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**Turkey's foreign policy in a changing world:
Old alignments and new neighbourhoods**

Turkey and the West
in the light of historical perspective
("Are You Changing Axis?")

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The beginnings:

Turks have always marched towards the west

- **Silk and Spice routes vital:** capitulations were given to ensure their continued use (impact of the "First Globalization" 1490→)
- **Some particularities of Anatolia made the Turks march westward and brought them in closer contact with the West:**
 - **East not suitable:**
 - Physical environment: Mountains in the east, plains and disintegrating Byzantine Empire in the west
 - Realpolitik: Iran, Kurds, Alevis in the east
 - Ideology: "Dar-ul Islam" in the east (Iran, Kurds, Turcomans); "Dar-ul Harb" in the west
 - **West suitable:**
 - Autochthonous Anatolian Christians: Corrupt socio-economic structure of feudal Byzantines + unrest vs. the much fairer pre-feudal Turks + relative law and order
 - Religious identity & autonomy: Dominance of Orthodox Byzantines (Armenians AD 451) vs. autonomy of the Millet System .

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The rise

- **At the height of its power, the “Second Roman Empire” was a major element of the intra-European power struggle**
 - Phanar vs. Papacy
 - France vs. The Holy Roman Empire/Austria
 - England vs. Russia .

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Stagnation, decline, and fall: Ottoman Empire, “sick man of Europe”

- **Many factors necessitated very close relations with the West and a foreign policy formulated on Western main features**
 - **The Russia factor:** Ottomans were always in need of Western assistance against the Russian Empire
 - **The Non-Muslim factor:** After the Wars of Religion ended in Europe, the second-class status of the Non-Muslim subjects was used as a pretext for interference
 - **The strength of the West: It became a model since the 18th Century**
 - Western superiority in firearms
 - The economic impact of the Industrial Revolution (Second Globalisation) (1838)
 - Socio-political impact of the Industrial Revolution (1839)
 - **The birth of Westernised elite .**

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The Empire and the Republic: The main feature of foreign policy

- **The Empire was, and the Republic is, a “Strategic Medium Power”(SMP)**
- **A SMP is a medium-size/strength State which, although it cannot influence global politics, can have a strong impact on regional developments thanks to:**
 - its **geostrategic location**,
 - in combination with its **“relative autonomy”**.
- **Relative autonomy is function of global, and particularly, regional balance of power: Relative autonomy of the SMP is strong when no single major Power dominates the region, and vice-versa.**
- **Although they were strongly influenced by the West, both States have always striven to prevent the dominance of one single Power in the region.**

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The Republic as a SMP: The two pillars of foreign policy

- **The Turkish Republic inherited the main foreign policy line of the Empire because of historical heritage and common geography. This foreign policy rests on two pillars:**
 - **Status quo / balance policy**
 - **Westernism / a Western orientation .**

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1) Status-quo / balance policy

- **It has two implications for Turkey**
 - The desire to **preserve the national frontiers, and refrain from irredentism**
 - This naturally means a harmony with Great Western Powers
 - The desire to **preserve existing balances within the established order**
 - This naturally means occasional controversies with certain Western Powers because it has two distinct manifestations:
 - Seeking a **balance between the West and its adversaries** (Russia, USSR)
 - In case this does not exist, seeking a **balance within the different groupings of the West** (France vs. England, Italy vs. Greece, etc.) .

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2) Westernism

- **A country with only 3 % of its territory in Europe. But it is nevertheless European:**
 - **Historical dimension:** The Ottomans
 - **Ideological dimension:** The Union and Progress was “**nationalist and Westernist**”. In underdeveloped countries these two are synonymous.
 - **Socio-economic dimension:** Its class structure and development model
 - Particularly, the “**Revolution from Above**” of the elites (“the product of modernisation before modernisation reached his country”) **is Westernist**. Unless they create a Western atmosphere at home, they cannot put their knowledge to use or even find jobs. Compared to their counterparts in the ex-colonies, they are greater admirers of the West:
 - Turkey had not experienced occupation,
 - There is no colour bar: Turks are White .

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Did Turkey change axis?

- Western Powers, fearing a deviation from a course they have taken **too often for granted**, have on many occasions complained about a “change of axis”:
 - 1919-21: “Turkey is going Bolshevik”
 - 1940-43: “Turkey is slipping into Nazis’ side”
 - 1967, the U.S. Ambassador Parker T. Hart to Prime Minister S. Demirel, alluding to Soviet credits: **“Are you changing axis?”**
 - 1974, 1978 Ecevit governments: “Turkey is turning nonaligned”
 - 1991: “Turkish world from the Adriatic to the China Sea”
 - ... and now: “The Islamists are changing axis”.

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Evaluation

- **The contention of “change of axis” is voiced every time Turkey attempts to diversify its Westernist policy in order to:**
 - **cope with** dramatic global developments (1940-43),
 - **take advantage of** changes in international politics to gain more “relative autonomy” through balance (1919-21, 1967, 1974 and 78, 1991)
- **This diversification is totally in line with the:**
 - **international systemic developments**
 - Detente, non-alignment, end of the Cold War, etc.
 - A transition from imperialist occupation to “Commercial State” system
 - A transition “from Bush to Obama”
 - **domestic developments in Turkey**
 - Transition from “national capitalism” (import substitution) to international capitalism
 - End of the military tutelage and orthodox Kemalism
 - Transition from a monist to a diversified and pluralistic society
 - Turkey’s aggressive export policy
 - **interest of the West and of the Hegemonic Power**
 - Westernism and balance politics are two faces of the same coin
 - Turkey’s mediation efforts between the West (+Israel) and Islamic countries are welcome
 - The transition accomplished by the Islamists in Turkey can be a “role model”

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Conclusion

- The new policy of the “Islamists” is reminiscent of a sort of “**Neo-Ottomanism**” influenced by their religious stance, but it is also reminiscent of **Atatürk’s foreign policy** of strict Westernism and good neighbourliness.
- This resemblance to Atatürk’s policy has of course nothing to do with their proximity to Kemalism. **It stems from** a couple of facts:
 - **They are new elites who are fast advancing on the road to “bourgeoisification”**, consequently articulation to international capitalism/globalisation; hence their Westernist policies,
 - These Western-oriented policymakers are striving to secure **a regional balance, the *sine qua non* of a Strategic Medium State**
- It is an irony of history that those who ask for a “change in axis” are **not the “Islamists”, but a section of the Kemalist nationalists (*Ulusalcılar*)**. Under the banner of **Eurasianism**, the latter now openly use anti-Western discourse so as to accuse the E.U. of imperialism, which has neither an army nor a foreign policy .