

Chapter 2

Is NATO Brain Dead?

Turkey's Position and the Effects of "Patronal Politics" on Foreign Policy

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ABSTRACT

Turkey has always been a strategic member of NATO, not just because of its military prowess as a regional power but also because of its geostrategic location. However, President Erdogan's assertive foreign policy decisions predominantly in conflicts in Libya and the East Mediterranean Sea laid bare vulnerabilities among the NATO members. Moreover, President Emmanuel Macron's warnings regarding the decreasing role of NATO intensified controversies between Turkey and allied members. This chapter seeks to find answers with regard to underlying domestic factors of Turkish foreign policy. It conceptualizes the term 'patronal politics' in the context of Turkish politics that have prevailed in former Soviet Republics for decades.

INTRODUCTION

Witnessing rising tensions among different powers has brought different complex questions regarding both in balance of power and diffusion of power. Indeed, as it has been always expected that there are status quo and revisionist states who challenge the established order so as to gain more favourable position. Recent controversies are certain manifestation of revisionist powers —mainly China and Russia— given the grey zone conflicts in different domains such as information warfare, trade warfare, subversive cyber-attacks, influence operations etc. These instances are constantly being questioned by academics and politicians as to whether we are witnessing the resurrection of the new 'Cold War' even though this analogy is not useful at all (Kaplan, 2019; Polyakova, 2019; Wertheim, 2019; Glasser, 2017). Apart from that, relations in transatlantic alliance particularly with the EU and the US is getting more problematic

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7118-7.ch002

given the latest remarks of both German Chancellor Merkel and president Macron with respect to European strategic autonomy and the EU's reliance on the US' security guarantees (Schake et al., 2019).

Evidently, Turkey is not immune from these challenges given its geo-politic and geo-strategic significance. Although current incumbent president Erdogan started his political career as a pro-western figure, he drastically shifted Turkey's alignment/foreign policy from Western camp towards Russia and China. Obviously, internal politics—for instance 2016 coup attempt and massive purge in bureaucracy—and long-standing problems regarding Kurdish minorities are pivotal factors for Erdogan to leverage current situation. In the wake of coup attempt more than 150000 public service officials were purged from the state apparatus (Schenkkan, 2018). Indeed, purging incredible number of public officials was the turning point for not just Erdogan but also for Turkish foreign policy. Erdogan's new allies predominantly from far-right ultranationalist front immediately forced Erdogan to change rhetoric regarding Turkish foreign policy which was previously based on 'zero problems with neighbours' doctrine (Kanat, 2010, Kibaroglu, 2012). Given the recent migration crisis stemming from Syrian civil war, Erdogan has constantly used this issue as a trump card to justify Turkey's existence in different realms. Moreover, Russian defensive missile 'S400' purchase of Turkey, proxy war in Syria—given the Turkish support to local groups and the US cooperation between Kurdish fighters¹—Libya and many other strategic problems. This directly leads to question whether foreign policy of Turkey is no longer in line with the NATO's security agenda. In the same vein, is multilateralism becoming obsolete considering the divisions among allied countries? This paper argues that domestic determinants of Turkish foreign policy particularly in the wake of coup attempt in 2016, increased the problematic position of Turkey in NATO that eventually unearthed the fault lines between allies. These were evident in the latest Turkey's foreign policy moves in Eastern Mediterranean and Libya conflicts. Moreover, increasing nationalist agenda of Erdogan helped him to consolidate his support domestically at the expense of degraded relations with NATO allies. Although there are limitations of Erdogan's agenda given the economic constraints of military power-based foreign policy decisions, the incumbent government is not going possibly change soon its stance due to domestic political factors. The most significant point is to assess that through the personalization of regime, Erdogan managed to build patronal regime that combines nationalism and Islamism based on controlling wealth mainly in business sector. This erosion eventually affected Turkish foreign and defence policy not just in NATO but also in different realms as aforementioned.

1. DOMESTIC DETERMINANTS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

With beginning of Justice and Development party (AKP) rule in 2002, Turkey shifted its agenda towards reforms not only in economy but also aimed at having good relations with Western democracies particularly with the EU. This agenda helped considerably to attract investors to engage in Turkish Economy. Through the flow of global capital Turkish economy showed considerable success even though its approach debt-ridden speculative growth model overshadowed the fundamental problems of Turkish democracy such as minority rights, freedom of speech, human rights violations and so on (Yeldan and Unuvar, 2016; Karaveli, 2016). During the Gezi Park protests in 2013 these fundamental problems revealed Erdogan's real agenda namely intolerance towards 'other' combined with nationalism and Islamism. In the wake of coup attempt 2016, Erdogan finally managed to transform parliamentary system of Turkey towards patronal system (Turkish type presidential system) not just by declaring state of emergency through unprecedented measures but also with smashing and silencing opposition groups

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