

THE 'NEW TURKEY' AS A NATO MEMBER

DOMESTIC STATE TRANSFORMATION AND
COMPETING STRATEGIC CULTURES

Toni Alaranta

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This study uses the concept of ‘strategic culture’ to analyze how Turkey’s incumbent Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) hegemonic position and domestic state transformation project has affected Turkey’s foreign policy and its position in world politics, especially regarding NATO membership.

The article demonstrates that the AKP’s new and more assertive foreign policy can be seen, first of all, as a result of the domestic power struggle between two major sub-cultures of Turkey’s enduring strategic culture (Republican versus Imperial), and second, as a more Islamist interpretation of the Imperial sub-culture.

This has led to a situation whereby the ideological attachment to the Western world and NATO, long characteristic of Turkey’s positioning in the world, is refuted without Turkey being ready to abandon the practical benefits of its NATO membership.



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THE ‘NEW TURKEY’ AS A NATO MEMBER

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INTRODUCTION

As Turkey’s incumbent Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has started to seriously implement its domestic Islamic–Conservative state transformation project, the country’s traditional position in world politics has also changed. At first, from 2002 to 2008, this domestic project of state transformation was for the most part implemented through democratic practices. It was often described as a ‘silent revolution’, indicating the idea that the AKP brought to political power conservative and more religiously-oriented constituencies that had allegedly been excluded ever since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.¹

As the AKP’s attempt to change Turkey was thus widely interpreted as a positive transformation, it came as a tremendous surprise to many observers when the country’s rulers by 2010 came to see liberal democracy and pluralism as a threat to both their hold on power and the Islamic–Conservative project they wanted to implement. In many previous accounts, the increasing authoritarianism of recent years is blamed solely on party leadership, especially on current President of the Republic Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s personal lust for absolute power. In contrast to such claims, this study elaborates the view that the AKP leadership’s ultimate goal has remained more or less the same during its 15 years in power. What has changed instead is that since the 2010 constitutional amendments and takeover of state institutions, the domestic power struggle between various stakeholders is over, allowing the AKP under Erdoğan to implement the Islamic–Conservative project almost unconstrained.²

The focus of this study, however, goes further than describing the domestic aspects of the ‘New Turkey’. The goal is to analyze how the AKP’s hegemonic position and state transformation project have affected

Turkey’s foreign policy and its position in world politics, especially regarding NATO membership. The Working Paper demonstrates that the AKP’s new and more assertive foreign policy can be seen, first of all, as a result of a domestic power struggle between two major sub-cultures of Turkey’s enduring strategic culture (Republican versus Imperial), and second, as a more Islamist interpretation of the Imperial sub-culture. This has led to a situation whereby the ideological attachment to the Western world and NATO, long characteristic of Turkey’s positioning in the world, is refuted without Turkey being ready to abandon the practical benefits of its NATO membership.

EXPLAINING TRANSFORMED FOREIGN POLICY

While most observers admit that there has been a change in Turkey’s foreign policy, caused by the AKP’s domestic state transformation project, there is no consensus whatsoever regarding the nature or depth of that change. The argumentation often follows the line where one first admits that there has been more pronounced Islamic and Muslim–nationalist tendencies in Turkey’s foreign policy behaviour, but that it has nevertheless fully retained its basic institutional ties and alliances, most notably NATO membership. This has led many analysts to argue that irrespective of a minor re-definition, there has been no major change in Turkey’s state identity nor in its status in the international system.³ However, it is argued here that there can indeed occur a radical transformation of national identity, leading to a major change in state identity and positioning in the international system, without Turkey abandoning NATO.

In order to explain this at first sight problematic assertion, this study elaborates the concept of ‘strategic culture’. As initially observed by Malik Mufti, within the Republic of Turkey, two rival strategic culture paradigms have competed during the twentieth century:

1 Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 267.

2 As Hroub convincingly argues, all declarations of the exhausted nature of political Islam are necessarily premature, and only hinder us in observing how the ‘project’ of Islamism is still unfolding at various levels, in various forms, and in diverse countries and societies. See, ‘Introduction’, *Political Islam: Context versus Ideology*, edited by Khaled Hroub, 9–19 (London: SAQI in association with London Middle East Institute SOAS, 2010), 11. Turkey’s Islamic–Conservative AKP can be defined as one manifestation of contemporary political Islam.

3 For an early evaluation of this debate, see Nicholas Danforth, ‘Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy, From Atatürk to the AKP’, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Fall 2008, available at: <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/290/ideology-and-pragmatism-in-turkish-foreign-policy-from-aturk-to-the-akp-fall-2008>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

Republican and Imperial. The first has emphasized strict nation-state borders and a status quo, especially regarding the immediate neighbourhood, being always anxious that no external forces are able to manipulate Turkey's internal cleavages (Islam-secularism divide; ethnic distinction between Turkish majority and Kurdish minority). The Imperial strategic culture paradigm, on the other hand, has understood Turkey's current borders, determined in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, as too restricting, calling for a much more assertive foreign policy, built on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire.⁴

One can argue that these competing paradigms also imply highly contesting readings of Turkey's national history. As argued by Hurrell, history matters because of the extent to which all human societies, including the international society, rely on historical stories about themselves to legitimize notions of where they are and where they might be going. In Hurrell's words, 'an important element in the study of International Relations is therefore the uncovering of actors' understanding of international politics and the ways in which these understandings have been gathered into intelligible patterns, traditions, or ideologies.⁵

These 'intelligible patterns, traditions and ideologies' have been defined as 'strategic culture'. This concept itself has always been contested, but few would deny the importance of the phenomena it refers to. One of the key problems has always been how to define 'culture' in a way that it does not become too all-encompassing and deterministic. Bloomfield provides one of the most promising recent attempts to define 'strategic culture'. In his model, strategic culture is seen as a singular culture containing multiple co-existing strategic subcultures. The subcultures each present a different interpretation of a state's international social/cultural context – who are a state's friends and foes, and how are the material variables relevant to strategic decision-making duly interpreted within a particular context – geography, relative power, technological change, and so forth?⁶

The narratives of the past, especially the widely accepted accounts of national history and its key events, therefore play a crucial role in reproducing the dominant threat conceptions. As a consequence, what is

needed for a convincing account of Turkey's changing perception of NATO under the incumbent AKP regime is a historical analysis demonstrating how different system-level pressures/incentives have been translated into different foreign policy traditions during Turkey's republican history, and how this has always been directly linked to the domestic power struggle. What follows is an attempt to sketch the general contours of this mechanism in Turkey.

REPUBLICAN STRATEGIC CULTURE AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

There is little reason to doubt that Turkey's NATO membership has taken place in two very different eras: during the Cold War era, and after it. This is also explicitly pointed out by current Turkish state elite, for example by former Prime Minister Davutoğlu, who cites the end of the Cold War as the essential system-level transformation that provided the necessary inducement for the Turkish 'restoration' project as he defines it.⁷

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 after a decade of wars (the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913; the First World War, 1914–1918; the Turkish Independence War, 1919–1922) during which the Ottoman Empire was partitioned. In the last phase of this process, the Western great powers – mainly Great Britain and France – also aimed to occupy the Anatolian territories of the Empire. These areas, inhabited by an Ottoman-Muslim majority, were however secured by the Turkish nationalist forces and subsequently included within the Republic of Turkey. The Republican strategic culture was deeply affected by these threatening formative experiences. Safeguarding the state became a major preoccupation for the new Republic, which from 1923 onwards embarked on a major Western-inspired modernization process while simultaneously being slightly anxious about Western intentions.⁸ The Republican strategic culture as it became consolidated from the 1920s to 1940s called for strict neutrality. This changed crucially with the more aggressive behaviour by the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

Thus, the initial reason for Turkey to seek membership of the Western military alliance concerned

4 Malik Mufti, *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: Republic at Sea* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

5 Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 16.

6 Alain Bloomfield, 'Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate', *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 33 (2012).

7 Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Türkiye'nin Restorasyonu: Güçlü Demokrasi, Dinamik Ekonomi, Etkin Diplomasi', SAM Vision Papers no. 7 (Ankara: Stratejik Araştırma Merkezi, 2014), p. 7.

8 Ahmet İnsel, 'Giriş', in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 2: Kemalizm*, edited by Ahmet İnsel (Istanbul: 2001), p. 17.

the new threatening attitude by the Soviet Union after the Second World War. In December 1945, the official newspaper of the Red Army published a story according to which the eastern borders of Turkey, drawn the beginning of the 1920s, manifested a ‘grave historical injustice’. As a result, nine of Turkey’s eastern districts – Kars, Ardahan, Artvin, Oltu, Tortum, İspir, Bayburt, Gümüşhane, and Giresun – were claimed to be part of Georgia, and allegedly now belonged to the Soviet Union. In addition to these districts, the Soviets demanded the right to establish a military base on the Bosphorus.⁹

The Soviet attempts to annex the eastern districts were perceived as an existential threat, and were thus decisively rejected by President İnönü. Although Turkey’s decision to become part of NATO was finally taken by the Democrat Party (*Demokrat Partisi*, DP) government, which won the first free elections in 1950, it was the (Kemalist) Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) government during the 1940s that took the crucial steps of withdrawing from the strict non-allied foreign policy doctrine, established in the 1920s. Hence, even CHP hardliners, such as Recep Peker – who is often seen as a typical example of right-wing authoritarianism in Kemalist Turkey – saw the establishment of increasingly friendly relations with democracy-supporting Americans as a necessity.¹⁰ What is more, another prominent intellectual from the Kemalist circles, Falih Rıfkı Atay, went even further and stated in 1946 that all those who wanted to live in a free, equal world that guarantees the sovereignty of nations in peace, could easily see their own star of fortune in the American flag.¹¹

In light of these views, one can argue that the Republican (or Kemalist) doctrine of non-alignment and strict neutrality was originally precisely just that – and not the kind of ideological anti-Western (anti-imperialist) nationalist doctrine that came to occupy the so-called left-wing Kemalist movement during the 1960s. For the founding cadres of the Republic, the Western powers, the USA included, represented exactly the kind of rationalist, Enlightenment-based modernity that the Kemalist revolution wanted to implement in Turkey. This evaluation also further consolidates the view, expressed most explicitly by Feroz Ahmad, according to which Mustafa Kemal and his closest

followers were anti-imperialist because the circumstances at hand forced them to be – they needed to halt the imperialist West (Britain, France and Italy) in order to build an independent Western-inspired secular national state in Turkey.¹²

Thus, it came as no surprise when, in 1947, five years before NATO membership, Turkey and the USA signed an agreement that had two main purposes: 1) to strengthen the Turkish defence forces, and 2) to create economic stability.¹³ The essentials of what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine – increasing the military capabilities of Turkey and Greece in order to secure these countries’ ability to resist Soviet invasion, and creating socio-economic conditions suitable for deterring the communist ideology – were duly implemented in 1947, with an agreement between the Turkish Kemalist regime and the USA. The initial consensus regarding Turkey’s Western orientation and NATO membership – which was explicitly affirmed by both CHP and DP – was partially lost during the decade of DP rule when it pushed for more American-initiated bilateral agreements. The DP leadership started to depict İnönü and CHP as anti-American. However, after İnönü became Prime Minister of Turkey’s first ever coalition government in 1961, he gave a speech that perhaps better than any other individual statement defines the essentially ‘Atatürkist’ view of Turkey’s relationship with the Western world:

*‘From its foundations, the Republic of Turkey has supported international cooperation, the idea of collective defence, and the resolution of disagreements in a peaceful way. Our government will continue working in this same manner in the international field... As a result of the Atatürk revolution, the relationship between Turkey and our NATO allies is not limited to the political arena but instead encompasses all fields of life, and we are determined to continue this relationship based on sovereignty and equality’.*¹⁴

The most important element in this statement is the emphasis on the shared view on culture and modernity in İnönü’s phrase about ‘all fields of life’, that is,

9 Şerafettin Turan, *İsmet İnönü: Yaşamı, Dönemi ve Kişiliği* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 2000), p. 266.

10 *Ibid.*, 269.

11 *Ibid.*, 270.

12 Feroz Ahmad, ‘The Political Economy of Kemalism’, *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*, edited by Ali Kazancıgil and Ergun Özbudun (London: Hurst, 1981), p. 150.

13 Turan, *supra* note 12, 270.

14 İnönü as quoted in Turan, *ibid.*, 276 (translation by author).

Atatürk's vision to make Turkey part of Western civilization. The statement also makes it very clear that the left-wing Kemalist current that came to be the most dominant version of Atatürkism during the 1960s and 1970s – which often took a rigid anti-Western posture – was a clear deviation from the Atatürk-İnönü tradition characterized by fundamental identification with Western modernity. The enduring element of modern Turkey has been the continuous struggle regarding the meaning and scope of modernization and, even more crucially, how modernization is or is not related to westernization. Whereas the tradition represented by Atatürk and İnönü emphasized full national sovereignty – in other words, national independence was perceived as illusory without economic independence – the centre-right tradition that is crucially linked to conservatism and frequently also to Islamic currents, has often understood modernization and westernization solely in material terms.

However, during the Democrat Party era in the 1950s, the inherent strain within the populist, conservative centre-right was not yet fully exposed. In other words, the DP could launch its 'Americanization', including an explicitly pro-Western foreign policy orientation, without massively antagonizing its conservative support base, which was to become suspicious regarding the 'Western values' in the end. The DP also expressed a much more relaxed attitude regarding full national sovereignty and impartiality in the international field and, in the words of Feroz Ahmad, 'once Turkey was allowed into NATO in February 1952, she came to champion the cause of the West wherever she could'.¹⁵

However, the Democrat Party governments were the first to challenge the Republican strategic culture, as they started to suggest that Turkey could play a much bigger role in world politics. After the 1960 military coup ousted the DP government, the junta in power, or the civilian governments following its intervention, in no way changed Turkey's pro-Western foreign policy orientation, while they simultaneously re-emphasized the cautionary Republican foreign policy doctrine. The relationship between the US and Turkey was soon altered, however, due to the Cyprus issue, in which the Turks felt – rather justifiably one could argue – that the Americans sided solely with the Greeks. As the 1960s also witnessed a peak in the leftist movement in Turkey, an anti-American

attitude became a more general element of Turkish politics.¹⁶

During the 1980s and 1990s, new formulations regarding Turkey's position in the world were elaborated within both the conservative centre-right and the social democratic centre-left tradition. Turgut Özal, representing the conservative centre-right, rediscovered the Democrats' initial vision of a more independent and powerful Turkey, and in many senses Özal wanted to break with the Republican paradigm altogether, both in terms of its domestic and its foreign policy aspects.¹⁷ This attempt was nothing short of a neo-imperial vision where Turkey would become a regional leader and a significant global power, based on its history and increasing economic power. This was, then, the most explicit formulation of the Imperial strategic culture paradigm before the AKP era. On the other hand, İsmail Cem, who also saw the Republican nation-state paradigm as unsuitable for the new post-Cold War circumstances, presented a much more nuanced yet clearly reformulated position. Cem advocated an approach whereby Turkey would make use of its long history in the Middle East, seeking to promote trade and cultural contacts with the region's countries while simultaneously carefully preserving Turkey's essential Western orientation.¹⁸

Thus, Turgut Özal's period in the 1980s can be seen as a watershed of sorts in terms of the changing perception regarding the West among the Turkish political elite. Özal had roots in the Islamic circles, and there are indications that he and his closest circle already perceived the ideological Western orientation, which characterized the Atatürk-İnönü tradition in particular, as no longer suitable for Turkey. Özal's coming to power, however, was preceded by Turkey's thus far most drastic military intervention, the infamous 1980 coup that brought Kenan Evren and his junta to power. Whatever initial project the generals might have been contemplating – probably some sort of a return to the presumably 'ordered society' of early republican years – their project ended in a new ideological synthesis. The most dramatic novelty of the 1980s was without a doubt that now, unlike previously, the military-dictated regime was no longer hostile towards Islamic currents. Quite the contrary, in their perception of international Communism and the domestic leftist

16 Ibid., 137–141.

17 Turgut Özal, *Turkey in Europe and Europe in Turkey* (Nicosia: K. Rustem, 1991).

18 İsmail Cem, *Turkey in the 21st Century: Speeches and Texts Presented at International Fora, 1995–2000* (Nicosia: K. Rustem, 2000).

15 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 119.

movement as the ultimate threat, the generals, and later Özal's civilian governments, induced the proliferation of Islamic and even Islamist politics. Although the initial idea was to instrumentally use Islamist currents in order to build an anti-leftist religious-nationalist domestic order, there were several members in the Armed Forces who were already warning by then that this would allow radical Islamists to reach important positions and acquire social legitimacy – something that has indeed taken place since the last quarter of the 1990s.

THE MUSLIM-NATIONALIST INTERPRETATION OF TURKEY'S IMPERIAL STRATEGIC CULTURE

Regarding the more immediate foreign policy orientation of the 1980s, the perception of the Soviet Union and Communism as an existential threat guided first the generals and then Özal to increase Turkey's cooperation with the United States. When Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the emerging Turkish political Islamist movement (*Milli Görüş*) criticized Kenan Evren for allowing more NATO bases in Turkey in 1982, Evren replied with these words: 'The weapons of the Armed Forces come from the West. Its planes come from the West. Please go tell Mr. Erbakan, I belong to the Western club as well. Is that clear?'.¹⁹ Thus, a junta leader who implemented the most draconian illiberal regime in Turkish history, at least before the current one established by Erdoğan, and who utilized both Islamist and Atatürkist slogans in order to build a strict political order, could that easily conceive of himself as a member of the Western club and emphasize NATO's essential role for Turkey.

Clear traces of the ambiguous mixing of Republican and Imperial strategic traditions can be found in Ahmet Davutoğlu's major work *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth), where the author builds a civilizational-cultural basis for the International Relations discipline from Turkey's perspective.²⁰ However, whereas İsmail Cem's formulations can be interpreted as an updating of Turkey's traditional Western-oriented strategic vision in the new, more complex and multi-dimensional post-Cold War reality, Davutoğlu's is an attempt to totally abandon the priority given to the West in order to build a new, one could even say Turkey-centred,

vision of the world. From Davutoğlu's book to today, we can also see a systematic attempt to educate a new cadre of foreign policy planners working in tandem with those AKP-oriented scholars who have defined the party's agenda in domestic politics. Thus, the two major state-sponsored Turkish think tanks, SETA (*Si-yaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı*) and SAM (*Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi*), have been instructed by the party leadership to educate a new generation of 'AKP scholars' whose function is to produce allegedly scientific legitimacy for the Islamic-Conservative state transformation project. Together, they produce a more or less tight circle within which the knowledge production of each member consolidates the views and ideology of their peers.

Further, from these institutions there is a direct link to what can be called pro-government media, the newspapers and internet news sites that on a daily basis publish news stories reproducing the AKP's official agenda. The direct link between pro-government think tanks and media outlets is often secured with the same people writing op-eds and columns for both think-tank publications and newspapers. From these and other important elite-level institutions, such as government bureaucracies, there is a link to informal sectors, consisting of professional groups, religious brotherhoods and so on. In time, the views and ideas circulated especially at the elite level can become highly petrified, often leading to a situation whereby an institutional structure ensures that policy-makers only have access to a limited set of ideas.

It is very useful to compare Evren and the Turkey of the 1980s to today's Turkey under President Erdoğan. One could argue that Erdoğan in many ways genuinely hates the Western world – or, more correctly, the image of the West he has in his mind²¹ – and yet at the same time he seems to think, at least by now, that Turkey's national interest and its allegedly new 'global' role in the world are well served by its NATO membership. However, what has crucially changed is the public discourse reproduced by the political power-holders in terms of Turkey's relationship with the West. Whereas continuous anti-Westernism has in the past been the domain of the far left, some circles of Kemalist neo-nationalists and political Islamists, with Erdoğan and the AKP this discourse has become a major ingredient in the official state institutions. In other

19 Ahmad, supra note 14, p. 54.

20 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

21 'Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president: Americans "like seeing our children die"', *The Washington Times*, November 28, 2014, available at: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/nov/28/recep-tayyip-erdogan-turkey-president-americans/>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

words, it would be completely inconceivable to hear Erdoğan emphasizing that he ‘belongs to the Western club’.

Both of Turkey’s main strategic culture traditions include a relatively strong Western orientation, which is, however, countered by slogans of ‘full independence’ and ‘anti-imperialism’ in the Republican paradigm, and, in contrast, neo-imperial, Islamist, and Ottoman anti-Westernism in the Imperial paradigm, as it is currently interpreted by the AKP government. One can argue that all the AKP has done thus far in its foreign policy can still be included within these long-term major paradigms, but that the party has pushed neo-imperialism and anti-Westernism to the most extreme position, in other words, to the ultimate limits within which it is still possible to maintain Turkey’s NATO membership.

From 2002 to 2010, the reforms the AKP implemented in order to build the initial grounds for its ideal society were seen as beneficial by a wide array of influential actors and institutions, both at home and abroad. This meant that there was no need to adhere to authoritarian practices, as the desired state transformation project was welcomed by the majority of citizens and hailed by influential external actors such as the EU and the USA. It is noteworthy that this observation is in line with Ruşen Çakır’s influential account regarding the alleged transformation of the *Milli Görüş* movement (Turkish political Islam). According to Çakır, the division between so-called ‘reformists’ and ‘traditionalists’ within the movement in the 1990s was never about the worldview, but rather about methods and strategies. In other words, the ‘reformists’ – Recep Tayyip Erdoğan among them – came to the tactical conclusion according to which the exclusive *tebliğ* (calling for the religious awakening) politics had to be abandoned in order to create a mass political movement capable of obtaining a response among all constituencies. During this process, the so-called ‘reformists’ actually sharpened their hostility towards concepts such as pluralist democracy and secularism.²²

Thus, the AKP leadership could behave in accordance with liberal democratic practices in the early stages of its state transformation project. During those early stages, the most important thing to do was to end the political guardianship role of the armed forces, oust

secularist officials from central state institutions (the army, the judiciary, and ministries), and empower the constituencies that formed the backbone of the AKP’s electoral success. These steps were taken in accordance with the legislative reform packages implemented during the AKP’s first years in tenure, from 2002 to 2007. The general elections in July 2007 crucially consolidated the AKP’s power as the party won 46.6% of the vote and 341 seats in Turkey’s 550-member parliament

The election was first postponed due to the parliament’s quarrel over the presidential candidate Abdullah Gül, whose possible election was seen by the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) as an opportunity for the AKP to staff all major state institutions with Islamists. However, the period from 2007 to the subsequent elections in 2011 can still be seen as an era of domestic power struggle. The 2011 elections, preceded by the 2010 constitutional referendum that at least from today’s perspective came to demolish many of the practices that could have halted the power of any single party or actor, seem to have made AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan comfortable enough to take several steps further in his desire to consolidate his power and transform Turkey.

Comprehensive state transformation projects – such as the one the AKP wants to implement in Turkey – also usually require considerable re-definition of the meaning of key national narratives and figures. Such a re-writing of history is indeed currently taking place in Turkey. There is very little doubt that nationalism is still the core ideology of all forms of successful mass politics in Turkey. What thus becomes the dividing line is the meaning and content of the ‘national’ in different and competing versions of Turkish nationalism. The meaning attributed to Atatürk (the ‘founding father’) is of course of utmost importance. For the secularists, he is the implementer of *ihtilal*, in current parlance more often *devrimleri*, that is, the great reforms of the early republican period (abolishment of religious sharia courts, emancipation of women, language reform, cultural secularism (*laliklik*), and so on). In short, the attempt was ‘to create a new human being’ (*yeni insanı yaratmak*), as one prominent Kemalist intellectual once put it.²³ This attempt more than anything else presupposed the idea that Turkey’s nation-building

22 Ruşen Çakır, ‘Milli Görüş Hareketi’, in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 6: İslamcılık*, edited by Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekinçil (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), p. 549.

23 İlhan Selçuk, ‘Türkiye Aydınlanması: “Yeni İnsan”ı Yaratmak’, in *Türkiye’de Aydınlanma Hareketi*, edited by Server Tanilli (Alkım Yayınevi, 2006), p. 31.

project was crucially attached to Western modernity, and that it animated the Republican strategic culture, no matter how much it harboured doubts about Western intentions in the Middle East. All of these Republican ‘revolutions’ hostile to Islam and Ottoman traditions are, however, unacceptable to the ideologues of the Islamic-Conservative project. Instead of seeing them as beneficial reforms, these ‘revolutions’ are defined in AKP circles as the source of ‘social trauma’ in Turkish society.

Hence, there are anti-Western as well as pro-Western elements in both major competing manifestations (Republican vs. Imperial) of Turkish strategic culture. The Republican paradigm always had its question marks regarding the West, but its domestic state and nation-building project required ideological affinity with the Western world. NATO membership from 1952 onwards was most of all pressured by the existing structural context and Soviet threat to Turkish territorial integrity. The Imperial and pro-interventionist strategic culture paradigm from the Democrat Party of the 1950s to Turgut Özal of the 1990s had no trouble accommodating the same pro-Western orientation – in fact it was even more explicitly pronounced. This state of affairs has now been crucially transformed during the AKP era, as the party leadership has increasingly emphasized its Islamist heritage, especially during the last five years.

Based on the left-wing nationalist interpretation of the Republican paradigm, one might conclude that the enduring commitment to NATO in Turkey, especially after the end of the Cold War had more or less completely transformed the system-level context, is maintained most of all by the conservative, but in economic policies liberal, centre-right. This reading was further consolidated by the interpretation according to which the conservative periphery – allegedly marginalized and excluded from political power until the 1980s (and in many analyses even until the AKP era) – was a natural force for liberalism and democratization in Turkey. However, after 2002 and the coming to power of the AKP, the traditional centre-right has been completely marginalized, its place taken by what was long seen as the ‘reformists’ within Turkish political Islam. Indeed, the parties from which the AKP leadership emerged – political Islamist parties led by Necmettin Erbakan since the beginning of the 1970s – have had a completely different view on Turkey’s Western orientation compared to the traditional centre-right of Menderes, Bayar and Özal, all of whom talked about making Turkey a ‘little America’.

In Erbakan’s view, Turkey and the Western world belonged in altogether different civilizations, and in political, cultural and religious spheres, Turkey had nothing to do with the West. In this tradition, the Westernization of Turkey has always been perceived as a historical mistake. This tradition has now been placed at the core of the AKP’s political ideology. The result in terms of foreign policy orientation is a Turkey that perceives itself as an explicitly Muslim state in international politics and where the West is often seen as a threatening ‘other’. The AKP now espouses within itself elements from two of Turkey’s strategic culture paradigms – Republican and Imperial. The Republican tradition guides it to a strongly nationalist yet Western-oriented position, while the Imperial tradition interpreted from the Islamist perspective questions Turkey’s place in the Western-led military alliance that is NATO.

CONCLUSIONS

This study proceeded from the initial observation that there are two major traditions within the Turkish strategic culture: 1) the Republican paradigm, which espouses a Kemalist Turkish nation-state based on strict non-interventionism and ideological attachment to the Western world; and 2) the Imperial paradigm, which glorifies the Ottoman Empire, Islamic elements of Turkey’s national identity, and advocates a pro-interventionist, active foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. The meaning of NATO to Turkey has been radically altered, as the currently hegemonic power bloc of Islamic-Conservatives perceive Turkey’s NATO membership as ideologically unsatisfactory, but practically necessary.

At the time of completing this article, Turkey was just finalizing a deal to buy a Russian S-400 Triumph missile defence system, which it cannot integrate into the NATO system.²⁴ Turkey had also used its veto right to block NATO’s co-operation with Austria, a NATO partner country with which Turkey had a major diplomatic row.²⁵ At the same time, a leading columnist in the pro-AKP daily *Yeni Şafak* published feverish

24 Christopher Woody, ‘Turkey’s Erdogan says “signatures signed” on deal to buy Russian missile system in what may be rebuke of NATO’, *Business Insider Nordic*, 25 July 2017, available at: <http://nordic.businessinsider.com/r-turkeys-erdogan-says-signatures-signed-on-russian-defense-system-2017-7?r=US&IR=T>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

25 ‘Nato hit by Turkish veto on Austria partnership’, *BBC News*, 23 May 2017, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40013507>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

op-eds arguing that NATO armed Syrian Kurds to destroy Turkey's territorial unity,²⁶ while Bloomberg, a US media giant, published an article where the author more or less explicitly stated that under Erdoğan Turkey is a dictatorship unsuitable for NATO membership.²⁷ These and similar kinds of polemics between NATO/Western countries and Turkey are not completely new, as the historical record can offer several examples – most notably regarding the Cyprus issue – where Turkey and the USA have been on a collision course. During that episode, however, the anti-Western attitude did not stem from an Islamist ideology of the governing party, but was instead based on the perception that Turkey's crucial national interests were being completely ignored by the NATO allies.

The system-level changes – notably the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War – induced the Turkish foreign policy elite to redefine Turkey's position in the world even during the 1990s. As was noted above, the more active and 'cultural-civilizational' foreign policy doctrine was inaugurated by people like İsmail Cem and Turgut Özal. The AKP's ideological roots, however, lay at least as much in political Islam as in Turkish mainstream centre-right or centre-left traditions, and in traditional Islamist foreign policy, Turkey's NATO membership was always an aberration. Turkey under the AKP has often tried to implement a multi-dimensional foreign policy, seeking a balancing act between actors like the USA, Russia, the EU and various Middle Eastern states. However, this balancing has just as often been overridden by a deep ideological commitment to an 'Islamic cause' – an attempt to reframe Turkey as an explicitly Islamic state actor in international politics.

The Imperial, Neo-Ottoman paradigm that calls for more active and pro-interventionist foreign policy behaviour, clearly becoming more influential in Turkey since the end of the Cold War, has provided the AKP leadership with a cultural backbone upon which to re-invigorate the traditional Islamist foreign policy agenda in the contemporary context. All of these transformations in the international system and in Turkey's domestic politics have led to a situation whereby Turkey under the AKP constantly reproduces an official state ideology that simultaneously maintains

and questions Turkey's NATO membership. As a result, Turkey maintains its NATO membership while it increasingly abandons its traditional Western-oriented foreign policy doctrine. The Imperial strategic culture paradigm itself was to a significant degree even more Western-oriented than its Republican competitor. However, the ideological synthesis that the AKP has recently discovered interprets the Imperial paradigm through an anti-Western Islamist perspective, while it simultaneously espouses the strong nationalist elements included in the Republican strategic culture./

26 İbrahim Karagül, 'Erken uyarı: NATO güney sınırlarımızı aşındırıyor!', *Yeni Şafak*, 12 May 2017, available at: <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/erken-uyari-nato-guney-sinirlarimizi-asindiriyor-2037861>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

27 Leonid Bershidsky, 'Turkey's Troubled NATO Status', *Bloomberg* 14 March 2017, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-03-14/turkey-s-nato-status-grows-more-troubled>, last accessed 30 April 2018.

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