REORGANIZATION OF GEOPOLITICS: UNDERSTANDING THE NEW ACTIVISM IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract

This study aims at introducing an analytical framework to explore the changing nature of Turkish foreign and security policy (FSP) in the post-Cold War period. It mainly argues that this change can best be understood as the regionalization of strategic and security outlook in Turkey. Here regionalization refers to two interrelated processes: first, the process whereby security interest definitions and threat perceptions in Turkey have gained an increasingly regional character, and second the process whereby Turkey has increasingly defined itself as an activist regional power. The regionalizing dynamics in Turkish FSP may be understood if only they are contextualized within the post-Cold War regionalization of international security order. This study suggests that the end of global bi-polar rivalry has recognized some leeway for Turkish policy makers to more actively engage in regional security institutions, issues and challenges. In that context, the first wave of regionalization in Turkish FSP began soon after the end of the Cold War and developed in parallel to the rise of the ‘region’ as a new unit of security in global politics. Even if it was much more characterized by ill-defined policy targets, and over-stretched ambitions, it contributed substantially to Turkish FSP vision and activism in the post bipolar international order. However, regionalism of Turkish FSP took its more mature and comprehensive turn in the regionalist assertiveness in the first decade of 2000s. This second regionalist turn draws on the construction of a particular foreign policy identity defining Turkey as a peace-promoting ‘soft power’ bearing the capacity of ‘order instituting’ in its surrounding regions, namely the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. It is also built on the redefinition of Turkey’s geopolitics with redefined threat perceptions and security interests.

In this sense, regionalist theories of international security provide useful insights to analyze the emerging and developing activism of Turkish foreign policy since the 1990s. They can also contribute substantially to understand Turkey’s dynamically changing and intensifying security interactions with its regional neighbors. However, they are analytically ill-equipped to explore the power politics behind the reorganization of Turkey’s geopolitics and the reconstruction of Turkish FSP identity in recent years. This article argues that the process of region building is a political one and the rise of regionalism in Turkish FSP both in the 1990s and in the 2000s may not be understood as independent from the domestic power political relations. Against this backdrop, this
paper first examines the main tenets of regionalist security theories and discusses their strength and weaknesses in explaining Turkey’s regionalist activism. Subsequently, it addresses some important aspects and policy initiatives of the first and second regionalist turns of Turkish foreign policy. It also sheds light on some commonalities and differences between these two regionalist periods. The article concludes by the assessment of challenges and opportunities which the recent regionalist activism has brought about for Turkey.