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TURKEY

AND

THE EU



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The Meeting Point: Thoughts on a Potential Geostrategic Interaction between a 'Challenger' and a 'Strategic Medium State'

By Baskin Oran

ONE: THEORY

This article aims to dwell on the geostrategic relationship between Turkey and the EU especially after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It will evolve around three intertwined concepts: 1) The Hegemonic Power; 2) Its Challenger; 3) The Strategic Medium State (SMS).

The Hegemonic Power is the global single state that dominates the international arena through its 1) Economic; 2) Military, and 3) Cultural superiority.

With this superiority the Hegemonic Power takes the lion's share in the world trade; renders its national currency a global exchange unit; compels other states to engage in or to refrain from certain actions; establishes military and economic bases in strategic areas; intervenes in and resolves regional and international disputes as the global leader; propagates its national language as the *lingua franca*, and its national culture as the dominant civilisation. In short, it controls international relations.

History teaches us that this hegemony is exercised both through coercion and persuasion. Coercion is achieved through the exercise of economic and especially military power, but it hardly suffices to rule a very complex world. It needs to be seconded by the assent of the others. This assent will be obtained through the impact of the Hegemonic Power's dominant culture, and also thanks to favours handed out by the Hegemonic Power: as a Turkish proverb goes, 'If one eats and the others stare only, there'll be quarrel'.

Since the 15th century the world has known several hegemonic powers, naval powers all, succeeding one another: Portugal in the 15th, Spain in the 16th, France in the 17th, and Great Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. That list of succession inevitably leads to the

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conclusion that the Hegemonic Power is not eternal. One reason for this can be identified as the excessive effort displayed by it to stay at the top: the imperial glory is expansive. But the real reason lies in the fact that a new power always comes up at one moment or another to challenge and replace the Hegemonic Power. Until very recently this change materialised by means of war, as a result of which one of the two following alternatives happened: either the new state replaced the old, or a third state emerged as the new aspirant to world hegemony because the old Hegemonic Power and its challenger drained each other.

This does not mean, however, that the dominance of the Hegemonic Power cannot be extended in time. To this effect this state tries to use two tactics: 1) It generates fear, which goes from a simple diplomatic demarche to the use of arms; and 2) It hands out favours, the most classical form of which is economic and military aid.

The US is the Hegemonic Power now, *par excellence*. This is partly due to the withering away of the Soviet Union without draining the US, and partly due to the amazing and unrivalled military superiority of the latter. Fuelled by the 9/11 catastrophe, this mighty military power and its fear-generating effect are now the only pillar of the US hegemony. Right now the US relies on its military power only, neglecting everything else: domestic economy and welfare, public support at home, and in particular, international legality and assent. With a budgetary and foreign trade deficit augmenting every day and the US Dollar at a low, this weakness is increasing with this mighty military machine stuck in a very difficult situation steadily worsening in Iraq. These considerations are backing up those analysts who think that the US hegemony is not on the rise but on the decline.

Only coercion, no persuasion. This is, as yet, a situation unseen of in modern international relations. The situation is largely due to the fact that the US, unlike its predecessors, has learnt that the hegemonic power is not eternal. Thus, before the atmosphere created by 9/11 vanishes, and at a time when the US military power is at its zenith and the military power of the potential Challengers at its lowest, the 'neocons' seem to hope to delay (or maybe, prevent) the rising of a Challenger, and henceforth extend the era of US hegemony. Without handing out favors to anyone, except some fragments of it for Great Britain.

At first glance, the appearance of a Challenger does not seem probable today. The European Union (EU) is too decentralized, too divided over the Iraqi invasion issue, and most important of all, it totally lacks a military pillar. Russia is too dependent economically on the US and the IMF. China only begins to enter the global arena.

But a closer view reveals a different picture.

Firstly and as already stated above, the US is much weaker than it looks.

Secondly, the Hobbesian approach of the Bush administration may not be preventing the rise of a Challenger but hastening it instead. Even quite rudimentary; a France, Germany,

Russia, China cooperation could have never been imagined before the Iraqi invasion.

Thirdly, put together, the economic and cultural assets of the EU member countries are sufficient to challenge and even to surpass the US. Were it not for the lack of the military dimension, the EU would be a serious matter of concern to the Hegemonic Power because it has also the advantage of international experience thanks to the past of many of its members.

Fourthly and perhaps most importantly, the very inertia of the EU in international conflicts due to the absence of the military ('second') pillar will probably shorten the path to a more centralised EU, because this whole picture is rapidly proving detrimental to the Union. Startled by France and Germany's extravagant bringing forth of the Elysée agreement in January 2003, the colts of the EU took refuge under the Trojan Horse. At a moment when certain members seem reluctant to join the Euro area, this could well be interpreted as a rift that could further weaken the Union. So much so that, a Kemalist discourse of the 1930s could now be meaningful in the EU context: 'Let us not stop; we might fall'.

Added to the Bosnian experience, this Iraqi affair must have rung some bells for the EU: unless this problem of 'second pillar' is taken care of one way or the other, the EU seems condemned to stay a second-class power. No hegemonic power without military power.

Some might think that the EU does not want to become a Hegemonic Power. But they should perhaps know that, with the help of another 'Iraqi' experience, the Union could well witness the alienation of some more members sucked by the magnetism of the Hegemonic Power. The choice does not seem to be left to the EU.

Therefore, this whole situation should create concern and logically trigger the beginning of an important change in the strategic thinking of the Union.

At this point, the future of the EU seems to meet the needs of a Strategic Medium State, Turkey.

The states in the international arena were once categorised as 'small' and 'big'. The definition of the former was easy, so was that of the latter, re-baptised 'superpower' after the Second World War. But as some states did not fit into that tight nomenclature, a third category came into being: The Middle State or the Medium State¹.

The Medium State is an important element of regional politics especially when it occupies a strategic geographical position; it may then be called Strategic Medium State (SMS) to roughly correspond to the qualifications of a 'Regional Power'. An SMS has marginal or no impact on the global system but can strongly influence regional politics and

¹ This concept that I tried to develop throughout *Turkish Foreign Policy: Facts, Documents, Comments (1919-2001)* (Istanbul, İletişim Publishers, 2001, in two volumes, in Turkish), in great part I owe it to Professor William Hale's *Turkish Foreign Policy (1774-2000)* (London, Frank Cass, 2000).

weaker neighbors in particular. To them it plays the role of a vassal and like all vassals it exerts its influence with the ascent of the suzerain, the Hegemonic Power.

Furthermore, the SMS can resist, to a certain degree, pressures from big powers. It can bargain with them, can influence to a certain extent their regional decisions when conditions permit, and could even 'show teeth' in case of a regional issue that it defines as its vital interest. But, when alone, it can hardly push its influence as to resist for long the big power that has taken an interest in the region; let alone go to war with it. When faced with this threat an SMS has two alternatives: to play to the balance of power, or to take refuge under the wings of a military alliance with another big power.

It's true that the choice is seldom left to the SMS. But the latter alternative, although it can 'save' the SMS from being crushed by the big power, can also transform it into a satellite of the 'saviour'. This is especially true in critical periods such as wars or crises, but the risk is valid in peacetime also. The Hegemonic Power is always interested in creating and using 'Pivotal States' in regions of strategic importance to extend its military or economic influence, or its Pax, in the region. To be promoted as the Pivotal State may well be an important opportunity for a strong SMS to further its strength, but it can also seriously limit its independence in case the economy of the former is in dire need of foreign aid.

On the other hand, the balance of power is very changeable; it may also materialize in the form of a rigid bipolar system in which case the bloc leader is too dominant (the Aron Paradigm). But this balance is the only instance that brings about an atmosphere of 'Relative External Autonomy', a term that we could use in international relations to replace the rather decrepit term 'independence': Balance of power creates the breathing milieu *par excellence* for the SMS. Unless the interests of the Hegemonic Power and the SMS perfectly superpose, and in that very particular case the SMS would be called the 'Strategic Partner' of the former (the case of Israel), the worst alternative for an SMS in its own region would certainly be the predominance of one single big power.

At this point, the need of Turkey seems to meet the future of the EU.

TWO: PRACTICE

To sum up things for the EU, The Union needs:

- To have a say in international arena; a prerequisite to overcoming its present status of a second-class power vis-à-vis the Hegemonic Power;
- More importantly, to stop centrifugal forces from weakening the Union, a process that could keep functioning as long as the Union stays in this status.

Both objectives can only be reached by closing the circuit: a military wing should compulsorily come to complement the economic and cultural assets.

Developing a military aspect was unnecessary when, in the obscurity of the Cold War, the US nuclear umbrella defended Europe against the USSR. But now, as the eye-dazzling radiance of the Hegemonic Power could obscure the future of the Union, it seems imperative.

The EU should be able to both: 1) develop a military pillar; 2) and be able to reach the conflict areas. Both objectives are difficult, because the taxpayers are quite unwilling to pay and they will continue to be so until they are convinced they have to for their well being; and Europe ends before most of the conflict areas begin.

To sum up things for Turkey:

- Turkey needs a counterweight, in its own region, to the overall dominance of one big state, the Hegemonic Power.
- Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, its predecessor, have done just that to survive in what's called in Turkish the 'Wolves' Table'. Examples would be too banal to cite.
- The needs could meet. Turkey as an element of the European Security and Defense Policy could enable the EU to reach (the Middle East, the Caucasus) and encircle (the Balkans) the conflict areas. In exchange, Turkey would enjoy a sort of balance, a breathing atmosphere.

FEASIBILITY

For this, Turkey needs not to be a full member of the EU. The co-operation could be limited to the military wing and for this it would suffice that some rules of the EU security policy are adjusted.

For this, Turkey needs to overcome its human and minority rights problems without which the EU public opinion would disagree. Turkey has gone a long way since 6 February 2002 when the first of seven Harmonisation Packages was adopted. There's no doubt that Turkey owes it to close relations with the EU: in the periphery, modernisation is usually achieved through external dynamics; in Turkey this has been the case since at least the Tanzimat in 1839, the first democratisation endeavor of the Ottomans. There's no doubt that this cooperation would facilitate a great deal the job of Turkish intellectuals working for greater democracy.

DIFFICULTIES

Aside from those already present, the main difficulty would reside in the following way of thinking: bordering the conflict areas would be bordering the trouble itself.

Of course, one must make it sure that Europe would be away from trouble when it's away from the conflict areas. Again, as a Turkish proverb goes: 'The fear does not annul the appointed time of death (*ecel*)'

On the other hand, the same train of thought brings to the conclusion that the decision

to stay a non-challenger would also create considerably fewer problems with the Hegemonic Power. 'Thinking big' always increases the risk factor.

Furthermore, it would be enlightening to think that Turkey would cause fewer security problems to Europe as a member of the EU's military pillar than as the pivotal state of the Hegemonic Power.

RECENT WORDS AND THINGS

On March 1st, 2003, the Turkish parliament refused to admit US troops into Turkish territory with a view to invading Iraq from the north. Afterwards some EU officials made statements to lead one think that such cooperation could be possible. To translate from the Turkish press:

G. Verheugen, 09.05.2003: 'In the light of the developments in the crisis region, I consider it useful to include a secular and Muslim country in the EU'.

E. Landaburu, 17.05.2003: 'A multicultural structure that assimilated religious differences, and strengthened by a strong democracy would transform into a global power a EU whose borders would extend as far as Iran'.

S. Berlusconi, 19.05.2003: 'To be taken into consideration one needs to develop a military power also. Europe can reach this by extending its borders towards especially to Turkey and Russia'.

Finally, to cite one inside information that did not make the news, French Foreign Minister de Villepen is reported to have said during his visit to Turkey in May 2003: 'The lesson that Iraq taught us is: We need not many small countries in Europe, but one big country.'

These statements made in May 2003 may be just a spring wind or, more realistically, they may be reflecting nice words intended to keep Turkish officials happy; in this latter case they could not be considered very original, given the history of relations. But if they are not so, there is much to think about a potential geopolitical interaction between the two sides.

The attack on South Korea in 1950 had frightened America, as a result of which the US admitted Turkey in NATO. The result has been, as it's called in international relations jargon, a 'win-win' situation.

The above-cited statements put aside, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, as yet, seems to have had no such frightening effect on the EU.

But if it were not so, I'm of the opinion that the result would again be a win-win.

After all, the sensation of fear is, according to the science of psychology, the most vital of the defense mechanisms.