

“NEW OTTOMANISM” AS A GUIDING FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINE FOR MODERN TURKEY

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Рассматриваются основные этапы становления и применения концепции «неоосманизма» во внутренней и внешней политике Турции за последние три десятилетия. Анализируются экономическая составляющая в политике Тургута Озала, религиозная компонента в деятельности Наджметтина Эрбакана и внешнеполитический фактор в политике Реджепа Эрдогана. Показано, что концепция «неоосманизма» выступает связующим звеном между внешней политикой современной Турции с историческим наследием османов, демонстрирует направленность на возврат «оттоманского прошлого» с учетом современных факторов.

The article investigates the basic stages of formation and application of the concept of “Neoosmanism” in domestic and foreign policy of Turkey for the past three decades. The author of the article analyzes in detail the economic component in the policy of Turgut Özal, the religious component in the activities of Necmettin Erbakan and the foreign factor in the policy of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The author proves that the concept of “Neoosmanism” serves as a link between the foreign policy of modern Turkey with the historical heritage of the Ottomans, and it demonstrates the return of “Ottoman past” taking into account internal and external factors.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика Турции; неоосманизм; политический ислам; пантюркизм; панисламизм.

Keywords: Turkey's foreign policy; Neoosmanism; political Islam; pan-Turkism; Pan-Islamism.

The term Neoosmanism, as suggested by its form and meaning, refers almost entirely to Turkey and Turkish affairs, but its coinage is attributed to scholars from outside of Turkey, rather than to Turkish academics. Its use represents an external, somewhat distant perspective of Turkey's contemporary politics, an attempt to distinguish the changes that have supposedly taken place since the previous period of the coup-d'états. The foreign origins of the term are evidenced by its avoidance by mainstream politicians, researchers and the media within Turkey. The British scholar David Barchard, who pioneered the term in his monograph titled “Turkey and the West”, used it to underline the perceived shift in Turkey's foreign policy strategy, and the re-emergence of signs of Osmanism of attempts to revive the greatness of the former Ottoman Empire.

On the surface, this ambition appeared overly ambitious, and totally unsupported by either the economic, military, or export capacity.

The domestic political context also seemed inconsistent with any revival of the Ottoman spirit. However, as happened many times during the history of the Ottoman empire, it is exactly this political environment – dominated by the perception of fear and disempowerment, shared by a significant proportion of Turkish intellectuals, as well as by widespread feelings of frustration, discontent and bitterness that created the social base for the ascent to power of a new generation of political leaders. These newcomers were full of desire to pull their country out of its political and economic stalemate and put it on a par with Europe's most powerful nations. It was this desire – totally understandable by all intents and purposes – that gave Western scholars the grounds to refer the political trends within Turkey as the Neoosmanism. The term shares obvious commonalities with the 19th century doctrine

of Osmanism. The most important of these is the unity of ambition – Neoosmanism, similar to its 19th century counterpart, sought to endow Turkey with imperial powers. However, while the 19th century Osmanism coincided with the period of the Empire's relative strength, and was directed towards keeping in that way, its successor in the 20th and 21st century sought to maximise Turkey's influence on Turkey's neighbourhood countries and internationally through its appeal to the Ottoman spirit and memories of the greatness of the Ottoman empire. The Neoosmanism also shares a striking similarity with its predecessor – notably, the understanding of the role of religion. Proponents of Neoosmanism, similar to those of Old Osmanism, believed that Islam was not a barrier to democratic reforms and even saw it as a powerful force towards them.

However, it would be unfair to present Neoosmanism as a simple replica of its historical counterpart. One key difference was that Osmanism had been put forth by the masses and served as the ideological weapon in the hands of the society's progressives – the intellectuals and the civil servants. Neoosmanism, on the other hand, is the intellectual product and tool of the ruling elite. Over the last thirty years, Turkey's leaders have been compelled to manoeuvre in the ideological minefield of history's many policy doctrines. United around the ideas of Osmanism, they have variably emphasised those elements of Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism and Kemalism that they found most consistent with their own ambitions while also taking cue of the sentiments of their voters. Voter sentiment, in the meantime, has evolved significantly, from a fairly modest assessment of Turkey's international clout in the 1980s, to the sometimes exaggerated perceptions of its global importance. As noted by the Serb scholar D. Tanaskovich in his book “Neoosmanism”,

the latter has invariably been a permanent feature of Turkish foreign policy. Condemnation of Neoosmanism would be counterproductive. As such, it cannot be approached from a moral perspective – only as a real, and even legitimate geopolitical phenomenon and a factor of international politics [1].

Neoosmanism appears to be a useful concept for interpreting the current events in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East in general.

David Barchard and his followers have always emphasised that Neoosmanism is not a programmatic prescription, but merely a reflection of Turkey's *Realpolitik*. This is what makes Neoosmanism distinct from the other political theories proposed by the Turkish and Ottoman theorists. The policies of three most recent Turkish leaders have been widely cited as some of the most outstanding examples of Neoosmanism. First is Turgut Özal, Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989, President from 1989 to 1993. Second is Necmettin Erbakan, Prime Minister from 1996 to 1997, and third is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014, and President from August 2014. Each is attributed their unique contributions to Neoosmanism. Özal is credited with the introduction of Neoosmanism's first elements, mainly in economic policies, while Erbakan is a known leader behind attempts to revive political Islam. Erdoğan is the leader who brought the tenets of Neoosmanism into Turkey's foreign policies. Below are some examples of the above leaders' strategies that best illustrate the influence of Neoosmanism on the political and policy processes.

THE "NEW OTTOMANIST" ECONOMIC POLICIES OF TURGUT ÖZAL

Özal's turn to Neoosmanism was facilitated by a combination of two factors. First was contempt of the legacy of the despotic rule of Turkey's last military President General Evren, which left Turkey in the midst of a deep economic crisis and resulted in a tremendous weakening of Turkey's international standing. Second was the drastic change in the world order caused by the collapse of the Socialist bloc and the USSR itself, which created substantial opportunities for countries such as Turkey to strengthen their positions in regional and global politics. Ever since the start of his ascent to politics, Özal has realised that cardinal economic reforms and integration into Europe's civilisational space were essential to regaining Turkey's global leadership. These views were quite consistent with the tenets of the 19th century Osmanism, whose followers shared a vision for 20th century Turkey as a major international power with a justified claim for influence and greatness. One example of the pursuit of this ambition in the economy was the substantial increase in the share of Turkey's manufacturing exports, from just over 30 % in 1979 to 82 % in 1989. Starting from the 1990s, Turkey has emerged as an advanced economy with powerful manufacturing industries and a strong agriculture.

According to Western scholars, elements of Neoosmanism were even more visible under Özal as President. Like no other political leader of the same rank, Özal has been a strong and active supporter of Islamic integration and solidarity. Özal favoured peaceful coexistence of the European and Oriental civilisations. He held that both civilisations were ultimately striving towards similar ends, and had faith in their ability to pursue mutual adaptation and accommodation. He underlined his ideological affinity with Osmanism by referring to Turkey as the Ottoman Empire in numerous unofficial meetings and interviews. In this regard, Özal can be viewed as a typical proponent of Neoosmanism, working hard both in word and in deed to implement the modern vision of a strong and powerful Turkey.

Erbakan's religious Neoosmanism:

Erbakan represents a somewhat different aspect of Neoosmanism – the emphasis on political Islam, making him a controversial figure of sorts. His influential role in Turkey's recent history is due less to his short stint as Prime Minister (which lasted less than one year), but him being the founder of a succession of pro-Islamic political parties. Erbakan, like no other leader, has a particularly rich and extensive record of party leadership. His conceptual pro-Islamic stance was expressed as early as in 1969 in the National Perspectives manifesto, which lay the ideological foundation of the all the political parties that he had created. Interestingly, the present ruling party of Turkey, the Justice and Development Party, has its roots in Erbakan's Virtue Party, which is why Erbakan is often referred to as the 'spiritual father' of Erdoğan.

Although all of Erbakan's Islamist parties have been ejected from political power, their influence of the Turkish electorate has been remarkable, particularly in the 1990s. Indicative of the shift in the public sentiment from the 1980s to the 1990s is the fact that support for Özal's democratic and secular Homeland Party, which was able to mobilise 40 % of electoral support in the 1980s, was defeated by a significant margin by Erbakan's Prosperity Party by the mid-1990s [3]. This electoral success of Erbakan's party not only elevated Erbakan to the post of Prime Minister, but also created fertile ground for the revival of religious Osmanism, also known as political Islamism.

NEOOSMANISM'S ASCENT TO FOREIGN POLICY UNDER ERDOĞAN

Unlike Özal and Erdoğan, who applied elements of Neoosmanism mainly in their domestic policies, Erdoğan adopted its tenets to guide his country's policy choices. Admittedly, New Ottomanist rhetoric was already strong under Özal, who proposed the famous slogan "21st century, a century of Turkey". New Ottomanist overtones sounded even stronger in the statements of his successor as President, Süleiman Demirel. One example is Demirel's suggestion that the Turkish homeland will once extend from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China.

On his ascent to power, Erdoğan quickly followed suit. Commenting as Prime Minister on the European Union's plans to admit Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, he remarked: "Turkey possesses the territories of Western Fracia, Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina. The EU has acted to isolate Turkey from the Balkans [5]. As President, he adopted an even more rigid tone to his statements. 'We will continue to strengthen our diplomatic activity throughout the world. We should be aiming to bring Turkey into the ranks of the world's top ten most developed nations. We will take our cue from the leaders'" [6]. Erdoğan's statements regarding the neighbouring states are equally straightforward. "We see these nations as our friends, because we share with them a common cultural and historical background, and also a common future. The Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East are indispensable parts of the Turkish world" [6].

Admittedly, these and other similar statements were designed to appeal more towards domestic audiences than to challenge the territorial integrity of other nations. To a large extent, their bellicose tone should be understood in the context of the highly competitive electoral campaigns in the 2010s. However, additional factors are also at play. By the beginning of the 2000s Erdoğan party had already built a strong ideological base with the tenets of Osmanism at its foundation. Much of this work can be attributed to the work of the then little known professor of political science at the University of Istanbul A. Dovutoglu. In the introduction to his monograph "Strategic depth – the international position of Turkey" (2001) he lays out very clearly a vision of Turkey's strategic foreign policy directions that he believes should not be subject to any major change. "In the beginning of the 20th century, writes Dovutoglu, Turkey surrendered its Ottoman heritage

and reserved for the Turkish Republic the status of the nation state". During the Cold War, cultural identity was only a symbolic matter. The geopolitical shifts following the end of the cold war clearly brought it back to the agenda. Turkey's Ottoman past imposes on it a burden of geopolitical responsibility. The return to the historical roots will open up for Turkey new opportunities and avenues and help it pursue a more constructive policy course" [7].

This perspective of Turkey's foreign policy strategy is well reflected in the title of Dovutoglu's work. The association of foreign policy with the notions of strategy and depth speaks volumes of the ambitious nature of the proposed long-term vision. The definition "strategic" indicates the orientation of Turkey's foreign policy towards the future, representing a substantive break from the present. The use of the term "depth" indicates an attempt to alter the perception of Turkey's past and the intention to view the history of the Ottoman empire as a matter of national pride and a base for progress. According to Dovutoglu, Turkey's foreign policy should seek to revitalise its Ottoman roots by acting purposefully and proactively at the international stage.

He underlines the historical depth of Turkey's geostrategic position, and its unique standing in the Muslim world. Dovutoglu writes: "Countries that speak the same language, practice the same religion and values should pursue similar policies. They all share the heritage left behind by the Ottoman empire. We are proud to be named the New Ottomans" [8]. The last sentence is perhaps the best expression of the meaning of the new foreign policy course of the Turkish Republic. At its foundation are the principles of multidirectionality, zero problems with neighbours, re-orientation from the West to the Middle East, and collaboration with the world powers.

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