



# Turkey's adjustment to the emerging post-western international order: The Russian connection

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## Abstract

Recent years have witnessed revolutionary changes in Turkey's domestic and international policies as the dynamics of the international order have been changing in a post-western fashion. Turkey, a NATO member since 1952 and an EU membership candidate since July 2005, has been experiencing a difficult relationship with its traditional allies and partners within the western international community over the last decade. This article seeks to analyze the dynamics of Turkey's response to the emerging post-western international order within the framework of Turkey's domestic environment and foreign policy. Of special importance in this regard is the impact that the so-called Russian revisionism/resurgence has had on Turkey's choices. To what extent and in which ways have the dynamics of Russia's challenge to western primacy in global politics constituted a role model for Turkey? What are the similarities and differences between Russian and Turkish efforts to adapt to the emerging post-western international order?

## Keywords

Post-western international order, Turkey, Russia, Russian revisionism, Turkish revisionism

## Introduction

Turkey, a NATO member since 1952 and an EU membership candidate since July 2005, has been experiencing a difficult relationship with its traditional western allies and partners over the last decade. Simultaneously, Turkey's relations with non-western rising powers have begun to improve, in particular with China and Russia. Turkey has also demonstrated a strong foreign policy agency in the Middle East, especially since the onset of the Arab Spring. This article seeks to analyze the nature of Turkey's international relations, as the dynamics of the international order have been changing in a post-western fashion. Of special importance in this regard is the impact that the so-called Russian revisionism/resurgence has had on Turkey's choices. To what extent and in which ways have the dynamics of Russia's challenge to western primacy in global politics constituted a role model for Turkey? What are the similarities and differences between Russian and Turkish efforts to adapt to the emerging post-western international order?

It is against such a background that the article first offers a conceptual discussion of how non-western powers respond to the primacy of western powers in global politics and chart their ways in the emerging world order. Then, an attempt will be made at demonstrating the key characteristics of the emerging order and the special role of post-Soviet Russia during this process. Afterwards, the article examines the key features of Turkey's adjustment to the emerging post-western world order, particularly since 2002 when the Justice and Development Party (AKParty) came to power. The conclusion summarizes the key findings of the research as well as highlighting the limits of Russian revisionism on Turkish revisionism.

## A Conceptual/Theoretical Discussion

Recent years have seen a spectacular expansion of the literature on how established powers should respond to rising powers, particularly in the context of US-China relations (Gill and Schreer 2018, pp.155-170; Friedberg 2018, pp. 7-64; Harding 2015, pp. 95-122). Generally speaking established powers can alternative adopt containment, accommodation and engagement/socialization strategies vis-vis emerging powers.

*Containment* strategy suggests that established powers view rising powers as potential threats to their interests and try to do everything possible to help contain their increasing influence both in their regions and globally. The supporters of the *accommodation* strategy do on the other hand argue that the United States would do well to recognize the irreversible rise of China, treat China as a regional and potential superpower, and increase great power cooperation with China with a view to finding solutions to the existing security problems in such a way that would satisfy the concerns of both. The ones who tend to believe in the promises of *engagement/socialization* strategy interpret China's rise positively and hope that improving trade relations with China and acquiescing to China's efforts to get richer would gradually culminate with China's transformation into a liberal democratic polity as well as China acting as a responsible stakeholder.

On the other hand, looking at the issue from the perspective of rising powers, three strategies stand out. *Balancing* strategy suggests that rising powers would view the existing system problematical and illegitimate in its current form and try to do whatever it takes to ensure that their national interests are taken into account more convincingly (He 2012, pp. 154-191). Because they view the existing system as unjust and threatening their interests, they would either internally try to improve their material power

capabilities or externally join forces with other rising powers should their individual capabilities fall short. Rising powers might either establish formal collective defense organizations and pledge to come to their aid militarily, viz. hard balancing, or coordinate their cooperation informally within the existing or to-be-created institutional platforms, viz. soft balancing (Abb 2018, pp. 275-296; Paul 2005, pp. 46-71).

*Spoiling* strategy assumes that rising powers would intentionally try to spoil the smooth functioning of existing international organizations with a view to ensuring that established powers do no longer benefit from them as they used to do till now. They can either use their veto powers, to the extent it is possible, or resort to other actions available. Spoiling strategy can be considered the first stage before moving to the soft-balancing strategy.

Finally, *co-optation* strategy seems to be predicated on the assumption that rising powers would continue to view the existing international organizations as both legitimate and instrumental in terms of achieving their national interests. A strong effort to ‘own’ existing organizations would likely provide them with an opportunity to help transform them from within in line with their national priorities and preferences. Their cooptation might stem from either their sincere adoption of the constitutive norms of existing organizations or the instrumental reasoning that should they ‘own’ them their ability to help transform them from within would increase (Oguzlu 2013, pp. 774-796).

### **The post-western international order**

Since the early years of the twenty-first century the center of gravity of international politics has gradually shifted from the Transatlantic region to the Pacific/Indo-Pacific region. As the primacy of western actors in international politics has come under strong

challenges with the growing power capabilities of non-western powers, the ideational and normative underpinnings of the US-led liberal international order have also increasingly been contested (Ikenberry 2017, pp. 2-9). This transformation seems to have accelerated following the financial crisis in 2008, which primarily engulfed the United States and many EU members.

Since the early 1990s till 2008, the United States, in partnership with its European allies within NATO and the European Union, used to call shots in international politics. This period was defined by many as the heyday of the so-called liberal international order. Not only the liberal order of the Cold War era gradually expanded to former communist countries in central and Eastern Europe, but also the immense material power capabilities at the disposal of the United States allowed her to pursue primacist strategies all around the world.

Even though the 9/11 attacks on the US homeland dented the image of the United States as the omnipotent global hegemon and criticisms of the American approach on the global war on terror intensified following the US occupation of Iraq, it was primarily following the financial crisis in late 2000s that a sense of decline has begun to perpetuate in the West (Duncanbe and Dunne 2018, pp. 25-42).

The retrenchment and leading from behind strategies of the Obama administration suggested that the United States does no longer want to play the role of global hegemon with all the responsibilities attached. The ‘America first’ strategy of the Trump administration, despite all its fundamental differences from Obama’s strategy, continued this trend in American thinking (Stokes 2018, pp. 133-159; Peterson 2018, pp. 28-44). Growing number of Americans seem now to believe that the United States is a global power in decline and

would do well to focus its attention on fixing the problems at home.

Similar to the United States, the European Union has also been in a crisis mood over the last decade. The weakening of the EU integration process in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the failure of traditional right and left parties across the continent to provide long-term solutions to the daily problems of Europeans, the growing Russian geopolitical assertiveness in the east, the worsening migration challenge to the south and the intensification of non-traditional security challenges in the heart of the continent seem to have resulted in the strengthening of populist, illiberal, anti-globalist, anti-integrationist and anti-migrant political parties and movements across the continent (Delcour 2018, pp. 109-121; Smith and Youngs 2018, pp. 45-56). All these developments denote that the strong support that European countries have been giving to the liberal international order can no longer be taken for granted (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). The election of Trump to White House and his never-ending questioning of the liberal roots of the postwar international order have added further insult to the injury.

Simultaneously Russia has been going through a geopolitical revival over the last decade no matter how costly this process has proved to be in terms of economic and political consequences. The Russian military involvements in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015 all attest to the fact Russia strongly contests the geopolitical primacy of liberal western powers in global politics (Romanova 2018, pp. 76-91).

Likewise, China has intensified its efforts to become the regional hegemon in East Asia. The 'hide your capabilities and bide your time' strategy of the post-Mao era seems has already given way to a more

assertive China dream since 2012 when Xi Jinping ascended to power (Chung 2016, pp. 47-59). Where China's efforts to solidify its global presence within existing institutional platforms failed to yield positive results, Chinese leadership have begun to pay more attention to creating alternative institutional platforms at regional and global levels. China's increasing material capabilities seem to have also emboldened the Chinese leadership to more confidently propagate its global vision of international relations and development (Mazaar, Heath and Vallas 2018; Breslin 2018, pp. 57-75).

Since 2008, the values of multiculturalism, openness, tolerance and universal human rights have increasingly become contested all over the world. The morality of universal cosmopolitanism has gradually given way to the morality of relative communitarianism as the rising non-western powers, primarily China and Russia, have increasingly offered non-western conceptualizations of international political order. Non-interference in states' internal affairs, primacy of state sovereignty, realpolitik foreign policy understanding, authoritarian leadership, strengthening strong national identities, state-led capitalism, sphere of influence mentality, multipolarism in global governance, primacy of great powers in international relations, mercantilist trade practices, investing in military power capabilities, increasing use of economic power instruments in the name of securing geopolitical gains, questioning the principle of responsibility to protect are some of the points that Russian and Chinese leaderships have been vehemently prioritizing over the last decade (Wilson 2018; Lo 2008).

The last decade has also witnessed the rise of populist and illiberal political movements in key western countries. The criticism of liberal democratic practices from within has severely hollowed out the

attractiveness of the liberal world order across the globe (Fukuyama 2014). As the Brexit decision in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump's election to presidency in the United States demonstrate, the forces of illiberalism, populism, protectionism and xenophobia have also gained ground in key western countries.

The last decade has also witnessed the replacement of long-term identity based alliance relationships with short-term, pragmatic and issue-oriented strategic partnerships. One of the best examples in this regard is Turkish-Russian cooperation in Syria. In today's world, countries of different value orientations, geographical locations, power capabilities and threat perceptions are no longer bound to define each other categorically as enemies or friends. The notion of 'frenemy' has already become an identity signifier in interstate relations.

In today's international order the ideological polarization between opposing power blocks is not as sharp and rigid as it was during the Cold War era. The interconnectedness between liberal western powers and illiberal authoritarian powers are much higher than it was between the western capitalist and eastern communist countries during the Cold war era.

What about the role of Russia in the emergence of post-western international order?

### **The Codes of Russian Revisionism**

Since President Putin came to power in late 1990s, Russia has witnessed a national revival. Having an imperial legacy in the background and acting as one of the two superpowers of the Cold War era, it is quite natural and understandable that Russia wants to leave the troubled years of the 1990s behind and put a serious claim to global power status in the emerging century (Kotkin 2016, pp.2-9). Recently, Russia has come under international limelight once again

following its support to ethnic separatists in Georgia, annexation of Crimea into its territory, the support that it gives to the separatist groups in the eastern part of Ukraine and its military involvement in Syria on the side of Assad's regime. Hardly a day passes without Russia being criticized by western circles of pursuing aggressive, assertive and neo-imperial policies in its near-abroad. It is for sure that Putin's Russia has been at odds with Western powers in terms of the constitutive norms of the emerging world order (Allison 2017, pp. 519-543). What kind of a world order does Russia envisage and what factors motivate Russia's strategies and policies abroad?

Putin's Russia has been extremely aghast at the primacy of western actors in world politics and therefore has been striving to help bring into existence a multipolar world order in which Russia plays a decisive role. Neither the established powers of the West nor the rising powers of the East should take Russia's cooperation for granted (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, pp. 63-95). Despite the growing strategic rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing in recent years, one not should jump to the conclusion that Russia would act as a fiddle to China whenever its relations with western actors deteriorate. In the best of circumstances China appears to be a trump card for Russia in its dealings with Western powers. The closer Russia comes to China, the stronger the Russian message that Russia is not without alternatives. Active Russian agency in the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICSs should be read as Russia's growing determination to soft-balance against the West (Ferguson 2012, pp. 197-122).

Russian leaders believe that Russia's historical legacy, immense military power capabilities, rich natural resources and huge landmass provide her the ability help bring into existence a Russia-friendly regional

and global order. It is a strong Russian conviction that rather than treating Russia as a defeated power and imposing a peace settlement on it, similar to what victorious western powers did to Germany in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, western powers should have contributed to Russia's incorporation into the emerging security order in post-Cold War Europe, similar to how post-Napoleon France had been incorporated into the Concert of Europe in 1815.

Despite some counterfactual arguments, it seems that the West promised not to enlarge NATO eastwards in return for Russia's acquiescence to Germany's unification and its eventual accession to NATO (Shifrinson 2016, pp. 7-44). However, this is not what has transpired. Therefore, a strong feeling of disillusionment, containment, and encirclement reigns in today's Russia. The Yeltsin era during the 1990s did not witness a serious breach in Russia's relations with the West mainly because Russia was weak and the then ruling elites saw westernization as the only route to modernization and development.

In order to voice its strong criticism against western aggrandizement, Russia needed to recover from its economic malaise under the strong leadership of President Putin. The improving Russian economy and the growing need of western powers to seek Russia's help in responding to the geopolitical challenges in the post 9/11 era seem to have emboldened Russian leaders to openly question the legitimacy of the liberal Western order.

Russia turned out to be vehemently against the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and some Central Asian republics. From Russia's perspective these revolutionary movements were masterminded by western circles and carried out by local agents. Seen from Moscow, promotion of democratic values in

Russia's near abroad cannot be seen isolated from the geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. This appears to be the main reason why Russia fought against Georgia in August 2008 and strongly opposed Ukraine's incorporation into the West through the signing of an Association agreement with the European Union in late 2013, as well as Ukraine's eventual accession to NATO (German 2017, pp. 291-308).

In Russian thinking, western security institutions, most notably NATO, should not be the main regional platforms in which questions of European security are discussed. As President Putin argued back in 2007 in Munich, absent the Cold War era confrontation between Washington and Moscow, NATO should have already replaced by new institutional arrangements concerning European security.

Unlike the developed western economies which are built on the capitalist values, Russian economy very much relies on the export of commodities in a semi-closed economy, such as gas and oil. The idea that capitalist economic modernization would eventually culminate in political liberalization and democratization does not strike a sympathetic chord with Russia. Russia seems to have adopted a mercantilist economic model in which many economic activities are closely regulated and monitored by the state and economic power is a means to state's political and strategic influence at home and abroad.

Unlike the western powers where post-modern ways of arranging state-society relations have taken deep roots and where issues of security mostly concerns low-politics issues, Russia, mostly owing to its multicultural character, offers an example of traditional nation-states where national sovereignty,

state survival and territorial integrity are still the most important security issues (Snetkov 2012, pp.521-542).

Russia defines itself as a 'sovereign democracy' and abhors western attempts at preaching the virtues of liberal democracy and universal human rights (Makarychev 2008, pp. 49-62). From a Russian perspective, historical experiences, geopolitical realities and cultural values tend to produce different conceptualizations of democracy across the globe. Putting the idea of universal human rights at the center of global politics and authorizing the United Nations or other regional security organizations to help organize multinational peace operations in conflict-riven places contradicts Russia's state-oriented security and diplomatic culture. Russian uneasiness with such multilateral UN-led operations can be seen in Kosovo in 1999 and Libya in 2011. The Russian position on the Syrian crisis also reveals that the principle of not interfering with states' internal affairs, no matter how severe the internal conditions are, still colors Russia's international behaviors. Russian rulers do not want to see that the principle of 'responsibility to protect' drive international involvement in conflict-riven places. There are no universally-agreed human rights and the use of force in the name of 'responsibility to protect' would only mask western imperial designs (Baranovsky and Mateiko 2016. 49-69).

Recent years have also witnessed that President Putin has been vociferously arguing in favor of the revival of Russian nationalism imbued with distinctive legacies of communism and Orthodox Christianity. Ascribing a messianic mission to Russia, Russian leaders wish to resurrect the defunct Russian empire in new clothes that acts as the protector of traditional Christian values against the challenges stemming from the post-modern/post-religion societies in the West

and religious fundamentalism in the East and South (Curanovic 2015).

Moreover, it is also believed that the Russian society is built on the primacy of patriarchal and traditional communal values instead of self-regarding individualistic morality. Russian society evinces a predisposition to communitarian ethics over individualistic or cosmopolitan ethics. That is to say that the meaning of life of an ordinary Russian emanates from his/her belonging to the larger Russian community in which common societal values take priority over individual quest for happiness and well-being.

Russia's approach to the liberal world order is informed, among others, by the historical dynamics of its relations with the western international community (Shlapentokh 2007; Kaempf 2010, pp. 313-340). On one hand exists a strong pro-western tradition in Russian culture and history, according to which the road to modernity and development goes through Russia's acceptance of western values and practices. On the other hand a strong resistance to the West also exists in Russian history, whose most exemplary manifestation took place during the Cold War era. Here Russia is defined as the anti-thesis of the West and its liberal values. Finally, the so-called Eurasian school of thought sits somewhere in the middle of these two polar positions (Laruelle 2008). According to Eurasianism, Russia is both a European and Asian country at the same time and Russia's historical mission is to unite the diverse communities in the Eurasian region under Russia's moral and political leadership. Russia is the geopolitical hegemon of the Eurasian region and without strong Russian leadership neither Russia nor other Eurasian communities would be in a position to restrain western and eastern encroachments. Given Russia's foreign and security policies over the last decade, one could confidently

argue that Eurasianism has already become the dominant geopolitical school of thought in Russia (Marozova 2009, pp. 667-686).

Russian elites are very much obsessed with the idea that Russia is legitimately entitled to have an equal standing with the West, if not superior than the West. As westerners question Russia's great power status and continue to lecture Russians on the superiority of western values and Russia's shortcomings, Russia tends to define itself in opposition to the West. The victories against Napoleon's France and Hitler's Germany in the past have been increasingly instrumentalized by Putin's administration in its efforts to redefine Russian national identity in the emerging century (March 2012, pp. 401-425).

#### **Deciphering the codes of Turkish revisionism**

Turkey came into existence as a western-style sovereign nation state after the war of independence between 1919 and 1923 and the founding fathers of the new republic wanted to build the new state on the basis of anti-Ottomanism in many respects. Multi-culturalist, universalist, multi-religious and multi ethnic character of the Empire were replaced by secular Turkish nationalism (Danforth 2016, pp. 5-27).

Foreign policy practices of the Republic since 1923 till the end of the Cold War mostly reflected Kemalist priorities of westernism and secularism. 'The peace at home peace in the world' motto captures this mentality well, thereby Turkey eschewed adventurist policies abroad with a view to maintaining its territorial security against external threats as well as channeling its limited capabilities to internal challenges of economic development and creating a harmonious society in the image of western values.

During the long Republican era, Turkish foreign policy was mostly pro-western and status-quo oriented

in that Turkey defined its international position within the western international community by aligning its interests and values with those of the western world. Neither its efforts to improve its relations with the Soviet Union and the oil-rich Middle Eastern states in times of crises with western powers nor occasional outburst for neutrality or third worldism prevented Turkey from maintaining its western orientation and valuing its membership in key western international organizations, such as NATO (Oguzlu 2003, pp. 285-299).

The so-called Eurasianist school of thought remained marginal throughout the long Cold War years. The ones, who argued in favor of Eurasianism, particularly from the left, limited their imaginations to socialist modernization process at home while maintaining a pro-Soviet foreign policy abroad. They were extremely secularist and vehemently questioned Turkey's so-called satellite status within the western camp. To them pursuing a predominantly western oriented foreign policy would amount to the abrogation of Ataturk's true legacy of wholly independent Turkey (Akcali and Perincek 2009, pp. 550-569).

Following the end of the Cold War, Turkey's foreign policy activism has spectacularly increased. Yet, rather than an intersubjectively shared new geopolitical imagination, the loosening of the Cold War era constraints and the changing dynamics of the international system appear to have determined this outcome more decisively. The idea that Turkey constituted the best role model for the countries that gained their independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union gave additional impetus to Turkey's efforts to improve its relations with many countries located in Central Asia, Caucasus and the Balkans. However, rather than Turkey offering these countries any alternative roadmap outside its westernization



path, its goal was re-emphasize its western/European identity by indirectly contributing to the promotion of western/European norms onto these areas. This also implies that the neo-Ottomanist arguments during the 1990s, mostly identified with former President Turgut Ozal, were in synch with Turkey's decades-long westernization process. Stated somewhat differently, the apparently neo-Ottomanist spirit behind Turkish foreign policy activism during the 1990s was mostly defined in economic, cultural and social terms rather than strategic, political and military.

Despite occasional crises in Turkey's relations with western powers, particularly owing to the developments taking place in the larger Middle East region, Turkey has nevertheless adopted a pro-western foreign policy mentality till late 2000s (Oguzlu 2011, pp. 981-998). A shift towards soft-Eurasianism in the second half of the 2000s did not radically change Turkey's pro-western orientation (Onis and Yilmaz 2009, pp. 7-24). The increasing reforms at home in the name of fulfilling the EU membership criteria, the ongoing commitment to NATO membership, Turkey's participation in the Greater Middle eastern Initiative as a democracy partner, the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies in the name of development and economic growth, the adoption of mostly liberal and soft-power oriented foreign policies in the Middle East and the growing determination to de-securitize Turkey's extremely securitized relations with its neighbors should all be seen as examples of Turkey's efforts to help underline its place within the western international community alongside the cooptation strategy (Oguzlu 2010-2011, pp. 657-683).

During this time period, mostly corresponding to years between 1991 and 2008, the West preserved its privileged position in Turkey's geopolitical imagination despite Ankara's growing efforts to improve its strategic and economic relations with

Russia, China, Iran, Syria and many other non-western countries. The idea that Turkey should join forces with such non-western powers in order help bring into existence a new international or regional order that would fundamentally problematize the legitimacy of the Western international order was not as powerful as it was going to be in the following years.

The revisionist tone in Turkish foreign policy has become more conspicuous since 2008, under the guise of a more assertive neo-Ottomanism (Tuysuzoglu 2014, pp. 85-104). The key difference between the neo-Ottomanism of the former President Turgut Ozal and then Prime Minister Davutoglu is that while the former defined Turkey's international activism in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire as part of Turkey's decades-long westernization process and ascribed Turkey an indirect role in the socialization of the newly independent states to the constitutive norms and rules of the western international society, the latter prioritized defining Turkey as a central country that should have both a strong degree of international agency and a particular global/regional vision whereby Turkey's goal should be to help transform the countries located in the post-Ottoman geography in the image of its interests and values.

While the neo-Ottomanism of Ozal was mostly defined in cultural, economic and social dimensions prioritizing Turkey's western secular identity, Davutoglu's neo-Ottomanism has been more a political and strategic Project than a social and cultural one (Torbakov 2017, pp. 125-145). To Davutoglu's version of neo-Ottomanism, Turkey should not only redefine its national identity on the basis of a synthesis between ethnic Turkishness and Islamic religion but also own the legacy of the former Ottoman Empire and contribute to the solution of many security and political problems in its regional environment as a responsible global/regional power (Ozkan 2014, pp.

119-140). Questioning the strong influence of extra-regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey has begun to argue that problems of the region should be solved by the people of the region with the development of regional consciousness. To this vision, Turkey, similar to Russia and China, should be treated as a global/regional power being entitled to its sphere of influence. The oft-repeated mantra that the world is bigger than five well epitomizes the spirit of Turkish revisionism.

Following its second consecutive electoral victory in the parliamentary elections held in the summer of 2007 and the election of Abdullah Gul to presidency despite all roadblocks, AKParty rulers seem to have felt a strong degree of self-confidence to set in motion an identity based transformation process at home and abroad. When the cooling of relations with the European Union combined with the growing differences with the United States, the end result happened to be Turkey's continuous search for strategic autonomy. The years since 2008 have witnessed a strong dose of employing normative and moral considerations in Turkish foreign policy practices, particularly in the Middle East (Dal 2015, pp. 421-433). Since the onset of the Arab Spring, Turkey's number one foreign policy goal in the Middle East has been to help bring into existence a new regional order with Turkey playing the leading role in the strengthening of representative democracy and regionalism. Playing the order instituter role went hand in hand with Turkey's determination to help erase the imprint of external actors in the region and replace it with the rise of new power blocks that would align their interest with those of AKParty-ruled Turkey.

When the American willingness to outsource security responsibilities to regional players combined with the relative absence of non-western global actors in the

Middle Eastern theater, it was not difficult for Turkish rulers to clamor for regional leadership and aggressively pursue an order-creator role to its south, at least by the time Russia decided to get involved in the Syrian civil war militarily. It was during this period that Turkey's efforts to facilitate the solution of regional problems in the Middle East increased. Turkey also actively supported the ouster of Assad from power in Syria. It has increasingly built its diplomatic engagements across the globe on humanitarian grounds and pursued a responsible global actor role by coordinating its policies with other like-minded rising powers within the framework of such regional groupings as MIKTA and MINT. It also signed up to China's One Belt One Road initiative and expressed its determination to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Economic Union as a full member. These are all examples of soft-balancing in Turkish foreign policy.

The strong revisionist tone in Turkish foreign policy has begun to soften since 2015 onwards as it has increasingly become clear that its hard and soft power capabilities would not allow Turkey to play an order-instituter role in the Middle East (Keyman 2016). On one hand Turkey has continued to suffer from an expectations-capability gap. On the other one, the growing assertiveness of other players in the Middle East, particularly Russia and Iran, has curtailed Turkey's maneuvering capability (Oguzlu 2016, pp. 58-67). Turkey's growing exposure to security challenges emanating from the ongoing civil wars in Iraq and Syria has also led to the revival of the old security-first mentality in that the preservation of Turkey's territorial integrity and cohesion of the Turkish society have now become the main preoccupation of Turkey's rulers. The coup attempt of the FETO-affiliated members of Turkish military in

the summer of 2016 has also aggravated Turkey's security concerns.

### **In Lieu of Conclusion: The limits of Russian connection in Turkish revisionism**

Turkish-Russian cooperation in political, economic and strategic realms has intensified over the last decade (Onis and Yilmaz 2015). Similar to Russia, Turkey also comes from an imperial legacy in that pursuing an imperial geopolitical vision occupied Turkey's political agenda from time to time. Similar to Russian security elites, Turkey's ruling elites have increasingly redefined Turkey in an imperial fashion in that Turkey deserves to have its sphere of influence in the post-Ottoman geographies. The primacy of state elites in defining national preferences, security interests and the strategies to be adopted to deal with them in a top-down fashion is common to both countries. State is deemed sacred and omnipotent in both societies. Defining national interests and security policies from the perspective of state is a practice shared by both.

Both societies are conservative in which traditional societal, political and cultural values should be preserved against liberal, post-modern and hedonistic western values. State and society are defined as constitutive of each other. If policies being adopted in the name of strengthening liberal democratic transformation were to imperil the cohesive and harmonious nature of the society, then such policies should be abandoned immediately. It is no wonder that in both countries a mixture of ethnic nationalism and religious conservatism has growingly shaped national identities in recent years.

Ruling elites in both countries tend to interpret strong western support to further liberalization and democratization in their neighborhood as part of larger geopolitical designs concocted in western capitals to

contain growing Russian and Turkish geopolitical influence. Just as Russia has been extremely against the so-called color revolutions in the post-Soviet geography, Turkey has also adopted a skeptical attitude towards western attempts at regime change in the post-Ottoman geography. Turkey's ruling elites interpreted the Gezi-parki protests in the summer of 2013 as a western ploy against the ruling government and therefore adopted sharp measures to suppress them.

Their common perception of exclusion from the West seems also to have brought Turkey and Russia much closer to each other in recent times (Morozov and Rumelili 2012, pp. 28-48; Hill and Taspınar 2006, pp. 81-92). Both societies seem to provide a fertile ground for strong and charismatic leaders to flourish. Holding strong executive powers in their hands, mobilizing their societies behind national grandeur, defining their nation as living organisms that need wealth, power and space to exist and survive, claiming to represent the national will against the corrupted elites detached from the society, offering simple and mostly emotional solutions to the complex and multifaceted problems of their societies in a globalizing and shrinking world, are common leadership traits of both Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. A strong personal chemistry also exists between them and they met each other numerous times in recent past.

Both Moscow and Ankara appear also to share in common that the US-led liberal international order has long been in terminal decline and the emerging international order should be defined in a multipolar fashion whereby non-western powers are in a much better position to determine its constitutive rules and norms. Claims to cosmopolitan morality and universal human rights are under strong criticism in both countries.

Despite such commonalities between them, it would be wrong to suggest that Russian and Turkish revisionism are of the same ilk. While Russia is a former super power trying to reclaim its status back by challenging the primacy of liberal world order and wants to play in the league of great powers, Turkey is a rising middle power trying to find its ways in the uncharted territories of the emerging twenty-first century. While Russia mostly defines its national and foreign policy identity in opposition to the west, Turkey's decades-long institutional relationship with western powers still continues to shape Turkey's constraints and opportunities decisively.

Turkey's revisionism seems to have elements of both soft-balancing and cooptation while Russian revisionism comes much closer to spoiling and oscillates between hard and soft balancing. Turkey has not proven that it is a revolutionary state aiming at the radical overhaul of the liberal international order through spoiling or hard balancing strategies. Provided that the liberal international order reflects the existing balance of power in today's world more convincingly, Turkey would likely opt for the current liberal order (Langan 2016). While Turkish rulers have gone to great lengths to have Turkey's international identity recognized as 'virtuous', 'humanitarian' and 'responsible' power, one does not see similar efforts on the part of Russian rulers.

In this sense, there is a stark contrast between Turkish and Russian revisionism. For example, while Putin's Russia has been giving all kind of support to pro-Russian illiberal and populist movements across Europe in the hope of driving wedges within the transatlantic alliance, Turkey still sees NATO as vital

to the materialization of its national security interests and actively contributes to the transformation of the alliance from within. Russian spoiling has nothing to share in common with Turkish cooptation in this regard.

As part of its soft-balancing strategy, Turkish rulers do now increasingly voice the view that the world is bigger than five and Turkey's efforts to develop cordial and pragmatic relations with non-western rising powers should proceed full steam. Signing up to Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, showing interest in developing joint projects with China within the framework of the One-Belt-One-Road initiative, contributing to global and regional governance initiatives, such as MIKTA and MINT, buying S-400 missile defense system from Russia, establishing military bases in faraway regions, such as Qatar and Somalia, are all noteworthy examples in this regard. The gradual erosion in the relative weight of western powers in international politics and the concomitant rise in the influence of non-western powers appear to have increased Turkey's maneuvering capability and bargaining power in its foreign policy. Yet, this does in no way amount to a strong Turkish revisionism evincing hard balancing or spoiling character.

As a final note, it should be admitted that while Turkey still values NATO very much and defines membership in EU as a long-term state interest, Russia appears to approach Turkey from an instrumental perspective in that helping drive wedges among NATO allies, in this case particularly between Turkey and the United States, would likely increase its bargaining power vis-a-vis the United States.

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