

10 Turkey: A Middle Power in the New Order

Meltem Müftüler and Müberra Yüksel

This chapter analyses the role of middle powers in international politics in times of uncertainty and in regions which are marked by a high degree of instability. The focus is on Turkey's role in the post-Cold War era in the Near East region. Turkey has the personnel, resources and entrepreneurial capacities to become an impressive mid-level power in the next decade.¹ The question to be addressed, then, is whether Turkey fits into the concept 'middle power' and if so, in which foreign policy issue-areas Turkey has demonstrated this capacity. An underlying assumption of the chapter is that in international politics, in times of crisis and uncertainty, the role of middle powers increase. In keeping with this perspective, it is argued that Turkey's role has begun to expand to new areas.

THE NEW ORDER

Since 1989, the international system has gone through a period of fundamental change. With the end of the Cold War, the international system has been transformed from bipolarity to an uncertain fluid structure. The collapse of the Communist systems of Eastern Europe and the dismantling of the Soviet Union led to the breakdown of the post-1945 power structure. In addition, the European Community gained a new momentum which in 1993 resulted in the European Union.

To be able to deal with such conditions of flux, states have had to modify their foreign policies. Competition is now between forces of global integration and regional fragmentation.² Economic power struggles, nuclear capabilities held by the politically unstable small countries, immigration, refugee issues and border problems provide possible areas of tension which should be handled in a regional context. The independence struggles of different nations within the former Soviet Union, the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and the Gulf Crisis have confirmed this argument. Thus, international attention is increasingly directed to regional politics and to the role of middle powers in their respective regions.

MIDDLE POWER AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL FOR FOREIGN POLICY

Carsten Holbraad defines middle power as 'a state occupying an intermediate position in a hierarchy based on power, a country much stronger than the small nations though considerably weaker than the principal members of the states system'.³ A middle power has the potential to play a political role within the limits of its region. Therefore, the terms 'regional' and 'middle' powers have often been mistakenly used synonymously. One of the characteristics of a middle power is that its presence has marginal value to the major powers and is distinguished in terms of the strength it possesses and the power it commands.⁴ Traditionally, while great-power interests are defined in global functional terms, secondary power interests are often defined in geopolitical regional terms. The main reason is that regional powers have relatively limited capabilities so that they cannot play a role in international politics as a major power could. Instead, they are preoccupied with either domestic or regional problems and are often insecure in their relations with major powers. To assure their security and national interest, such states have often tended to form political alliances either with great powers or with other states in their own region.

An alternative, yet complementary perspective has been provided by Cox who emphasized the leverage of middle powers concerning specific policy issues on the current agenda.⁵ The tendency to favour multilateral cooperation for managing international problems, respect for international law, participation in international organizations and relative autonomy from the influence of great powers and the major international conflicts are at the crux of Cox's definition. Identifying a middle power not only in terms of rank in the power hierarchy but in terms of foreign policy strategy makes the concept more applicable for problem-solving. This tendency is reinforced by the greater salience of economic as opposed to geo-strategic issues.

To a considerable extent, the problem of definition stems from the fact that structural capabilities in and of themselves may not reveal abilities to achieve a specific policy objectives. Nossal argues that 'the ability to exercise power while working with limited capabilities is itself a power resource'. Relational power and the consequent influence that middle powers have over particular regional or global issues depend to a large extent on the sufficient distance from great powers. Middle powers *par excellence* may not be allied with great powers. They may be non-aligned, neutral or aligned with smaller states. In the case of non-aligned countries,

they enjoy considerable diplomatic influence as a group. Although the determination of non-aligned countries to stand against great-power politics has been the main factor in maintaining the significance of middle powers during the Cold War, today relative latitude is sufficient. Whether or not a middle power is in an alliance system, or is a free-rider in the negative sense, it has to maintain relative independence from the decision-making of the great powers. They may even have more influence within an alliance at times, if they are not total satellites of a major power or thoroughly dependent on that superpower. Holmes makes the argument that 'those least fixed in their orbits have on the whole been more influential middle powers than those who are group conformists. States whose vote can be influenced attract more influence than do those whose position as members of a bloc can be counted upon in advance.'⁶

It is more appropriate to consider Turkey, a NATO member, as a conformist since its foreign policies have been mostly in accordance with bloc policies. However, as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this chapter, in the post-Cold War era, Turkey began to make more independent foreign policy decisions that, in a number of instances such as the Bosnian crisis, clashed with those of the alliance.

In short, the principal determinant of the middle power's role is the quality of relationships existing among the great powers, and the conduct and role of middle powers are affected by the nature of political relations among the great powers.⁷ Middle power can set itself up as the local great power with or without the backing of great powers and with or without the willing support of small states within its sway.⁸

In today's fluid international environment, repercussions and chain reactions of any hazardous move by middle powers endanger not only their region, but the whole world. The power vacuum created by the decline of the former Soviet Union is causing a turmoil in the territories of the former Soviet Union which, in turn, is presenting the international system with a new challenge. The former East European Communist states and the former Soviet Union republics are signing agreements with NATO, 'Partnerships for Peace', which indicates an emergence of a new relationship between NATO and the former Soviet Union. The regional security issues and the conventional armament and military questions are still top-priority items. That is why middle powers can become more effective and may even become major regional powers by initiating economic cooperation and political stability not only in their limited region, but also within the context of a larger regional bloc such as Europe.

The geopolitical considerations arising from the fragmentation of the region are not the only new challenges:

Regional states are also confronted with global political concerns that will limit their options, concerns that in fact have only come to dominate the political horizon because of regional fragmentation. The most significant consideration is the growing integration of regional states into the global economy as a result of economic restructuring.⁹

By definition, the capabilities and vulnerabilities of states referred to as 'middle powers' are contingent upon the historical context. They may use their relational power with comparatively independent decision-making, in activities that would promote regional and international peace affairs and economic cooperation.

A middle power may exist in close and dominated vicinity of one of the great powers.¹⁰ For instance, Canada is an illustrative case of a middle power which has traditionally concentrated its efforts on the global rather than on the regional environment. Canada not only strengthened the position of middle powers in international organizations such as the UN, but it also succeeded in bringing clauses into the NATO Charter about middle powers. Other countries, however, have focused their attention on building up their regional roles.

There are three possible scenarios for the middle power and its role in the region where it is located: (i) it can have preponderance in the region; (ii) there can be two or more middle powers in the region engaged in rivalry; (iii) there can be one or more middle powers at the centre of an association in the region. In all three ways, the middle power can exercise decisive influence in the region and in its interstate relations.

Although the concept of middle power does not suggest an universally applicable pattern of behaviour and predictability, it still has an explanatory power in setting the groundrules and priorities in regional cooperation and its institutionalization. For example, it can provide barriers against territorial encroachments by stronger powers.¹¹ A middle power has the capacity to bring a balance into the system. In addition, middle powers have a special interest in maintaining a balance of power in the system; they separate great-power rivalry both strategically and geographically.

Generally, a middle power is defined within an international hierarchy of powers, while a regional power is determined within a regional division of the globe. Turkey fits into the definition of both middle power and regional power. A regional power has the potential to balance other forces, maintain codes of conduct, stabilize sphere of influences and police unruly

states.¹² Since the pattern of interstate relations results from the interplay of domestic, regional and global forces, the existence of a strong bond with one of the superpowers is important for middle power to play a regional role. Within this context, Turkey's close relations with the United States in the post-Second World War order have been important in shaping Turkey's regional capacities.

Since middle power is an inductive concept, starting with its operationalization and selecting objective criteria to determine absolute and relative power capacity is appropriate to reveal where Turkey stands. One such criterion is geography. A country's power and position in the international political system depend on its locational attributes. Therefore, in an analysis of Turkey's role in the global order, one should always keep in mind that its power and status are dependent on its location. Turkey's geographical position gives it leverage by counterbalancing it against the former Soviet Union. In the first years after the Second World War, as the only Islamic country with a secular democratic government, Turkey was viewed as a bulwark against Soviet designs in the Middle East.¹³

Another criterion is Gross National Product (GNP) which is an objective criterion revealing the comparative economic performance of a country. GNP incorporates population, area, strategic location, institutional organization, alliances and trading areas simultaneously; therefore, it captures aggregate economic power along with potential military power. In Table 10.1, Turkey's relative power is clearly seen when compared to other states in the area. Turkey fits the GNP criterion of middle power.¹⁴

Another widely accepted criterion is the size of the army and military expenditures, to determine overall military capability. Despite the lack of a commonly agreed index comparable to GNP in measuring political power

Table 10.1 Population, Area and GDP of states in Near East

	<i>Pop.</i> (mill. 1992)	<i>Area</i> (thou. sq. km)	<i>GDP</i> (bill. \$)	<i>GDP per head</i> (\$)
Turkey	57.2	779	104	1 815
Greece	10.2	132	66	6 498
Iraq	19.6	438	14	691
Iran	57.8	1 648	127	2 205
Israel	4.9	21	59	12 902
Azerbaijan	7.2	87	10	1 670
Armenia	3.4	29	7.23	2 150
Russia	148.9	17 075	480	3 220

Source: *The Economist*, 'World In Figures', 1994.

and the consequent variations in ranking according to difference indicators, Turkey's place in military capability is also appropriate for a middle power. Although Turkey does not have the economic strength to produce nuclear weapons on its own, it has the second largest standing army after the USA in the NATO alliance.¹⁵ Intangible elements of power such as organized and working institutions, a strong central government, political efficacy and economic competence complement the above tangible criteria. Turkey has a modern political system, particularly so when compared to the Middle Eastern and the Central Asian countries.¹⁶ Over past decades it has been defined as stable, democratic, secular, unencumbered by extremism and reassuringly pro-Western; to varying degrees, Turkey is all of these things.¹⁷ Even though recently Turkey has been tormented by Kurdish separatist movements, ideological/religious tensions, economic problems, foreign debt and a high inflation, it still is regarded as an 'island of stability in a region increasingly awash with instability'.¹⁸

Turkey also conforms to the criterion of being a member of international organizations.¹⁹ It was a member of the League of Nations from 1932, and a founding member of the United Nations. Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1948, the Council of Europe in 1949, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975. With the 1963 Ankara Treaty, signed between Turkey and the European Community, it is an associate member in the EC. In October 1992, Turkey was accepted as an associate member in the WEU. Thus, it is an important element of Western security arrangements in the post-Second World War order. It is also a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Defence and Economic Cooperation (DECA), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Accord (BSEA) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which together reveal that it has the potential of acting as a bridge between various parts of the world as well as various organizations.

TURKEY'S PLACE IN THE NEW ORDER

In the post-Cold War era, Turkey's potential role as a middle power and a regional power became increasingly marked. For example, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union have made it possible for Turkey to consider more flexible regional policies. An important stimulus for the increase in Turkey's role has been external, in line with the general notion that a middle power has more room to manoeuvre in times of

uncertainty and when the relations between the middle power and the great powers are less intense:

a development has raised fears that a new balance of power inside the Middle East could develop involving Russia, Iran, and other elements of the non-Arab Middle East if the current relaxation of East–West tensions associated with the Cold War is reversed by changes in Russia. It is for this reason, that the United States, reluctantly supported by Europe, which is anxious to avoid confronting Turkish desires for European Union membership, has sought to encourage Turkey into becoming the regional power in the Black Sea and Central Asia.²⁰

All of this means that in the period of flux created by the demise of the Soviet Union, Turkey's role in the region has been intensified in line with our hypothesis. There is also a clear Western interest in pushing Ankara in the direction of regional power.²¹ Turkey's move towards leadership in the region has been effective in the formulation of such foreign policy strategies as the Balkan cooperation network, the Peace Pipeline water project, and cooperation schemes with the Central Asian Republics, such as the Development Bank.

TURKEY'S VARIOUS ROLES AS A MIDDLE POWER

Turkey's membership in the Western organizations such as NATO, OECD, Council of Europe, CSCE\OSCE has brought a rubber-stamp approval to Turkey's place within the Western order. For instance, its membership in NATO is generally regarded as the key to the rest of its international relations.²²

Security

Within NATO, Turkey carried an important burden for the conventional power of the alliance. If the Soviet Union ever decided to launch an attack on the Western Alliance, Turkey was one of the two countries that Soviet armies could directly march into.²³

In addition, since the Iranian revolution of 1979, Turkey's role had increased and extended into being a listening-post as well as intelligence-gatherer for NATO and the USA. Even though NATO was created as a bulwark against a possible Soviet expansion into Europe, its functions were not strictly limited to stopping only Soviet aggression. Instead, it is a collective security arrangement with the purpose of deterring any potential

aggressor's attack on any of the alliance members. Therefore, the collapse of the Soviet Union does not mean that NATO's functions are over.

The area where Turkey is located is prone to all kinds of military conflict as one can easily see in the Gulf crisis of 1990–91 and the conflict in the Caucasus between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The importance of the Gulf crisis of 1990–91 was that it demonstrated that, even if the super-power conflict has ended, the Middle East is still a prime source of global instability.²⁴

Traditional Turkish foreign policy, formulated in 1923 when the Turkish Republic was founded, required that Turkey followed a non-interventionist, neutral policy particularly towards its Middle Eastern neighbours. However, the Gulf crisis brought a very sharp break with past policies. For on 8 August 1990, soon after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Turkish president Turgut Ozal declared that Turkey was closing the pipelines and participating in the UN embargo towards Iraq. As one commentator put it bluntly:

The closure of the pipeline, and the ending of all regular trade with Iraq, was undoubtedly a vital element in the economic campaign against Saddam. Without Turkish cooperation, any effective embargo would have been quite impossible.²⁵

This shift in Turkish foreign policy was unquestionably due to Turgut Ozal's initiative in departing from traditional foreign policy. Throughout the crisis, Ozal faced opposition in his own political party, as reflected by parliament as well as the fact that both the Turkish foreign and defence ministers and the Chief of Staff resigned from political office – an unprecedented event in the Turkish Republic's history. The Gulf crisis became an important turning-point *vis-à-vis* Turkey's relations with the West. Turkey's activist stance during the crisis carried vital importance for the new European order. For example, the Incirlik base in Turkey, where the Rapid Deployment Force is located, is the staging area for the forward deployed land-based combat tactical aircraft in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In such organizations as the CSCE/OSCE, which acts as a regional organization charged with the peaceful settlement of the disputes in the area,²⁶ Turkey's role can be substantial as well. Evenhandedness is the essential condition for an outsider to play a constructive role in solving or managing some of the new conflicts. It may often be the case that both sides in a dispute have more confidence in a conciliator or arbitrator from outside.²⁷ This is where Turkey can be placed within the framework of the CSCE/OSCE as a middle power.

A case in point is the Armenian–Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey is the only country in which both sides have some kind of trust and ties. On the one hand, the Azeris share cultural ties with Turkey and a comprehensive cooperation agreement was signed in February 1994 between Turkey and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, the Armenians are largely dependent on Turkish wheat and electricity; plus the trade routes that link Armenia to the Western world pass through Turkey. This position immediately places Turkey in a conciliatory position, as foreseen by the CSCE/OSCE requirements of dealing with a conflict without directly intervening in it. One should keep in mind that the only place that the leaders of these two recently independent republics came together under the same roof was during the funeral ceremonies for Turkish president, Turgut Ozal, held in April 1993 in Ankara.

Economic Cooperation

Turkey can play an important role in economic cooperation schemes which are developing in the post-Cold War era. An advantage that Turkey has in its region is that it has been an associate member of the EC since 1963 when the two sides signed the Ankara Treaty. Since 1989, Turkey and the EU have worked together towards the realization of a full customs union to be completed by the end of 1995. The customs union means that Turkey will be included in the internal market of the EU, but it will stay out of the political unification process of the EU. Turkey's full customs union with the EU also allows access for the countries which have free trade agreements with Turkey to the European market as well. This means that Turkey can act as a bridge between the EU, BSEC and ECO members.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Accord

In 1990, an economic cooperation organization was established for the Black Sea region countries under Turkish leadership. Turkey has employed the BSECA appropriately to enhance its image in the 'New World Order' as a middle power which emphasizes commonalities in a timely manner. Similar to the role of Turgut Ozal in the Gulf crisis, the former Turkish Ambassador to the United States, Sukru Elekdag, was the policy-maker in the BSEC project when he initiated the idea of economic cooperation in the Black Sea region under Turkish leadership. Both these state officials had reformulated Turkish foreign policy in line with Turkey's regional power image.

For the BSECA, the talks between Turkey, Moldavia, the Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan started in Ankara in late 1990 and lasted until 1992 in various capitals. Later, Turkey invited Greece and Yugoslavia to be among the founding members. Greece became a member immediately; Yugoslavia's membership was stillborn when the state disintegrated. Later on, Albania also joined the BSECA.²⁸ Despite the fact that the inclusion of Greece and Armenia has galvanized Islamic reactions and brought wider scrutiny to the question of why Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia are excluded from the Accord, it has definitely enhanced the role of Turkey as a secular country which acts as the 'bridge' for the region to the West. Meanwhile, the inclusion of Greece and Armenia revealed the ongoing concern of European integration in the long run, along with Turkey's reluctant stand in defining its interests in terms of bloc politics and a consequent polarization of critical policy issues.

The Black Sea project can be seen as a signal of Turkey's confidence and a reflection of its re-emergence of the post-Cold War scene.²⁹ The project, it was claimed, followed on from the end of the Cold War and the breaking-down of hostile world blocs, a process which it would help to accelerate.³⁰

Another attempt at cooperation under Turkish leadership has been directed towards the newly independent Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union. Since Central Asian countries are both geographically distant and predominantly Muslim, they have been isolated by Soviet politics from the Western world. Even though Central Asia is still in transition, with the Russian Federation as the major source of influence, Turkey has been increasingly involved in its affairs. These newly established states in Central Asia are at the crux of Turkey's attempts towards a middle-power status. Turkey is confronted with the competition of Iran for extracting resources and exercising influence over the region.

Turkey's recent rapprochement with this region, however, cannot be explained exclusively by geography. On the contrary, these countries are far away from Turkey. Natural resources such as oil and gas, coupled with a developed military and nuclear industry, particularly in Kazakhstan, along with cultural-historical ties, make this process organic rather than induced. The economic structures between Turkey and these countries are complementary, reminiscent of the BSECA.

Supported by the West only to some extent, Turkey has tried to set a unique example with its relatively stable, developed political structure and outward-oriented economy in the region, but lacks sufficient financial resources to be the actual driving force. While similarities in ethnic origins and linguistic affinity may aid rapprochement with these countries, there

have at times been movements which have caused problems for Turkish foreign policy by posing threats to the ethnic mosaic of some countries in Central Asia. That is why Turkey has been assuring Moscow and the republics in the region that Pan-Turkish, Pan-Islamic, and Pan-Turanist ideologies are completely rejected within official lines. Hence, neither the linguistic nor the religious affinity of Turkey in Central Asia needs to be exaggerated, and consequently seen as a threat to the Western world.

The major obstacle to Turkey's claim to middle-power status in the region arises from difficulties concerning the transport of oil and natural gas. The first problem is the intra-regional conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia that prevents the project of the oil pipeline being fully realized. The second problem is the recent rapprochement between the Russian Federation, Greece and the West for transporting these resources by sea routes that pass through the Turkish straits. The scenario is economically beneficial for other parties, but is physically risky and politically costly for Turkey.

The focus of Turkey as the middle power on the Central Asian Republics may also prevent the possible creation of another 'Middle East' of the foreseeable future. These countries have large oil and gas reserves and other natural resources which attract Western countries to the region. Therefore, economic cooperation institutionalized primarily by Turkey might aid the stability of this region which has such a high potential. In return, Turkey would benefit from a risk-free environment, both to continue with its economic advancement and its endeavours to become a middle power, which would promote the Western liberal model, instead of being solely a surrogate to US policies as a regional power.³¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although it seems clear that in the near future Turkey will continue its activist approach towards the Central Asian republics, the BSECA and the EU, the constraints on this approach are obvious. First of all, because Turkey itself lacks sufficient financial resources to act unilaterally, it will have to act in concert with the West. Secondly, the internal problems of the former Soviet republics pose formidable barriers. Nonetheless, if these moves toward economic cooperation succeed even partially, it may give momentum to Turkey's incorporation into the EU and enhance its role both as a functional and the cultural link between East and West. Indeed, it may be argued that the emergent order requires countries such as Turkey

which constitute a bridge between the West, the Middle East, the Balkans and the Central Asian Republics. As the only country with strong ties – economic, political, cultural and military – to these different parts of the world, Turkey is well positioned to play the role of a middle power.

NOTES

1. Morton I. Abramowitz, 'Dateline Ankara, Turkey After Ozal', *Foreign Policy* 91, Summer 1993, 645.
2. John Lewis Gaddis, 'Toward the Post-Cold War World', *Foreign Affairs*, 70:2, Spring 1991, 102–3.
3. Carsten Holbraad, 'The Role of Middle Powers', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 6, 1971, 78.
4. Carsten Holbraad, *Middle Powers in the International System* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 76.
5. Robert Cox, 'Middle Powermanship, Japan and Future World Order', *International Journal* 44:4, 1989, 823–63.
6. Quoted in Kim Richard Nossal, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 16.
7. Holbraad, *Middle Powers*, 178.
8. *Ibid.*, 202.
9. E.G.H. Joffe, 'Relations between the Middle East and the West', *Middle East Journal*, 48:2, Spring 1994, 251.
10. Iver Neumann (ed.), *Regional Great Powers in International Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 7.
11. Holbraad, *Middle Powers*, 25.
12. Neumann, *Regional Great Powers*, 7.
13. Bruce Kuniholm, 'Turkey and the West', *Foreign Affairs*, 70:2, Spring 1991, 34.
14. *World Development Report* (New York: World Bank, 1991).
15. See US Army Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms 1991–1992* (Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, March 1994, 7). Meanwhile, defining military capability of middle powers solely based on nuclear capacity is debatable. However, a country may have a large army but military expenditure may be such a large burden on the economy that the country can be considered only as a small state due to severe economic constraints it faces. Capturing the readiness, moral training and leadership of armed forces by statistics is difficult.
16. For further information, see Metin Heper, *Strong State Tradition in Turkey* (London: Eothen Press, 1985).
17. Philip Robins, 'The Overlord State: Turkish Policy and the Kurdish Issue', *International Affairs* 69:4, October 1993, 658.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Carsten Holbraad, *Middle Powers*, 4.

20. Joffe, 'Relations', 255.
21. Ibid., 256.
22. David Barchard, *Turkey and the West* (London: Chatham House Papers no. 27, 1985), 52.
23. The other country in the NATO alliance for which such a scenario would be plausible is Norway.
24. William Hale, 'Turkey's Time', *International Affairs* 68:4, October 1992, 679.
25. Ibid., 684.
26. Alfred Tovias, 'Integrating Turkey into the European Community', *Futures*, November 1993, 951.
27. Edward Mortimer, *European Security after the Cold War* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Adelphi Papers, 1992), 29.
28. For further information, see Sukru Elekdag, 'The Black Sea Economic Cooperation – Karadeniz Ekonomik Isbirligi Bolgesi', unpublished manuscript, 1992.
29. J.F. Brown, 'Turkey: Back to Balkans', in G. Fuller and I. Lesser, (eds), *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Boulder: Westview Press, Rand Corporation, 1993), 157.
30. J.F. Brown, 'Turkey', 156.
31. Ian O. Lesser, *Bridge or Barrier?: Turkey and the West after the Cold War* (Santa Cruz, CA: Rand Corporation Report, Summer 1992), v–vii.