

A Pax Turca in the Middle East?

Summary

Turkey's recent foreign policy initiatives within the former Ottoman lands, aiming at the creation of a zone of peace and stability with 'zero problems,' have received mixed reviews in the West. Some feel threatened by the alleged increasing Islamisation of the country's (geo)politics. These sceptical voices, notably from within Congress and echoed in Turkey's Kemalist establishment, claim that the so-called 'Neo-Ottomanist' turn gradually corrupts Turkey's traditional transatlanticism in favour of Iran and Palestine, evidencing the resurrection of a pan-Islamic neo-Caliphate hostile to the West. Others, including many policy makers in the Obama administration, support Turkey's efforts to become a regional peace broker. Reminiscent of British designs for a regional *Pax Ottomanica* in the 19th century, this policy aims at maintaining stability through the geographically, culturally and religiously closer Turkish intermediary. Governed by a conservative Islamic government determined to continue on the neo-liberal reform path, Turkey is frequently seen as a blueprint for constructing the proverbial bridge between 'East' and 'West,' earmarking the 'Turkish model' for export.

Intervening in this debate, this paper will explore the potential of expanding and complementing the Pax Americana through the Pax Ottomanica. Comparing the underlying social conditions of 'Ottomanism' in the 19th century with contemporary Turkey, it will be argued that, far away from challenging the West, 'Neo-Ottomanism' can be understood as the external dimension of expanding Turkish capital in the region. Disappointed by the stalling EU accession process, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) entrepreneurial base, sometimes referred to as 'Anatolian Tigers', start looking beyond Turkey's traditional OECD export markets. This conservative Islamic business elite not only represents a domestic political contender to Kemalism but also challenges Turkey's traditional transatlantic cornerstones by emphasizing 'Ottoman' commonalities over potential 'security risks' in the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. This shared Ottoman heritage can support Turkey's own geo-economic and geopolitical regional opening. However, the neo-liberal origins of Turkey's foreign policy ambitions imply that these initiatives are not essentially at odds with a US designs for regional order. However, the historically grown, uniquely Turkish character of this trajectory means that this 'model' cannot be reproduced elsewhere. The *Pax*

Ottomanica is, therefore, more complementary to American power in the Middle East, rather than contending it.

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*Turkey's Middle East offensive has taken on something of the scale and momentum of an invasion, albeit a peaceful one.*ⁱ

*"Turkey is like a lake which is fed by several streams from the Balkans, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus."*ⁱⁱ

Endnotes

ⁱ The Economist, October 29th, 2009; http://www.economist.com/world/middleeast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14753776 (retrieved November 5, 2009)

ⁱⁱ Yavuz 1998.