prelude for the stability of human components in the surrounding neighbourhood.

Turkey is also in the centre of the conflict between the major international powers over the vital interests, such as America's conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, the American – Russian conflict in the Caucasus, America and Iran, and between the West and China in the Gulf region. Turkey's role cannot be ignored by any power in the process of setting order in the region. For example, America cannot withdraw from Iraq without prior arrangements

approved by Turkey, Russia cannot move in the Caucasus without mutual understanding with Turkey, and Europe cannot secure its back side from the East and get the flow of oil into its markets and homes without some kind of agreement with Turkey. Since this area is very important to the world and is at the same time frequently subject to factors that undermine its stability, Turkey found that the most important role it could play in the next phase is to secure stability and cooperation. This policy is expressed by Davutoğlu as the policy of zero problems inside Turkey and its close surroundings, especially in the Arab world and the Caucasus region. Then, even further neighbourhoods will be secured, which is part of the policy of soft power by Ankara instead of hard power or military force.

Since Turkey has given preference to cooperation rather than conflict, it is always looking for common grounds with the other parties. Here comes the role of Islam as a common heritage with the Arab and Islamic countries. Davutoğlu does not consider this as new legitimacy for the recovery of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey still capitalises primarily on the Western alliance, and wants to elevate itself from a power that controls its region to a global power that shares the process of decision-making with superpowers.

Davutoğlu expresses his intention to continue the approach by Kemal Ataturk in forming an alliance with the West, as he says that the direction of Turkey towards the East will accelerate its step towards the West. He likens it to a bow; the more you stretch it back, towards the East, the more likely the arrow is to hit the West.

Davutoğlu does present his view as a break in the course of Turkey, but also as a continuation of the same previous strategy established by Ataturk. If anyone tries to search in his book for the condemnation of previous periods or a coup against its major course of action, they will not find it. He does not claim to have added anything, and believes that Turkey needs to take advantage of the current situation of increasing returns of its resources in its ongoing drive towards participation in global leadership. He is a nationalist like the founder of the Turkish state, but he enriches his nationalism by adding other dimensions to maximise the chances of achieving Turkey's interests. Whoever believes him to be an internationalist Islamic who serves interests other than of his own country, will find nothing in the book that suggests this.

The new Turkish policy: an abundant harvest and the challenges ahead

Davutoğlu gives a number of reasons for the successes of this new policy, as he talks about the intervention in Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish rebels, finding acceptance from all parties, and that Turkey has gained momentum from Europe in recent years more than in previous years.

We can, of course, mention a number of gains from this policy. Turkey's objection to the appointment of Dane Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as the head of NATO, for his advocacy of cartoons insulting the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a great success. Thanks to this position, a radio station run by Kurdish rebels and broadcasting from Denmark was closed down. Turkey is occupying an important leadership position in NATO, and other concessions made in its favour by the U.S. administration.

This independence did not deprive Turkey of respect for America. U.S. President, Barack Obama has made it the first platform in which he addressed the Islamic world.

We find in Davutoğlu's book the major imperatives that determine the future of Turkish foreign policy. For instance, he discusses the dispute with the U.S. on Iran, saying that Turkey is an economically prosperous country and is in need of the energy that exists in Iran, and thus it is not in its interest to be part of the conflict to destabilise Iran, which in turn would damage Turkey's vital interests in the long run.

What we see after reading Davutoğlu's book is that the rejection of the policy of Western powers in the region will increase, while cooperation with them remains, as happened in Afghanistan when Turkey was the first to call for political solutions to the conflict and that military options would only increase the volatility of the situation.

Davutoğlu's theory is still at stake, despite the successes it achieved, as Turkey is a country still going through a historic transformation towards state building, and is yet to form a common political culture for State as consensus on what is stated in the "strategic depth", unlike in America, for example, where internal forces agree on the imperatives of its external relations, which formed the basis of the Baker-Hamilton commission between Republicans and Democrats.

Turkey faces the same problem faced by Europe in capitalising on soft power, a problem of agreeing with the other forces that stability is in the interest of everyone. In fact, you may find that it is in the interest of other forces to change the situation by force, because the status quo is harmful to them and they cannot change it by peaceful means. Yet, the new Turkish policy is neither welcomed nor understood by Western powers. There is a huge misunderstanding between the two sides as result for the past several years during which Turkey always responded to Western requests with a big, "Yes, Sir."

Israel's foreign doctrine, which is based on force and intimidation, is contrary to the Turkish foreign policy, which emphasises soft power, cooperation and confidence-building. Thus, collision between the two parties is likely to occur in the future.

This Turkish policy is suffering from the absence of partners who can be part of building new stability, as the Arab world is fraught with upheavals, and thus not a reliable partner who can partake in the building of stability in the region, and by the region's people alone.

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