

Chapter 8

Turkey's Role During the Russia and Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the national roles Turkey adopted during Russia-Ukraine War. The national role concept was developed in the second half of the 20th century. Holsti carried the concept from sociology to international relations. According to this concept, every state plays a particular role that its leaders specify as appropriate for their countries. Turkiye also played a national role in the international arena during the war between Russia and Ukraine. These roles have been highlighted by their differing political aims. On the one hand, Turkey has desired to repair its political image as “aggressive.” Turkey adopted a mediator-integrator role between Putin and Zelensky. On the other side, Turkey didn't reject its political maneuvers of recent times which formed in trajectory of being “independent” of western or Eurasian oriented policies. Turkey criticized Russia's invasions acts. It also criticized NATO because it ruled out Russia's existential concerns over NATO's plans.

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey has been ruled by AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments since 2002 parliamentary election. Since then, Turkey experienced political and social change. Furthermore, reflected in both soft, ideational and hard power in different region. At the beginning of the office, AKP adopted a political agenda in compliance with EU integration process. During this time, AKP emphasized human rights, economic liberalism and collaboration with neighbors and western allies, especially the USA. This convergence of AKP rule and international society had impact on Turkey's economic and societal development and make peace both of inner and external political areas. Turkey's political attitudes and acts within this period reflected a certain national roles such as mediator-integrator role or regional collaborator according to scholars. In this era, AKP's mentor and foreign policy's director was Ahmet Davutoğlu and his ideas about political role of Turkey at international and regional scale that positioned Turkey on an unexperienced route that it was before. Then, a series of events took place in the middle east

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such as Arab Spring and followed by Syrian civil war. These events and Syrian civil war were assessed as opportunity for Turkish politicians to make real their political desires called as “neo-Ottomanism that combined with Islamism and Nationalism. In that era, Turkey changed its perspective toward more aggressive and interventionist side. In the second decade of AKP rule, understanding the national role concept converted into autonomy and military interventionism from mediator-integrator pattern or regional leader pattern. The new pattern easily comply with the role of “regional leader” in terms of Holsti’s categorization. The point which this approach brought Turkey, is aloneness in foreign policy and economic degradation within the country. Unfortunately 15 July coup attempt strengthened this approach and Turkey adopted more aggressive attitude in foreign policy to protect its autonomy and security, however, especially after 2020, Turkey realised that its aggressive policy united its political rivals such as Egypt, Greece and Israel at Mediterranean policy whereas this extraordinary political alliance would be able to damage Turkey’s interests at the region. These developments induced a manoeuvre changing for Turkish foreign policy. Erdoğan and his ministers and diplomats set again the national act type and political attitudes towards their counterparts to mitigate mutual relations and to become a political ally and collaborative actor again.

Russia-Ukraine war gave the an opportunity that Turkey expected. Moreover, Turkey’s recent political position ensured an extra political advantage such as being a bridge between West and Russia due to that the only indispensable political actor has been Turkey which has able to maintain diplomatic conversation all of sides of the conflict. On the other side, it should be added that Turkey has repositioned itself as a mediator role but also Turkey has continued to pursue its national interests. Turkey joined western allies to support sanctions, closed the straits to the Russian vessels, but maintained regular dialog with Putin, sold the military equipments, like game changer drones to the Ukraine, and supported Ukraine territorial integrity and sovereignty, joined in In this study, I aim to examine what political roles Turkey adopted during the Russia-Ukraine war. To achieve this aim, I started by examining the Holsti’s role theory. Then I looked into research about Turkey’s national role approach both of pre-AKP rule and post-AKP rule diligently. This endeavour ensured a clear viewpoint for Turkey’s role in terms of Russia-Ukraine war. Lastly I interpreted the roles Turkey adopted during the process. To diligently interpret the process, I looked for political and official statements, academic articles and reports.

2. THE PRINCIPAL FEATURES OF THE ROLE THEORY

Holsti in his study titled *National Role Conceptions in the study of Foreign Policy* listed national roles. Under his study we are going to look into Türkiye national role conceptions (TNRCs). First of all, the “role” concept was transformed to the academic literature in 1920’s and 1930’s, basically, the “role concept” is connoted with theatre platforms or cinema. At theatre, the role is about a behavioral presentation type which player presents (Ties, 2009: 3). As a result, the role has a decomposable feature from the player’s itself and the role, by academic view, refers to a particular behavior but not a position. So, a player may perform a specific role but never he/she cannot occupy a role (Holsti, 1970: 238). The concept converted into a theory named the “role theory” and tended to examine and to interpret the behavioral types of humans. The founders of the role theory principally wielded it within the social sciences such as sociology, psychology and anthropology but it was incorporated into the foreign policy analysis in 1970’s by Holsti. At the very beginning, theorists aimed to interpret the states’ behavioral approaches during the Cold War by the role theory (Harnich, 2011: 7). According to the theory, the

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