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**The Strategy of Surprise:
The Turkish Paradox and Systemic Power Reversals
in the Middle East**

by

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The Strategy of Surprise: The Turkish Paradox and Systemic Power Reversals in the Middle East

SPYRIDON N. LITSAS[*]

> *Do not wait first to see the wolf popping up through the dark in order for you to react. If your horse is uneasy prepare yourself to confront him either with cunningness or with the force of your sword.*
> **Mongolic proverb**

Introduction

On various occasions in the course of man's historical adventure through the labyrinth of foreign policies and politics, the focal points of political and strategic interest have shifted from one geographic region to another, resembling the constant movement of mercury which, thanks to physical laws, is able to maintain its fluid form. Every corner of our planet has been transformed for a certain period of time to a field of conflict between great powers and local powers, ultimately for the purpose of maximizing or maintaining power, the recognition or the hindrance of exercise of sovereignty, strengthening or upsetting the security net in the particular area or a wider region.

The present paper tackles the situation in the Middle East, a region that for such a long period produces, paraphrasing Winston Churchill's well-known quote for the Balkans, more history than the forces that play a leading or a secondary role in the region might wish for. In particular, the paper will focus on Turkey's Middle Eastern grand strategy in the post-9/11 era. For centuries the Middle East has been on the front line of redeployments of power, diplomatic interventions and military operations

of the Great powers, as well as in the demesne of regional interests by ethnic nationalists and governing political forces in the region. However, the main focus of this present article is not the domestic situation in the Middle East, but the role that Turkey plays today in the region under the conditions of the important changes in the distribution of power in the Middle East brought by 9/11 and the complete rift between the United States and the Islamist factor. Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East will be set at the centre of our analysis, as we aim to analyze the present, and possibly comprehend more extensively part of the future, of a region that for historical, social but also reasons of international politics interest International system that as developments indicate, will maintain its unidiomatic privilege to considerably contribute, so much in quantity as well as in quality, 'loads of history' to international politics in the 21st century.

In what follows I will suggest that Turkey, after the end of the Cold War, abandons the downgraded policy in the Middle East imposed by bi-polar antagonism and the historical opposition of the Arabs. Ankara today, following new strategic tactics, endeavours to exploit to its advantage the important changes that take place in the Middle East, seeking to become the new regional power in the aforementioned sub-system. Accordingly, in the pages that follow, I will deal with Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, setting as my objective to investigate the changes that occur in the planning of the country's new grand strategy, exploring the new methods of Ankara's strategic acquisition of power. My aim is to approach this field by connecting real-world developments and IR theory. Despite its significance, the special role of the Kurdish issue in Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East will occupy us only as one dimension in the overall analysis, not in a separate section.

The Paradox of the Historical Beginning

The starting time of relations between Turkey and the Middle East begins in abstract, through the decision of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, to abolish the Caliphate, a symbol of unity and imperial power of the Ottoman Empire (Mango 2001: 396-414). The notional apposition of the Caliphate's unity is contradicted by the Ottoman Imperial power, because the Middle East devolved to Ottoman rule via conquest and more specifically through the military confrontation between of the Osmanlic Principality and the Abbasid dynasty (Faroqhi 2006: 32-43). The problematic relationship that was developed between the Sublime Porte and the

conquered Arab tribes is superficially normalized via the common religious and dogmatic beginnings of the Ottomans and the Arabs and the preferential socio-economic position the later occupy in domestic Ottoman developments. This preferential position of the Arab world within the Ottoman Empire, which into the evolutionary course of the Ottoman Imperium will mutate into the identification of the strategic objectives of spreading the Islamic sovereignty and the internal antagonism as well, mainly between Cairo and Constantinople, is supported by Qur'an's preaching and by the directives of God to Muhammad regarding the unity of the Moslem community that is based on the common religious faith, superseding different racial origins. This particular aspect is of particular interest, because it was used by the Sublime Porte as the fundamental reason for legalizing its sovereignty over the entire Islamic world for several centuries (Hourani 1992: 220-230).

In essence, however, the relations remained mildly troubled, focused mainly in the domestic political rivalry between Constantinople and Egypt, up to the point where Arab nationalism surfaces restoring the historical adversity at the foreground of developments. The emergence of Arab nationalism, an ideological development of exceptional importance in the interior of both the Middle East and also the Islamic world, emanates from a composition of events and historical developments and completely alters the balance of power in the wider region of the South-Eastern Mediterranean. It is vital to open a parenthesis at this point and note that the appearance of nationalism inside the Arab world constitutes a contentious development for the Islamic religion. Islam does not recognise national borders and the only segregation that appears as a point for geographical segregation is the Land of Peace, *"dar al Islam",* in the interior of which the word of Allah and the harmonious living together prevail, while in the antipode is the Land of War, *"dar al Harb",* in the interior of which the word of God has not yet prevailed (Watson 1992: 113).

The appearance of Turkish nationalism, that in essence cancels the sovereign role of the Islamic religion in the interior of the Ottoman Empire, prompts the political and intellectual elite of the Arab world to demand a new self-definition, this time evoking ethnic origins rather than religious identification. The Committee of Union and Progress political agenda, which essentially draws some innovating elements from the period of the Tanzimat and Rashid Pasha (Cleveland 2004: 83-34), put a final end to the Ottoman system of the Millet and promoted a new political position, that of

Turkification. The CUP efforts to implement a new source of legalization in the interior of the Ottoman Empire, the one concerning the acceptance of a new Ottoman -Turkish identity, led to friction with the Arabic element. The CUP rigor towards the Arabic cultural diversity and its efforts to promote the Turkish language in the Arabic communities caused a strong resistance from the latter. In nature, and as a consequence in politics, action brings reaction. Therefore as an act of opposition towards the new-fangled ideal of Turkification, Arabism started to develop, with the flamboyant British encouragement. A typical great power practice of 'divide and Rule'. The agenda of Turkification was initially introduced by Yusuf Akcura, a Turkish political refugee from Russia, who contrasted the ideological foundations of Islamification and Ottomanification, arguing that the implementation of Turkification in the interior of the Empire had to be seen as the only lucid solution, able to reassure the survival of the Ottoman Empire (Berkes 1964: 322). The Turkification scheme of the Arab population can be clearly identified in the following calus from CUP's political program in 1908, which clearly states that:

> "*The official language of the state will remain as Turkish. All correspondence and official memoranda will be executed in Turkish.(Article 7). Teaching of the Turkish language is compulsory in elementary schools. For secondary [idadi] and higher [ali]education, first guidelines will be adopted on the basis of the Turkish language.(Article 17)*" (Kayali 1997: 91).

The Neoturks' ideological maximalism virtually led the Arabs to develop a new mode of ethnic-awareness that broke the religious-imposed unity of the Imperium, bringing to the surface ethnic divisions and historical bitterness.

In addition, the weakness of the Ottoman Empire to militarily protect its Arab territories from British and French influence and military presence is another reason that prompts the Middle East to search for a new national consciousness, while in the end the process of the certain collapse of the Ottoman administration model convinces the Arabs that the opening of a new chapter in their historical course, one that will separate them from Ottoman influence, constitutes henceforth a beneficial historical necessity. We should place within that context all political and military developments that take place from the end of the 19th century until the period before the Mid-War in the interior of the Middle East, with perhaps the most important peak of this de-

Ottomanization process the revolt of Mecca's Hashemite Sharif Hussein and western Arabia's Bedouins in 1916 that led to the liberation of Palestine and Syria from Ottoman rule.[1] However, the rise of Arab nationalism was not accompanied by the severance of the Arab population from Islam, contrary to the case of Turkey and the evolutionary course of Turkish society, and avoiding the secular example of Kemal's ideology, religion and national consciousness coincided in a construction process of a complimentary new ideology, in reference to the historic role the Arab world ought to play in International Politics after the end of World War I and later.

The Non-Paradox of the Cold War Era: The Turkish stance in the Middle East under US Guardianship

The Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East for the duration of the Cold War is also directly influenced by bipolar conflict. Turkey plays the role of intercepting Soviet influence in the Middle East, but the particular region does not constitute a priority in Ankara's wider planning (Kirisci 2002: 442). The reasons for the decreased importance that Ankara attributes in the Cold War era to the Middle East have to do with:

- The basic prioritization of Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans.
- The basic perception that conditions Turkish foreign policy throughout the Cold War era, regarding the complete obedience of its methods of operation to the policies of the United States in the region.
- The fear syndrome of an enlarging of the internal Islamic fraction in the event that Turkey re-establishes relations with Middle East regimes.
- The non-disposition of the Arab world to allow the dynamic return of Ankara into the region's interior.

In point of fact, Turkey throughout the duration of the Cold War era is involved primarily with the Balkans region, functioning firstly within the frames of Atlantic Treaty's policies of interference towards the member-states of the Warsaw Pact, and secondly pursuing through this tactic to assert in its western allies' consciousness its role as a force in the Balkans. As Chr. Giallouridis reports on the subject:

> "... *Turkey made serious attempts to re-establish its image in the Balkan region, returning to Ataturk's perception for the position and the relations of the country in the international*

sub system of the Balkans and South-eastern Mediterranean,
that Turkey is primarily a Balkan state" (Giallouridis 2004: 146)

The Middle East, from the time of Britain's withdrawal from Palestine and throughout the duration of the Cold War constitutes the United States' region of preferential interest, so much for the petroleum deposits in the region as for its strategic importance, resulting in Turkey's self-confinement to the role of a faithful bearer of Washington's policies, wishing this way to consolidate the position of the United States' most precious ally in the area. After the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the bipolar conflict, Ankara realizes that without American help and support it will not be in a position to withstand the Soviet Union's pressure. The reasons however for the decreased importance that Ankara assigns to the Middle East are not explained only by American-Turkish relations. After the end of the Second World War the Turkish construct experiences two types of structural concerns. The first concern is the rise of the far left forces and the second concern is the non-secular Islamic political forces inside the country and the increased influence that is progressively acquired by the country's lower social layers.

Both these sources of structural concern meet at the point of maintaining national unity and in both cases a common denominator is the Kurdish factor that plays an important role in the internal developments in the country and in Turkey's contemporary relations with adjacent countries, like Iraq, Iran and Syria, as we will see later on. At this point, however, it is of interest to us that a likely turn of Turkey to the Middle East was considered by the Turkish political establishment as a potential strengthening factor of the internal Islamic element and an upgrade of its political role and its anti-secular argumentation. Finally, it should also be mentioned that the Arab nations themselves during the Cold War era did not encourage with their stance such a policy from Ankara, citing the historical reasons of differentiation between the Arab world and the Ottoman environment in the Empire's last period as much as Turkey's Israel-friendly stance, which, from all the countries in the region, Turkey was the first to recognize in 1949 the newly founded Israeli state.

However, the downgraded Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East was abruptly altered with the Cold War ending and the first reports from members of the Turkish political establishment regarding the new upgraded role of the country in the post-Cold War order. The Turkish optimism was based on two factors. The first was a

deontological fictitious and very deeply moral-regulative one and the other an ideologically political one but with a limited time span. The first factor was based on Ankara's delusion on the retributive benefits that it would acquire from the final predominance of the United States in the bipolar friction and the close relations that Turkey had developed all these years with that superpower. The second factor was based on the logic that after the United States' victory in the Cold War the opinions that wanted the country to limit its involvement on the international scene and the beginning of a new political period of quiet isolationism would prevail in the unique superpower's interior. Based on this, Turkey considered that it will receive from Washington the appointment of regional overseer in the Middle East, henceforth solidifying the open door relations with the superpower and simultaneously upgrading her hegemonic prospects in the Middle East and also in South-East Europe. However, the September 11th events occurred under the doctrine of absurdness and its degree of influence in International Relations, overturned Turkish hopes, shaping at the same time a new balance of power in the Middle East.

Today, one approach to the Middle East riddle leads us to the conclusion that the region's volatility is the result of al-Qaeda's actions and its efforts towards the creation of a Global Caliphate. No-one can certainly disagree that al-Qaeda's plans regarding the overturning of power in the Middle East and also in the remaining Islamic world create a negative force on the region's political stability pylon. Without certainly disregarding the negative rational dimension of this particular approach, however, the appearance of al-Qaeda is not enough by itself to thoroughly explain the deep crisis that prevails, from one end to the other, in the Middle East.

An other approach regarding the same issue, turns our attention to the USA's policies after the September 11th strike, showing the American president's ideological Manichaeism, the development of the head on conflict via the extended Axis of Evil, as well as the ideological paradox of a neo-republican government completely adopting Wilsonian ideology, setting as objective the maximalist aspiration of consolidating the principles of western type democracy in the interior of the Islamic outline. Certainly, this revolutionary theoretical concept (Hall 2006: 138) of diffusing democracy in to the interior of the Islamic world, combined with American structural insecurity that results from the ruins of the Twin Towers and prompts the superpower to erroneous decisions of active force, without ever leaving out of course the everlasting question of the Palestinian Issue, certainly causes powerful vibrations

in the "quake-prone" environment of the Middle East but this element isolated from the greater analysis cannot provide a persuasive and accurate interpretation of the Middle East's total destabilisation phenomenon.

Conventional time in International Relations is a measurement unit of decreased value. This is because the evolutionary phases of a phenomenon, from its birth up until its respective climax, usually last many decades. Time in International Relations has greater duration than conventional time has, penetrates the cycles of history and presents an exceptional resilience over the human need for classification and the segmentation of it, containing at an analysis' core, complex and many times, heterogeneous events. As an example, the rise and fall of the Roman Empire cannot and should not be identified only with the victories and the defeats of Julius Caesar's or Octavius' legions, or on the other hand with the composition and decomposition of the social conditions inside Rome and the appearance of new competing forces in the era's political arena. Following the same line of methodological thought in our analysis regarding the Middle East crisis, we realize that this process of deterioration has begun centuries ago and is immediately connected with the course of the Ottoman Empire. The eminent Islam expert Bernard Lewis substantiates the previous argument with his latest work, "*What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle East Response*", supporting that the dissolution of the Arab Caliphate and the subjugation of Islam under the roof of the Ottoman Empire render the development of the Middle East and the Arab world bound to the developments and the course of the Ottomans. The failing of the Sublime Porte to occupy Vienna in the middle of the 17th century opens the chapter of a long period of decline for the Ottoman Empire that is translated in a corresponding deterioration in the Middle East's interior, on a political, economic and social level (Lewis 2002: 11-17) (b). The conclusion that is derived, from what we have seen so far, is that the development of the Middle East and the Arab world is closely related to the centuries of the Ottoman's political-military imposition on the Islamic world's interior, while at the same time it should not be reduced as a fact that these relations are built on a historically charged negativism that has predominated in the region for centuries.

Changing Turkish Approach to the Middle East after 9/11

The Middle East was of great interest to the US almost from the beginning of the bipolar conflict. Of particular interest is the structural rivalry with the Soviet Union

around the planet's biggest natural oil reservoir, and also the intra-Western rivalry with Britain as the latter approached the end of the colonial era and its withdrawal from the Middle East, a region that was of particular importance for the control of the Mediterranean and the communication routes between London and India, the 'jewel of the crown'. September 11th however prompts Washington to qualitatively reform its policy towards the Middle East and to try to give shape to new approaches towards all the countries in the region. It is a fact that US policy in the Middle East, perhaps for the first time so openly, admits opening Pandora's Box with the invasion of Iraq (Mearsheimer & Walt 2003: 50-59), without any long-term strategic plans for the direction that it would wish for the whole region to take. American foreign policy, under the absolutely justified pain caused by the 9/11 trauma, allowed itself, completely unjustifiably, to be possessed by the "Middle East Psychosis" syndrome (Gause III & Mohamedi & Molavi & White& Cordesman 2007: 1).

It is now becoming apparent to the analysts concerned with Middle East developments, that the US not only lacks a long-term policy for the Middle East, but also that the policies that the US applied in the region have been often contradictory. For example, the disposition to isolate al-Qaeda and its branches from the interior of the Arab states conflicts with the disposition of the Americans to import urban democracy to these states, which in their entirety are governed by oligarchic and not democratic regimes. On the other hand, the voices that are heard within the United States opting for the withdrawal of the American military from Iraq, clash with the sought policy of appeasement with Iran (ibid: 2-4). The list of the self-contradicted and overlapping American policies in the Middle East is long and covers the full spectrum of the permanently fluctuating balance of power in the region, from the Palestinian Question to the support of Lebanon and from the new chapter opening in American-Syrian relations, to the appointment of Qatar as the new centre of natural gas in the region and the exploitation of its deposits for the benefit of Washington's position in the American-Russian energy rivalry. In front of this Gordian knot Washington has only one success to show, the steady course of the Kurdish pocket in Northern Iraq and an unattainable wish, Turkey's distinction as a model of Islamic democracy to be exported to the Middle East nations.

Paul Wolfowitz, at the time the US Undersecretary of Defence, visited Turkey in July 2002 in order to have talks with the Turkish Prime Minister Bullent Ecevit and the head of the Department of Defence Huseyin Kirvikoglou. The meeting

had been arranged so that Ankara's disposition in aiding the American invasion forces in Iraq could be obtained (Brown 2007: 97). The Turkish side did not adopt a specific stance in that first, non specific American query but through the Turkish head of the DoD a series of exchanges were agreed in the event the country was to join forces with the USA. More specifically, the Turkish government requested:

- US invasion should not lead to the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq
- The writing off of a 4 billion dollars debt from an arming systems purchase from the US
- The compensation of Turkey for the economic crisis that the war in its borders with Iraq would create
- The active American support in the country's efforts to be accepted within the European Union (Brown 2007: 97).

However, the remarkable change in the Turkish stance towards the American approach for Ankara's assistance in the imminent invasion in Iraq began to form after the electoral victory of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*) in November 2002. In the USA's first contact with the newly elected government of the 'mild' Islamists, the Bush administration requested Turkey's active assistance in the war and more specifically the use of Turkish territory by the 4th Division so that it could deploy in northern Iraq and establish a new front for the American attack (Gordon & Schmitt 2002). The new Turkish government indicated that, provided a degree of reciprocity was respected, it was prepared to agree to such a development. R.T. Erdogan's statement in the Turkish National Assembly is characteristic of the eagerness of the government to collaborate with the USA in order to overthrow the Baath regime in Iraq. As he put it:

> "O*ur moral priority is Peace, but our political priority is our beloved Turkey... If we stay out of the equation in the beginning of the operation, then it might not be possible for us... to affect the developments after the end of the operation. If this happens then the long-term Turkish interests... and our safety will be in danger*" (Associated Press 2003).

Despite Erdogan's extremely realistic position, the conclusion of the American-Turkish collaboration was a negative one. In the 1st of March, 2003 the Turkish National

assembly with 264 votes in favour, 251 against and 19 abstentions did not agree[2] to the American request to use Turkish territory as a base for 15.000 American soldiers for their attack against Iraq's forces (Benli-Altunisik 2004: 373)

The Turkish refusal caused and perhaps still causes a great deal of confusion to analysts. Leaving aside certain simplistic views that fail to conceive the complexity and the competitive aspects of the international system and consider Turkey's refusal to collaborate with the USA as an indication of the degree of democracy in Erdogan's government (Benli-Altunisik 2004: 363-378), we will aim to analyze the reasons that prompted Turkey to lose a first-class opportunity to be officially rendered, with the USA's concordance, the leading regional power in the Middle East.

An argument that aims to explain Turkey's decision to abstain from the American-Iraqi war, proposes Ankara's traditional position of neutrality, based on Kemal's well known quote "*Yurtta sulh cihanda sulh*"[3]. This view, based mainly on the historical example of the Turkish stance during the course of World War II, proposes as a hypothesis that Ankara denied its involvement in the Iraq adventure because the neutral attitude safeguarded the country from the enormous deterioration of war in a problematic setting of internal segmentation, between the Shiite majority and the Sunni minority. This particular opinion is supported by historical example, apart from the example of World War II, Turkey's stance of non-entanglement during the Iranian-Iraqi war, and also the careful distance Ankara keeps in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Mango 1992: 56-58).

At this point I would like to explain why I cannot concur with this view, without of course ignoring that up until the end of the Cold War Turkey indeed appears as a neutral force regarding developments in the Middle East for various reasons (pertaining to Cold War balance of power or, concerning the Iranian- Iraqi war, lack of direct interest). My argument is that Turkey today does not function in the arena of international politics as an introvert player, expressing in other words a traditional stance of neutrality that is combined with isolationism. Turkey is most certainly not such a country, as we will explain later on. The traditional position regarding the Turkish principal strategy is that the country moves in the international environment having as basic criteria: a) The protection of territorial integrity and avoidance of absolute satellite-dependence on a Major Force in the international environment (Sevres complex). b) To meet the conditions so that the country is accepted as a functional member of Europe (hence European Union) and the West.[4] c)

The protection of Turkish minorities outside its borders and the maintenance of a good level of influence on the Muslim populations, primarily in the Balkans (Brown 2007: 90).

My approach aims to contribute to the decoding of the Turkish grand strategy by considering an additional basic function in foreign policy, the "passive third element wearing down". This emanates from historical examples, both the duration of the Iranian-Iraqi war and the duration of the American-Iraqi war in 2003. The third element wearing down method or as John Mearsheimer calls it, the 'bleed each other Strategy', has as a basic objective the exploitation of a war between two rival countries by a third country, which remains outside the war in order firstly to avoid the deterioration of its forces, and secondly with its neutrality to perpetuate the war and increase the conflicting parties' deterioration (Copeland 1998: 464-501) of the two countries that are involved in the process.[5] Turkey invested in the Iranian-Iraqi war, a heavy and long-lasting deterioration of two of the most powerful states in the region, remaining intact from the exhaustive eight year war between Baghdad and Teheran, at the same time watching as both sides weaken towards its competitors in the Middle Eastern balance of power (Hiro 1990: 153-212 and Karsh 2002: 84-92). However, concerning the Iran-Iraq war and Turkish non-involvement policy is important to clarify that I do not support the idea that Turkish stance derives from a pre-planned strategic calculation. Turkey did not get involved simply because the aforementioned rift was a Cold War sub-chapter and Ankara was not, under no circumstances, willing to interfere, positively or negatively, in an American high-interest strategic case. However, this does not alter the final outcome of the Iran-Iraq war. Both countries were negatively affected by the long and ferocious state of warfare and that Turkey had been elevated, diplomatically and strategically, by the fact that Iraq, a close U.S ally during this period, showed little evidence in opposing Iran's willingness to alter the Middle East status quo. In fact we can claim that the evolution of the Turkish bleed-each other strategy methodology dates back to this period.

The Turkish stance towards the 2003 American-Iraqi war is even more complex and based on ambitious long-term planning. With Ankara's refusal to get involved in the American invasion or to supply important facilitations to the American army, Turkey aims to increase the USA's wearing down from its military efforts, which is compounded by the current occupational status, investing to increase

its usefulness to the USA and to receive the official appointment as a regional major power in the Middle East from Washington now that the White House is found in a constant search for possible exits from the Iraqi labyrinth. Turkey wishes to be nominated by the US as the guardian of American interests in the Middle East, a development that will offer Ankara a long-waited opportunity to elevate itself in an undisputed regional power rank.

The fragmented presentation of the previously mentioned argument, may strike one as an excessive hypothesis. If, however, we link it to the broader policy of Ankara in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War, then the reader will be in a position to distinguish the final goal behind the Turkish moves on the region's chessboard.

With the Kurdish issue as vehicle as well as issues of energy, Turkey follows an active diplomatic approach policy with Iran after the end of the Cold War. These activities came to a fruitful end in July 2004, when during an official visit of Erdogan in Teheran the two countries signed a collaboration pact on the confrontation of the Kurdish factor, and Teheran was included in the countries that considers the PKK to be a terrorist organization.[6] In the energy sector Iranian-Turkish relations have as point of departure July of 1996, when the Turkish Islamist prime minister Necmettin Erbakan set the foundations for natural gas transportation from Iran to Turkey, (Turkish Daily News 1996) while in February 2007 Teheran gave its authorization to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) to conduct research in the Iranian territory for the discovery of natural gas and oil in exchange for the transport agreement for natural gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey through the Iranian pipeline (Stephen – Larabee 2007: 105).

The same kind of developments can also be observed on the front of Turkish-Syrian relations, with another paradox emerging, this time concerning the relations of two countries that in the recent past had been addicted to a conflicting coexistence. The last two decades of the 20th century constitute the period of the highest peak in relations between the two countries, with the climax in October of 1998 when Ankara warned Damascus that its military forces were ready to invade Syria, if it did not stop state support to the PKK forces. The Turkish threat of the use of violence brought the results that Ankara wanted as Damascus turned away PKK's leader, A. Ocalan, from its territory, while it closed the Kurdish organization's training camps in the Bekaa valley. Damascus's retreat to the Turkish demands was

sealed with the Adana Accord in October 1998, opening a new chapter in the diplomatic relations of the two nations, with Ankara having the upper hand in this new uneven equation (Benli-Altunisik & Tur 2006: 229-248). Syria is henceforth considered as one of Turkey's most "obedient" newly-developed allies in the region; with the identification of opinions between Damascus and Ankara reaching the point where the Syrian Prime minister, Naji Otari, recognizes the hegemonic role of Turkey as the main gate of the Middle East to the West, that will manage to elevate the relations between the European Union and the Arab world in a higher level. As he stated himself in 2004, on the occasion of the beginning of discussions for Turkey's acceptance in the EU:

> "*We consider Turkey as representative of the Arab and Islamic*
>
> *world in the European Union*" (Zaman 2004).

The spectacular change of Syria's stance towards Turkey can be explained through Damascus' greater plan to overcome USA's pressure by building powerful economic relations with the EU. Syria sees Turkey as a first-class partner that will assist Damascus to export its products to Europe, while on the other hand such a development will end country's isolation from the West. Characteristic is the statement of Syrian deputy Prime minister, responsible for Economic Affairs, Mohammad Housain:

> "*Syria and Turkey have a common destiny in uniting*
>
> *the European Union with the Arab free trade zone*"
>
> (Arabic News 2005)

 while Ankara on the other hand takes care to encourage the Syrian ambitions by all means, aiming to turn Damascus into a Turkish satellite-state. This relation is fully exhibited, bringing down even the pretexts imposed by a diplomatic approach, from the former Turkish President of Democracy Ahmet Necdet Sezer's statement during his official visit in Damascus in April 2005. There, the former Turkish President made the following statement, dissolving even the last doubts regarding the new balance of power that prevails from 1998 and later in the relations between the two countries:

> "*If Syria continues to behave according to the wishes of*
>
> *the international community, then Turkey will be in a*
>
> *position to better present Damascus' positions in*
>
> *Europe*" (Singh 2005).

The same spectacular change can also be observed in Turkey's foreign policy with the other nations of the Middle East. As an example, towards the Palestinian Question,

Ankara abandoned its traditional Israel-friendly policy that excluded it from the Arab World. Turkey's neo-Islamic political establishment is henceforth making it clear with official statements that Turkish-Israeli relations are entering a new phase and that they are to a large extent influenced by the renewed post-Cold War Turkish interest in the Middle East. The Turkish Prime minister, R.T. Erdogan, characterized Israel's policy in the Western Bank and in Gaza as "conditions of terror", while in January 2006 Turkey hosted in Ankara a Hamas delegation with Khaled Mashaal himself at the head (Stephen-Larabee 2007: 106). The change of the Turkish stance towards the Palestinian Question did not only result in strengthening the relations between Ankara and the popular Hamas, the core of the Palestinian community. It also prompted other countries with special weight and role in the region, like Saudi Arabia, the Sunni champion world-wide, to re-examine their stance towards Ankara and re-establish diplomatic relations that for the duration of the Cold war remained in the margins. In this new climate that is formed in favour of Turkey in the Middle East can also be interpreted the visit from King Abdullah himself to Turkey in 2006, after 40 years of no diplomatic relations of such magnitude between the two countries (Stephen-Larabee 2007: 106).

The Turkish stance towards the Middle East can no longer be further analyzed under the light of Cold War balances, but under the light of the new developments and Ankara's plans regarding her new role in the International System after September 11th. Turkey knows that in order to acquire a new upgraded role in the region it should first normalize its relations with the Middle East nations. And this is what it so successfully does as we saw before. Close relations with Iran, turning Syria into a satellite-state, upgraded relations with the powerful Hamas, are probative elements of Ankara's intention to play an important role in the Middle East, exceeding any apprehensions and fears of the past, pulling out again from its historical memory the sense of a regional major force. The Turkish plans however do not include turning against the established American interests in the region. Turkey does not develop a new anti-American position, neither of course is it ready to enter into a competition with the world's only superpower. Through the previously mentioned diplomatic activities Ankara aims to increase its usefulness to the USA, investing in USA's moral exhaustion.[7] The current size of the American military force in Iraq will not be maintained for a long period of time. The initial American plans aimed in the support of post-Baath Iraqi government and in the progressive withdrawal of a large part of the American army, with the simultaneous reinforcement of the new Iraqi armed forces.

These plans however are sinking with the development of the bloody civil war today in Iraq's interior between the Shiites and the Sunnis. Ankara aims in Washington being prompted due to the circumstances to ask the active support of the Turkish armed forces in controlling Iraq, materializing thus the concealed Turkish desire to receive the appointment of the new overseer of American interests in the region, upgrading its position in the balance of power in the Middle East but also proving in Washington that without Ankara's assistance the control of the region will be virtually impossible in the immediate future.

The rapid reinforcement of the Turkish defence sector strengthens the aforementioned argument. The total re-organization of the Turkish Army in the '90s,[8] the change of the Turkish White Book of Defence by importing terms such as "forward engagement" and "crisis management and intervention",[9] but also the massive technological steps of the Turkish defence industry and the country's armed forces' equipment programs[10] reveal that Turkey approaches with a different sense the 21st century and the post-Cold War status quo of the Middle East and the South-Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey aims to reveal itself as the only major peripheral power in the wider region that will have the force to manage the crisis-cases that the USA either will not be interested in, or will not be in a position to manage all alone. The continuously internal crisis in Nato, which mainly refers to the failure of approving a commonly accepted political agenda for the future of the Alliance, the disintegrating familiarity of the U.S among old and traditional allies, as well as the escalation of instability in the 21st century International System, reveals the demanding challenges that the new face inside the Oval Office is going to deal with. On top of that, the unwillingness of the American public opinion to withstand the economic and social sacrifices that follows the present high-intervening American foreign policy, lead us to the conclusion that the U.S will need able and willing allies to share the burden with.

The Turkish strategy that persists in dealing immediately with any political or military incident that could evolve into a crisis or a challenge for its role in the area, is the reason which explains Turkey's attitude towards PKK. Even if PKK find shelter in northern Iraq, it is isolated from the international factor while, it faces intense political animosity from the Iraqi Kurdish political establishment. Since PKK is in such a difficult position, why Turkey has a specific psychosis with it? And secondly, which was the main reason for Turkey's invasion in northern Iraq few months ago? At this point, it is necessary to approach the wider spectrum of Turkish policy

regarding the Kurdish Question from a critical point of view over the structural conclusions the majority of analyzers have drawn, on the specific issue.

Unlike the official Ankara's standpoint, the Turkish obstinate stance over the Kurdish Question does not originate from the convention on the 27th October, 1978 which took place in one of the villages surrounding Diyarbakir and signaled the birth of PKK. On the contrary, the conflict between the Kemalists and the Kurds started in the early years of the Turkish state and was founded on the opposition of the latter towards the committed abolition of the Halifate and the adopted core of Kemal's ideology, which was based upon the well-known rhetoric of the Six Arrows,[11] and implied the total mutation of all socio-political sources of civic legalization of the Ottoman era by the newly-born state. At this point, it is worth mentioning that due to the urban character of Kemalism the inner rural regions of Turkey, in Anatolia and further East, had not been drastically influenced by the introducing reforms, and the people continued to embrace undisturbed the Ottoman socio-political and cultural tradition in their daily lives. Substantially, this lack of influence is the main reason that led to the growth of political Islam within the Turkish political spectrum, after the 1961 constitutional reform (Poulton 1997: 168-199).

In addition, the continuous refusal of the Kurdish majority to go along with the Kemalist establishment was mainly due to the ideal of Panturkism and Ankara's plan to absorb the Kurds in the newly constructed nucleus. However, due to Kurdish spread in the wider region of neighboring states, the Kurdish Question did not remain a chapter of the Turkish domestic agenda. Soon enough, it became a priority issue of the Turkish foreign Eastern policy. In 1932, Turkey signed a Treaty of friendship and broader cooperation with Iran and Iraq, and in 1937 a regional security agreement, known as Sababad Pact, with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. Among other multilateral issues of high importance, the Sabadad Pact called for cooperation among all the participants, concerning the formation of a common front against the Kurdish separatist peril (Benli- Altunisik & Tur 2005: 99).

With the implementation of the Sabadad Pact Turkey attempted to create a broader controlling mechanism of the Kurdish factor; this, on one hand, gave the opportunity to Ankara to proclaim common enemies with neighboring states, reinforce its diplomatic ties with them, while, on the other hand, it minimized the possibilities for the creation of a Kurdish front at the eastern frontiers of the country, which would have threatened Turkey's territorial integrity. Obviously, it would be a

fallacy, if we supported the view that Ankara's diplomatic initiatives aimed to the establishment of a regional hegemony. At that time, Turkey was making its maiden appearance as a nation-state in International system, while Britain's hegemonic role in the wider region of the Middle East was still unquestionable. However, the foundations for a future and more dynamic approach over the Kurdish Question had been already set by then.

On February 2008, Turkey invades northern Iraq, chasing PKK's guerilla fighters. Turkey, through President Abdullah Gul, underlined that the particular military intervention would finally contribute to Iraq's stability and the maintenance of peace in the region. Nevertheless, the United States of America as well as the European Union demanded from Ankara to limit the attacks only on PKK forces, from fear that any other development would overrun the stability in the one and only Iraqi region, which does not experience the tragic consequences of the civil war between the Sunni and Shiite element. However, those who believe that the Turkish invasion comes as a reaction to PKK's actions against the Kemalist establishment or as a consequence due to the domestic political disputes that have broken out between the Turkish Prime Minister and the Kemalists, they simply fail to grasp the wider picture.

There is a false perception regarding Turkish policy over the Kurds, which only focuses on the human rights issues and does not grasp the complexity of the Turkish aspirations in the wider area of the Middle East. Ankara's approach over the Kurdish Question has nothing to do with the Turkish recognition of the Kurdish ethnic identity and it is a serious methodological mistake to compare this kind of attitude with the former prejudice against African Americans in the United States (Gunter 2007: 122). Turkey's fundamental goals is on the one hand to protect itself form separatist issues - the same kind of issues that Spain faces at the moment - while on the other hand to create various obstacles regarding a future recognition of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq by the U.S and the main European powers. An independent Kurdish state, under the American shield, and on top of that, with Kirkuk oil deposits, could be turned into a metropolitan pole of influence for all Kurdish populations of the region, challenging Turkey's plans to undertake a major role in the Middle-East with the support and approval of the United States. The appearance of a new strong player in the Middle East will ruin Turkey's aspirations of being the only state in the region that is able to provide its services to the American

eagle - with an appropriate compensation in return. At this point, we can identify a distinctive policy of preventive action by Ankara, in order to reduce any potential antagonism over the future Middle East balance of power.

The Turkish invasion in northern Iraq was made in order to draw US's attention to the fact that Ankara would not tolerate an independent Kurdish state on its eastern borderline and that it has all the necessary means of power to pose a constant and present threat towards such a development. If someone rushes to answer that this kind of a treat can not be realistic since a future Kurdish state in Northern Iraq will function under the protection of the US, on one hand he/she does not take into consideration the constant fluctuation of International Politics, where allies are becoming enemies and vice versa according to national interest, while on the other hand, it is important to consider whether US still has the ability, but more importantly the will, to act as a global *Deus ex Machina* in every corner of the world. The post-war Iraqi trauma in the American state of mind deserves to occupy the wits of International Relations' scientific community concerning the future role of U.S. in International system and the wider consequences that a possible American neo-isolationism will bring into International Politics as a whole.

In general, the 'Turkish paradox' regarding the policy that it follows in the Middle East lies in that it exerts a primitive fear for the structural realignments that are taking place in the region. Appearing to abstain from the developments, but in reality moving with careful steps and highly strategic well calculated moves, Turkey, weaves a durable web, not only for the countries of the Arab peninsula but for the USA as well. The objective, as we have already mentioned enough times before is not to compete directly with the USA but investing in the country's insecurity after September 11th and the traumatic for American public opinion Iraqi case. By that Ankara expects to be called by Washington to undertake more responsibilities in the monitoring of the region with the proportional retributive returns.

Conclusion.

The 'Turkish paradox' in the Middle East results from Ankara completely overcoming its unwillingness to get actively involved in the region. The unwillingness in question was the outcome of a policy that was followed throughout the duration of the Cold War but that does not appear to contribute to Ankara's new ambitions and to the upgraded role that it wishes to play in the region post Cold-War and post 9/11. Investing in the

exhaustion of all powers involved in the intricate paths of the Middle East, strengthening the diplomatic relations with the region's nations, but also strengthening its military capabilities, Ankara has aimed at building the foundation for a spectacular reversal of the political balances and it now expects the materialisation of its objectives. The hypothesis that appears in the core of the present article's analysis, that is to say that Turkey is slowly but steadily building its hegemonic presence in the Middle East and that such an event will probably be realized with the agreement of the USA, might from a non-analytical perspective become an example of conspiracy theory, complete with unfounded assumptions and thoughtless false warnings. Furthermore, the issue of US-Turkish relations is, of course, a complicated one and – especially in the last few years – warrants careful and detailed analysis which would be beyond the confines of the present paper. In the absence of such analysis, any hypothesis on US-Turkey agreement over the latter's grand strategy may appear farfetched given the disagreements between the US and Turkey over the developing political scheme in Northern Iraq.

Be that as it may, the analysis in the preceding pages, focusing on concrete and tangible evidence on Turkish foreign policy and on the principal elements of a grand strategy of Kemal's country, aims to present the realistic dimensions of the issue, our aim being the exposition and the analytical consolidation of the argument through empirical examples as well as IR theory. On the other hand, it should not slip our attention that Turkey is experiencing another structural paradox regarding the country's position in international relations post 9/11. While, as is known, Kemal's establishment has been based on an anti-Ottoman identity that reaches up to the point of denial of its historical past, in the past few years Ankara has begun flirting again with the idea of a reconstituted Ottoman Imperium in the Middle East through its 'appointment' as the most powerful player in the particular sub-system. This stirring of the imperial past is mainly attributed to R.T. Erdogan and the mild Islamists. The issue however, is that – as it was argued earlier – the entire Kemalist inner/deep state is heading in such a direction, aiming to adapt the country's new principal strategy to developments in the Middle East after 9/11 and the chain reactions resulting from the Manichaeism which is evident in the Bush Administration's foreign policy. This calls attention to new issues for analysis and deliberation, not only for countries in the Middle East and Southeastern Europe but for the West as a whole. These are new issues in a region that, as current

developments apparently demonstrate, will continue to play a destabilizing role in international developments for the foreseeable future.

End-Notes:

[1] The role of Britain was important in this revolt and it can be studied at great length through the correspondence between Mack Maon and Hussein (1915-1916). Also, the important role of British army officer T.E. Lawrence in the co-ordination and in the strategic guidance of the revolt should not be neglected (see Lewis 2002: 192-205) (a). The Arabic revolt is also an exceptionally important element for the configuration of Turkish antipathy to the Arab world, a fact that is often not presented as much as it should be but shapes vitally the Turkish historical memory towards the developments in Middle East. The Turkish antipathy is based on the fact that the Arab world did not demonstrate the solidarity that was owed by a part of Islam towards the Ottoman Empire and it is translated, through the prism of the Turkish subjective historiography, as one of the more important reasons for the defeat and the dissolution of Ottoman Imperium (Jung 2005: 3).

[2] Even though the resolution was voted in favour with 264 votes, it did not get the absolute majority that the Turkish constitution requires. One hundred Members of Parliament from the Justice and Growth Party voted against the government's proposal, since party discipline was not sought to be expressed through this resolution and the members voted as they wished.

[3] This quote is attributed to Kemal Ataturk and means "Peace at home - peace in the World". Interest presents the historical argument inside Turkey's academic community, part of which states that it does not result from any concrete historical evidence that this quote was said by the founder of the Republic of Turkey. For more on the subject of this historical argument and also with regard to the traditional Turkish neutrality see Mufti (1998: 33).

[4] This particular position is one of the fundamental pylons of Kemal's heritage and is based on the known quote of the founder of Turkey: "*The West has always been biased against the Turks… but we Turks constantly and systematically move towards the West… In order to be a civilised nation, we do not have any other option*" (Hale 1992:680-681).

[5] John Mearsheimer (2003) analyzes active third element wearing down, placing it in the list of acquisition of power strategies. Mearsheimer sketches out the specific strategy as a method in which a third country remains neutral in an existing war between two other countries, but is also ready to intervene with various methods of sabotage and false information in order to perpetuate the war for a longer time and the two belligerent countries to suffer as much war damages as possible. The only difference between what Mearsheimer presents and the passive third element wearing down is that in the later the country-observer does not proceed to methods of resurgence of the existing conflict, but maintains its hopes for the continuation of war remaining neutral and not offering the essential facilitations that might shorten the war and would limit the damages (Mearsheimer 2003: 155-156).

6 The Kurdish minority inside Iran is treated by Teheran as a potential threat for the country's territorial integrity, particularly after the foundation of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*) in Iran's Kurdish regions in 2004 and the close relations that they have developed with PKK. (Yildiz& Taysi 2007: 85,110-115).

7 The term moral exhaustion in this case translates to the predominance of the voices inside the USA that persist on complete withdrawal of the USA from Iraq, or in the ideological predominance of the neo-isolationists, or in the increase of the Vietnam syndrome inside the American society that will intensify the political pressure to the White House, after G.W. Bush Jr. leaves, for a dramatic reduction of the American forces in the region. The last scenario is also the most likely one. Regarding this exceptionally important neo-isolationism subject that inside the USA takes the form of an organized political ideology and influences a degree the layout of the American foreign policy see Davis- Harris (2004: 133-138), Bacevich (2005: 205-225), Morgan (1989: 125-152), Martin (2007: 137-138), and Muravchik (1996).

8 In 1995, the complete transformation of the Turkish Army's land forces was completed with the creation of 40 independent and self-reliant brigades. On the Turkish Army's re-organization see the Turkish General Staff's official website: http://www.tsk.mil.tr/eng/genel_konular/kuvvetyapisi.htm.

9 The change of the Turkish Defensive Bible took place in 1998 and inserted the concept of Turkey's military intervention in crisis' hearths created domestically in neighboring countries in order to preventatively stop them before escalating and reaching inside Turkish territories. For more on the subject see: Turkish Ministry of National Defence, Defence White Paper 1998, (Ankara, 1998), p. 19.

10 Turkey owns the second largest fleet of F-16 fighter jets (240) in the world and the second largest air-force fleet in NATO, it is a manufacturing country of the FH-88, 155 mm firing gun with 40 Km, effective range, has the technical know-how to manufacture in Turkey the AH-1Z King Cobra American fighter helicopters, now owns 7 KC-135 aircrafts for in-flight refueling of their air-force, participates with the USA and Israel in the research for the development of the Arrow anti-missile system, have recently renewed their naval forces with 12 modern frigates and 10 submarines, while there are plans for the purchase of a light aircraft carrier to carry 15 JSF and 6 Sea Knight helicopters. (Erickson 2004 :34-35).

11 1) Republicanism, 2)Secularism, 3)Populism, 4) Nationalism, 5) Etatism, 6)Reformism. (Lewis 2001: 286).

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