

## RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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### INTRODUCTION: DOMESTIC POLITICS IN TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY/TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY, INSIDE OUT

By **Lisel Hintz**

Turkey's foreign policy over the past several years has been characterized as increasingly unilateral, aggressive, and risk-tolerant, from the purchase of a NATO-incompatible missile defense system from Russia to its clashes in Syria and Libya with Moscow-backed fighters. These policy shifts, and the anti-Western rhetoric that accompany them, became starkly evident in the wake of the July 2016 coup attempt. Ankara's hostility toward the United States had been aroused by American support for a Syrian Kurdish militia against ISIS that Turkey deems a terrorist group. It was exacerbated by the Obama administration's hesitation immediately to condemn the coup plotters and Washington's ongoing refusal to extradite Fethullah Gulen, the Pennsylvania-based cleric Turkey blames for the failed putsch.

These policy and attitude shifts follow a pattern sketched in my recent book: they are not merely responses to a changing security environment but rather reflect earlier processes of internal and external contestation over what it means to be Turkish and what Turkey's domestic and foreign policy priorities should be.<sup>4</sup> By taking its fight over Turkey's national identity to the foreign policy arena in the early 2000s, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was able to use EU conditionality levers to weaken and then reconfigure domestic institutions that opposed what I term its Ottoman Islamist understanding of Turkishness.

This symposium offers novel insights into this pattern of intersecting domestic politics and foreign policy in Turkey. **Ferhat Zabun** analyzes the role of the coup attempt in creating distrust of US intentions as well as the role of so-called "Eurasianist" influences on Turkey's policy of strategic ambiguity in balancing its relations with

the United States and Russia. **Sinem Adar** argues that the trauma of the coup attempt may have generated new motivations for militarization, but that without the earlier expansion of the domestic defense industry, these motivations would not have translated into a more "hard power"-oriented foreign policy. **Sibel Oktay** demonstrates the importance of getting our definitions right with her China-focused exploration of the Nationalist Action Party's lack of the policy leverage normally attributed to coalition partners. **Sercan Canbolat** presents a novel Turkish operational code analysis tool (TOCA) for studying the impact of AKP leaders' audience based adjustments in their speeches on foreign policy. Together these contributions offer a glimpse into a rich emerging literature on Turkish foreign policy.

*Lisel Hintz, School of Advanced International Study, Johns Hopkins University,*  
[lhintz1@jhu.edu](mailto:lhintz1@jhu.edu)

### UNDERSTANDING TURKEY'S INCREASINGLY MILITARISTIC FOREIGN POLICY

By **Sinem Adar**

Since 2016, Turkish foreign policy has markedly shifted from soft power policies of the early 2010s towards a hard power approach manifesting at numerous fronts. These include unilateral military incursions into Northern Syria in 2016, 2018 and 2019, and the deployment of Turkish warships to guard drilling activities in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It also includes the signing of EEZ and military supports agreements with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), along with shipments of arms and contributions of Turkish troops and Syrian fighters to support the GNA in late 2019. Turkey's new military bases in the Middle East and North Africa, including in Qatar, further underline this hard power shift. These moves line Turkey firmly up against rivals from Russia to United Arab Emirates to Greece.

Scholars and experts have offered numerous explanations for Turkey's increasing use of military power. Some emphasize President Erdoğan's efforts to maintain domestic popularity.<sup>5</sup> Others point to Ankara's attempts to recalibrate Turkey's position in a changing regional order, especially given the increasing insufficiencies of soft power politics to do so.<sup>6</sup> Still others highlight identity-based shifts rooted in Islamist, neo-Ottomanist, and nationalist ideologies.<sup>7</sup> As important and influential as these factors are to understand Turkey's changing foreign policy, they are not sufficient to explain the timing of this shift, nor how it compares with earlier periods in which threats of military invasion and cross-border operations played a significant role. This short essay focuses on the effects of the 2016 coup attempt to shed light on the question of timing, and provides insight into continuities and ruptures with the past.

A focus on domestic factors is a useful lens for understanding Turkey's foreign policy choices.<sup>8</sup> Domestic events can strongly shape perceptions of threat, attitudes toward alliances, and definition of interests. The 2016 coup attempt shows how such domestic events bring familiar characteristics of Turkish politics into sharper relief, not only providing the ruling elites with the justification for a shift to hard power but also triggering a re-configuration of intra-state alliances in ways which placed narrow interests in the driving seat of foreign policy.

Still, as important as the coup attempt was for vindicating and mobilizing militarization, without the growth of the defense industry since the 1980s, a shift to a militaristic foreign policy would not have been practically possible. Reinforcing Ankara's self-perceptions of power, an indigenous military-industry complex motivates the ruling elites' reckless readiness to simultaneously fight at different fronts. In short, Turkey's new expansionist foreign policy has been enabled not only by the coup attempt but also by the decades-long developments in the defense industry.

### **The coup attempt: justification and**

### **mobilization of militarization**

In a speech he delivered in October 2016 to *muhtars* – locally elected heads of villages and city neighborhoods, President Erdoğan announced that Turkey's national security policy had fundamentally changed: "We have lost many generations in the fight against terrorism and in fratricides. We no longer want to carry the can. From now on, we will not wait until the threats are at our borders. We will no longer wait for the terrorist organizations to attack us; yet we will beat them to death wherever they mobilize."<sup>9</sup> An attempt to pull up Turkey by its own bootstraps, Ankara's military incursion into Al-Bab (Syria) in 2016 was, Erdoğan noted in the same speech, part of this new policy. Based on the idea of "defending the territory and area" (*savunma sathı*), the new policy, he continued, was an adoption of the military strategy that had brought victory in the Turkish Independence War during 1919-1923.

Hard power is not exactly new, given Ankara's historical record. Military threats in 1998 to invade Syria due to its support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), cross-border operations in Iraq throughout the 1990s, the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and threats in 1936 and 1937 to invade Syria over a border dispute issue illustrate this. Linking the foreign to the domestic enables an understanding of how Turkish foreign policy has, since the establishment of the republic in 1923, been shaped by a collective anxiety over the state's perseverance (*devletin bekası*).<sup>10</sup> The coup attempt accentuated this anxiety, providing the justification for the necessity of using hard power to defuse threats. The belief that the West, particularly the US, did not show enough solidarity with Turkey during the coup attempt added to an already existing sense of loneliness that had been triggered by disagreements over US support in the fight against ISIS for Syrian Kurdish forces, which Turkey considers an offshoot of the PKK. Combined, these anxieties intensified the sense of an increasing need for self-help and independency.

The coup attempt has also been central in re-configuring alliances within the state apparatus, making narrow interests more central to foreign policy choices. The ground for this was somewhat

laid following the June 2015 parliamentary elections, when, for the first time since 2002, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost its parliamentary majority due to the Kurdish and left-leaning Peoples' Democratic Party's (HDP) unprecedented passing of the 10% electoral threshold. Lacking the votes for a single-party government, the AKP went into a de facto alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and ramped up its own nationalist rhetoric. Soon after, the so-called Peace Process with the PKK came to a halt, armed conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK resumed, and AKP regained its majority in the November 2015 snap elections thanks to the votes that it gained from the MHP base. MHP's support to the AKP has since then been the key in Turkey's transition from a parliamentary system to a presidential one providing Erdoğan with expansive powers.

The MHP is, however, not alone in its support to Erdoğan. Following the coup attempt, the AKP incorporated various political and security factions that share a strong commitment to Turkey's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite partisan and ideological differences. Even though the background negotiations and compromises that led these factions to support President Erdoğan against the coup plotters will remain unclear in the near future, it is clear that the coup attempt presented these various groups a unique opportunity for logrolling. Erdoğan's personal ambition to remain in power conveniently overlapped with the increasing national security concerns as well as power aspirations of these actors, bringing Ottomanist ideals side by side with Eurasianist<sup>11</sup> and ultranationalist ones. By positioning himself as the embodiment of the will of "those who truly belong to the nation" (*yerli ve milli*) and as the charismatic defender of Turkey's territorial integrity, President Erdoğan became in July 2016 the "commander in chief" of Turkey's so-called second Independence War.<sup>12</sup> Since then, the AKP's militarism has intensified, going beyond a sole focus on preventing the so-called Kurdish threat at the Syrian border.

### **Defense industry as the enabling factor**

Expansionist foreign policy aspirations do not necessarily imply an actual or perceived capacity to act on them. Without the cumulative growth in the defense industry over the last four decades, a pronounced shift to the current hard power approach would not have been possible. If the US embargo on arms sales following Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 was the first moment when Ankara realized the importance of a native defense industry to protect national interests, the end of the Cold War prompted a further recalculation that necessitated modifying Turkey's position in a changing world order. The volatile situation in the neighboring countries and the armed conflict with the PKK prompted Turkey to continue its defense investments during the 1990s. The same period also witnessed the establishment of new joint ventures between Turkish and Western companies.

Building on these earlier developments, the industry continued to grow rapidly under the AKP rule. Between 2010 and 2018, part of the period that overlapped with the seeming "soft power" era, Turkish military expenditure increased steadily from 13 billion USD to 22 billion USD.<sup>13</sup> Aviation and defense exports rose from an annual 1.388 billion in 2013 to 2.035 billion in 2018,<sup>14</sup> with around 60 percent of the aviation and defense products currently produced domestically.<sup>15</sup> These developments are an evident source of pride for government officials. At public events, for instance, they often praise home-made drones produced by Baykar Savunma, a firm owned by the family of President Erdoğan's son-in-law, Selçuk Bayraktar, and by Turkish Aerospace Industries. The latter was first established in 1984 as a joint venture between Turkish and US partners, and restructured in 2005 with the acquisition of foreign shares by Turkish partners.<sup>16</sup> Turkish drones have attracted international attention in the last few years, especially following their increasing deployment in Syria and Libya. The Turkish navy has also been an important pillar of Ankara's power aspirations in recent years, evidenced particularly by maneuvers in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> In short, the growth over time of an indigenous defense industry and, equally if not more important, the sense of power that it has reinforced in Ankara generates an

aggressive stance and readiness for military action in multiple spheres.

### **Is Turkey's militaristic foreign policy sustainable?**

Ankara's recent foreign policy choices were prompted by the coup attempt, which not only provided justification for the necessity of an increased militarism beyond national borders, but also placed foreign policy choices in the hands of narrow interests. A full understanding of these choices would, however, be incomplete without taking into account the changes in the defense industry since 1980s. The sustainability of Turkey's hard power approach in the medium-to-long term is highly questionable, however, given the limitations that domestic factors also can pose. The rapid weakening of state institutions since the coup attempt, Erdoğan's growing legitimacy crisis in the aftermath of the 2019 municipal elections, the fragility of intra-state alliances, and last, but not least, a growing economic crisis – one that COVID-19 is already exacerbating – risk a clash between aspirations and realities.

*Sinem Adar, Associate, Center for Applied Turkey Studies at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, [sinem.adar@swp.berlin.org](mailto:sinem.adar@swp.berlin.org)*

### **UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL ISLAMISTS' FOREIGN POLICY RHETORIC IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE: A TURKISH OPERATIONAL CODE ANALYSIS APPROACH**

**By Sercan Canbolat**

In January 2009, then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stormed out of a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "I will never come back to Davos after this," he uttered in protest after sparring with Israeli President Shimon Peres. He kept his promise: Erdogan has not partaken in the forum since 2009. As Lisel Hintz notes, after the Davos

incident, many Muslim and Arab audiences in addition to his domestic supporters referred to Erdogan as the "conqueror of Davos," and increasingly viewed him as both a powerful regional leader and a protector of the Muslim world.<sup>18</sup>

Individual leaders have played an outsized role in Turkish politics. From the founding fathers like presidents Kemal Ataturk and Ismet Inonu to military general Kenan Evren to modern Islamist leaders such as Ahmet Davutoglu and Erdogan, Turkish politics is dominated by high-profile personalities. As powerful as individual-level factors can be, my research demonstrates that they are conditioned by audience effects. In my research, I focus on how foreign policy rhetoric by Turkey's Islamist leaders is conditioned by audience type: domestic vs. international. Such bifurcation allows a specification of the effects of audience on rhetoric, while providing insight into otherwise puzzling divergences in positions articulated by Justice and Development Party (AKP) leaders.<sup>19</sup>

This short essay draws on an at-a-distance analysis of the speeches Erdogan and former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu gave in Turkey (in Turkish) and abroad (in English), I demonstrate that 1) leaders alter their foreign policy profile and political beliefs depending on the type of their audience; and 2) idiosyncrasies of individual leaders make more difference than any overarching Islamist political ideology. While the 'automation turn' in political psychology has addressed many challenges associated with the study of political leaders from a distance, such as the paucity and low quality of text corpora as data,<sup>20</sup> automated at-a-distance analysis of verbal statements of political leaders to create leadership profiles has remained largely confined to English-language texts.<sup>21</sup> To overcome this limitation, I employ a novel Turkish operational code analysis (TOCA) scheme, which is compatible with the Profiler Plus software and operational code analysis research program in the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA).

The remainder of this essay consists of three parts. First, I explain TOCA and underscore its

## Endnotes

### Cammett and Kendall Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Giles, Micheal W, and James C Garand. 2007. "Ranking Political Science Journals: Reputational and Citational Approaches." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40 (4): 741–751.
- <sup>ii</sup> Teele, Dawn Langan, and Kathleen Thelen. 2017. "Gender in the Journals: Publication Patterns in Political Science." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50 (2): 433–447.
- <sup>iii</sup> Articles coded as "multi-country" are those covering 2 to 3 countries; articles coded as "regional" focus on the MENA as a whole or a sub-region, such as the Gulf, the Levant, and North Africa.

### Hintz Notes

- <sup>4</sup> Lisel Hintz, *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

### Adar Notes

- <sup>5</sup> Kingsley, Patrick. 2019. "The World Condemns Erdogan's War on Kurds. But Turkey Applauds." *New York Times*. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/16/world/europe/Turkey-Kurds-Erdogan.html>.
- <sup>6</sup> Karsikaya, Birol Altioğ & Karsikaya, Sinan. 2017. "Recalibrating Turkish Foreign Policy After the Arab Uprisings: From Pro-Activism to Uncertainty by Easing Off Ideational and Liberal Goals." In *Contemporary Turkey at a Glance II: Turkey Transformed? Power, History and Culture*. Edited by Meltem Ersoy & Esra Ozyurek. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. Pp: 145-161
- <sup>7</sup> Ozkan, Behlül. 2014. "Turkey, Davutoglu, and the Idea of Pan-Islamism." *Survival* 56 (4); Taspinar, Omer. 2008. "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism." *Carnegie Papers* 10; Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2008/10/07/turkey-s-middle-east-policies-between-neo-ottomanism-and-kemalism-pub-22209>; Hintz, Lisel. 2018. *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Danforth, Nick. 2016. "Turkey's New Maps are Reclaiming the Ottoman Empire." *Foreign Policy*. Available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/23/turkeys-religious-nationalists-want-ottoman-borders-iraq-erdogan/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Synder, Jack. 1991. *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Also see Sonmez, Goktug. 2017. *The Interplay between international and domestic factors in Turkey's grand strategy-making*. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London.
- <sup>9</sup> "Bu Ülkede Artık Kimsenin Yaptığı İhanet Yanına Kâr Kalmayacak", *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı*,

19.10.2016. Accessible at <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/55684/bu-ulkede-artik-kimsenin-yaptigi-ihonet-yanina-kr-kalmayacak.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Göçek, Fatma Müge. 2011. *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*. London, UK: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>11</sup> Akturk, Sener. 2015. "The Fourth Style of Politics: Eurasianism as a Pro-Russian Rethinking of Turkey's Geopolitical Identity." *Turkish Studies* 16(1): 54-79. Gurcan, Metin. 2017. "The Rise of the Eurasianist vision in Turkey." *Al-Monitor*. Available at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/05/turkey-rise-of-euroasianist-vision.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Bargu, Banu. 2018. "Year One: Reflections on Turkey's Second Founding and the Politics of Division." *Critical Times* 1(1): 23-48. Also see Turkyilmaz, Yektan. 2018. "Quo Vadis Türkiye." *Gazete Duvar*. Available at <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/forum/2018/06/01/quo-vadis-turkiye-1-yazilmis-oykuleri-unutmal-bir-devlet-kendisine-savas-acarsa/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/military-expenditure>.

<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2019/03/13/turkey-targets-defense-and-aerospace-exports-to-counter-growing-national-deficit/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://eraiturkey.com/news/aviation-and-defense-industry-in-turkey/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Turkey: New drone software to spot terrorists with ease." *Anadolu Agency*. 03.03.2019. Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/turkey-new-drone-software-to-spot-terrorists-with-ease/1407978>.

<sup>17</sup> Gingeras, Ryan. "The Turkish Navy in an Era of Great Power Competition." *War on the Rocks*. 30.04.2019. Available at <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/the-turkish-navy-in-an-era-of-great-power-competition/>.

### Canbolat Notes

<sup>18</sup> Hintz, Lisel. *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Ozdamar, Ozgur and Sercan Canbolat, "Understanding new Middle Eastern leadership: An operational code approach." *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2018): 19-31.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen G. Walker, Mark Schafer, and Michael D. Young, "Systematic Procedures for Operational Code Analysis: Measuring and Modeling Jimmy Carter's Operational Code." *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998): 175-189.

<sup>21</sup> Ozgur Ozdamar, Sercan Canbolat and Michael D. Young, "Profiling Leaders in Turkish." In *Forum "Coding in Tongues: Developing Non-English Coding Schemes for Leadership Profiling"*. *International Studies Review* (2020) online first: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa001> (accessed 3/19/2020).