

PERSPECTIVES OF NEUTRALITY IN A WORLD SOCIETY OF THE 21ST CENTURY IMPACTING TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY

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The Issues

Turkey stands today at the epicenter of a hurricane surrounded by wars and conflicts extending from the Caucasus to Cyprus all the while the clock currently turns backward to an Age of the 19th century known as the New Great Power Rivalry among USA, Russia, and China.⁴⁵ Since the end of the bipolar Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, for a short time, there was no other superpower than the USA with Western primacy at its doorsteps. The assumption was that the democratic, secular, and the free-market model protected by NATO, international organizations, multilateralism, and the international rule of law would drive worldwide geo-politics henceforth. But the events of 9/11 changed the American psyche feeling continued vulnerability and when suddenly, Russia went to war against Georgia in August 2008, the world discovered that such assumptions how geopolitics would be like after 1991 were false. The “end of history” didn’t last. Many developing nations began to challenge American power through state capitalism in China and Russia acquiring the economic and political wherewithal to consolidate brands of modernity that present durable alternatives to democratic capitalism as the only game in town.

Russia was back and the international community could not stop Russian aggression. The sword had come to mean more than the liberal world order was prepared to handle and by the second decade of the twenty-first century antagonism between Russia and the USA had escalated that some refer to it as the Second Cold War.⁴⁶ The unpreparedness of dealing with a rogue nation like Russia was due to the fact that seven weeks later after the Russian war with Georgia, Lehmann Brothers had collapsed September 15th prompting the begin of the Great Recession 2008 and the increasing rise of multipolarity, nationalism, and the decline of Western primacy to come as each country sought to reconcile conflicting national aims, religious lifestyles, or ideas of world order.

Ray Kurzweil, director of engineering at Google, writes, the twenty-first century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today’s rate of growth [...].⁴⁷ Although not a universal reality, technological advancements in instantaneous global communication (i.e. the Internet, social media, Twitter, the iPhone) and financial networks operating in real time have accelerated economic globalization. The impression is that European and American idealism about free markets and unregulated competition are lifting many people out of poverty in the world. Countries are inspired by the thought of less economic dependency and greater commercial opportunities only to realize that by joining the trading state model, economic globalization paradoxically permeates the concept of a sovereign state ignoring borders, displaces many people by rationalizing away jobs, challenges cultural/religious identity, and undue

speculation leaving the world to become a financial bubble bursting in 2008. It produced a blowback which is the buzzword of the 21st century called populism.

Almost a decade later Russia had annexed the Crimea from Ukraine with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko warning of “full-scale war” with Russia as tensions escalate between the two countries⁴⁸ while populism had taken front stage in Europe with Brexit and Orban in Europe and President Trump becoming President of the United States calling to an end of international institutions and the rise of nationalism. Their behavior in Eastern Europe (Russia) and the South China Sea (China) are not rule-breaking, but rule-making. Attempts at reshaping the basic premises of the game are impacting not only their regions but the entirety of the game, which comes at the costs of the most significant player. At the same time, however, that player is not willing anymore to sustain the deal that has kept the former system in shape. Donald Trump’s outbursts against the “costs” of NATO are just the symptom of that underlying tension that the American Deal with the Western World is broken.

The Great Recession of 2008, coupled with the accelerated technological advancements that have led to changes in the economic structure of developed nations, have also caused enormous uncertainties and loss of jobs for large numbers of people who used to earn middle-class incomes in traditional industries. Protests on the streets of Paris are now demonstrating for a new order that should serve not only financial capital but also the middle class that can purchase a car but not afford the gasoline to drive it. Market oriented countries are challenged by the call for reforms aimed at ensuring social justice from affordable health care in the USA or taxes to distribute wealth among its citizens. The issues of injustice have caused some parts of Western society to begin grappling with the operative logic of hypocrisy about economic injustice and the laws of war and justice in the 20th century in a new millennium to find a framework for universal peace at a time of global anxiety about “an identity split that separates a minority from the ethnic, religious, or ideological majority, and a wealth gap that pits the rich against the rest of society.”⁴⁹ Political debates are held overlooking the urgency to find new ways to govern the world with the rise of ultra-nationalism, illiberal populist democracy, authoritarianism, and the fragmentation of the liberal world order.

As civil war rages in Syria displacing millions of its citizens in need of humanitarian aid, the world community watches on without humanitarian intervention as compared to the events at the turn of the century due, ironically to the quagmires in Afghanistan and Iraq, which had soured much of the Western public on such undertakings. Thus, the world continues to remain defiant of a security architecture that underscores a policy for universal peace, security, and justice opening opportunities to reduce tensions between the USA and Russia as well as in the case of Sino-US relations to end the Era of Great Power Rivalry. Instead the crusade for ‘just wars’ are embraced halting humanitarianism to almost a standstill in Yemen, where some 12 million people are starving as the world looked away from Saudi Arabia’s handling the war against Yemen until an American residing Saudi journalist called Jamal Khashoggi was murdered premeditatedly in the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey on October 2, 2018 by agents of the Saudi government.

With such geopolitical developments, what role can Turkey play? How can Turkey’s foreign policy calling for justice and humanitarian protection of refugees and civilians in conflict zones reaffirm its ontological identity of providing humanity by drawing closer to these collective objectives to help end the dying in Yemen and other crisis situations. Can such humanitarian foreign policy effectively reduce uncertainty and existential anxieties among besieged civilians. Can the humanitarian services offered to refugees by Turkey impact the course of international norms placing the bar higher to protect the individual than a country’s sovereignty? Religion and nationalism imbued with the legacy of history are the initial responses to such insecurity. They are spurred by populists and ultranationalists who rationalize corrupt and oppressive policies toward other religious beliefs, which run contrary to the prescriptions of faith, freedom, and foreign policy that should usher tolerance for others. How does

Turkey address these pillars of faith (religion or ethical humanitarianism) in the form of freedom (individual self-conscience) and foreign policy (expressing the credo of public policy principles) both domestically and internationally. While the US policymakers focuses on the bi-polar discourse of interests and values reflected in the Wilsonian hypocrisy of just wars and many authoritarian governments underscore the Schmitt's perceptions of humanity as a pretense and a political tool for imperialist expansion,⁵⁰ these binary poles discussed in U.S. foreign relations debates often leave a third pillar unturned which is seeking justice that people of many different countries embrace through their faith as a way of life.

Wilson and Schmitt – The Testing Ground for Faith, Freedom, and International Relations

In his 'just war'-address on the Conditions of Peace on January 8, 1918 U.S. President Woodrow Wilson asserted that this 'final war [World War I] for human liberty' had its only justification in upholding "the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak."⁵¹ Despite Wilson loathing imperialism and a deep-seated belief in liberal democracy and self-determination, he resorted to military action in Latin America just as his predecessors had four years earlier. In 1914 he deployed American troops to Mexico during the civil war situation occupying the country by force. The same occurred in Haiti in 1915 and the Dominican Republic in 1916, when Wilson eventually sent in American troops to occupy the islands to preserve its dominance in the region.⁵² Northwestern professor Peter Ludlow pointed out that Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's perception of humanity had no realm of existence in the absolute "successful prosecution of warfare"⁵³ against an enemy that would be demonized. "Stripped of all legal rights, of whatever nature,"⁵⁴ Schmitt protracted such an enemy other than human but rather an "outsider, something different and alien"⁵⁵ vested without reservation by the executive or, in Carl Schmitt's case, the Fuehrer. Neutrality, to Schmitt, was no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world or the annihilation of the enemy was considered. Norms of international humanitarian law respecting armed conflict were nothing, but a romantic illusion associated with an age of chivalry to him. "They are 'unrealistic' as applied to modern ideological warfare against an enemy not constrained by notions of a nation-state, adopting terrorist methods and fighting with irregular formations that hardly equate to traditional armies."⁵⁶

Schmitt's real enmity was, however, directed toward the partisan aggressor (non-combatants but armed civil resistance). According to Schmitt, the way partisans fought irregularly for their causes, disadvantaged traditional armies to the point that facing fighters without uniforms, "the regular army reacts with violent reprisals, summary executions, the destruction of private property – even entire villages – and regards all these actions as fair punishment against deceit and treachery," and for Schmitt, irregular fighters were indeed real criminals. Indeed, a true Nazi patriot violating all principles of international humanitarian law.

It is difficult to imagine that liberalism, especially of the kind derived by Wilsonian internationalism, and vehemently criticized by Carl Schmitt, might hold the political answers to fix the current world problems.⁵⁷ These two men attracted the intellectual left and right through their writings to which their supporters and critics grapple with the operative logic of hypocrisy about the laws of war and justice.

The Impact of A New Security Architecture on Turkey's Foreign Policy

While many Muslim states in the Middle East were dissolved in sectarian violence—impacting Turkey— between Sunnis and Shiites, the Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh disputes remain dormant as well as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict unresolved, as religion continues as the hallmark in the region.

The irony is exemplified by the political ambitions by Iran to control a roadmap from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea to dominate the Middle East. Ethnic-nationalist rivalries and religious militias are financed by major regional powers, backing different groups in civil wars which overlook the human carnage and fail to live up to the standards—be they religious or not—that they set for themselves. The turmoil has caused massive migration movements, leading some countries to become failed states and others to function as flagships for humanitarian aid. A power vacuum has emerged with Iranians, Turks, Saudis, Kurds, Russians, Israelis, and Americans engaged in combat operations to determine who will shape the Arab world while European fear siege by Jihadist terrorism. Great Rival Powers have rebalanced their strategies turning the regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Caucasus into centers of increasing tension with multipolarity rising with the likes of Turkey and Iran becoming strong regional powers with geopolitical ambitions. Great Power geopolitics has returned with China's deeper involvement in the Middle East through its Road and Belt Initiative, aggressively claiming what it sees as historical rights to the coastal waters in the South and East China Seas. Russia having returned to the world stage with a double edge polity of having annexed the Crimea, intervened militarily in Syria, and cyber-attacks against the West while brokering 'peace' in Syria and disputes over the maritime rights on the Caspian and Black Sea. The regions have acquired a rebranded significance not only as a conflict zone, jihadist threat, political upheavals and overlapping interests of great power, but also because a new security architecture is in flux. As the USA/NATO, the EU, Russia, and China enter a new path of open confrontation and rivalry in various regions of the globe that hold a certain geostrategic importance can parts of these regions serve as buffer zones to reduce the tensions with Russia and the USA? At the same time these states can oppose themselves in one theater and be also allies depending on the issues such as the fight against ISIL as a top priority for all states in the region. Can a rapprochement be found to achieve universal peace and end the hypocrisy?

Would a security architecture that embraces 'permanent neutrality' help in reducing tension between the American Eagle, the Russian Bear, and the Chinese Dragon by providing security and justice and offering thereby greater stability and prosperity in the region? How would the China of Xi Jinping, the USA of the Trump Administration, Russia's Putin, and Turkey's Erdogan in general perceive, Cyprus, and the Caucasus, for example, as a 'permanent neutral' providing themselves as geographical buffer zones to contribute to "security, peace, and justice in the region?" These questions are not hypothetical; local stakeholders are actively exploring them. New permanent neutrals in the region would avoid entanglement in the political and military disputes among Great Powers, just as traditional permanent neutrals have demonstrated in two world wars and a prolonged Cold War, during which their position was one of military impartiality, vested with a respectable place in geostrategic thinking, and part of the institution of international law. Could the creation of a Neutral security corridor between NATO and Russia security architecture of Eastern European countries extending to the Caucasus and Cyprus adopt the status of permanent neutrality to become a buffer zone with the effect of reducing tension between rivaling great powers as trade can continue. The commitments made to transform the pockets of conflict into mutually important geographical stable areas based on a set of rules allow for potential prosperity. Most importantly, the logic of a global security system revolving around the pillars of neutrality can work because they serve the self-interest of the nations involved— the necessary premise for the stability of any system. Although the Swiss were neutralized by outside forces in 1815, if one tried to take it away from them today, they would fight to the death to defend that core value of their self-image and foreign policy. At the same time, they (and other neutrals) have been actively contributing humanitarian relief, good offices, and diplomatic services to the world at large because it was in their own best interest.

Furthermore, could this provide a setting for American and Russian reconciliation to the extent of entering a new phase in the understanding of international relations and provide Turkey with a new neo-Ottoman designed to propagate its foreign policy without military entanglements launching a trajectory

to become more than the official words of a ‘strategic partner’ but a friend of the USA and the West embracing the fundamental values of faith, freedom, and foreign policy?

The new security architecture containing ‘permanent neutrality’ as its core lays the foundation for Turkey’s foreign policy in the 21st Century. If adopted, it would halt NATO expansion eastward and contain U.S. overstretch addressing populist criticism and ontological narratives. The Russian ‘near abroad’ perception of the hostility with the USA is addressed in return Russia engages to settle conflicts in Ukraine, Georgia, Caucasus, and Cyprus as part of the arrangement. (Crimea’s status would become a neutralized territory) moreover, and any other frozen or simmering conflicts need to be addressed. A prerequisite in reducing tensions between the Great Rival Powers is that neutral countries can join any economic or political organization (no military alliances). In addition, the permanent neutrals would increasingly play a role in providing humanitarian services as peacekeepers and protecting civilians during armed conflicts embracing international humanitarian law. Permanent neutral state practice of international humanitarian law would enhance the importance of international customary law and the Right to Protect (R2P) civilians during armed conflicts. The principle of sovereignty to bar such humanitarian services is increasingly discounted to allow humanitarian services to protect civilian lives from bodily harm. The resolution to the turbulent conditions under a new security architecture would provide ample opportunity for Turkey’s revival as a strong regional power when once in its history it was an Empire and now in a world of multipolarity with a commitment to the liberal world order enhance its role to contribute to universal peace as it marches forward to become potentially one of the most powerful countries in the decades ahead.

Conclusion: The End Game

What all of this points to is the simple conclusion that the global security environment of the 21st Century is radically different from what is known over the past 70 years essentially because of America has become one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the world due to the development of shale gas and oil. The Post- WWII Order is ending and what is coming next is going to be inherently less stable from what one used to know. The world is transforming into a race towards a future of multi-polarity, with regional economic and military heavyweights that will compete for influence in their spheres of interest. In this context, the primordial question will be how one stabilizes the system again while avoiding the cataclysm of war that in the past was the only thing that could definitely settle questions of power. Harvard professor Christopher Clark has called this threat the problem of political ‘sleepwalkers’ stumbling into a global war without intention but with necessity, due to the logic of the system that they build.⁴⁵To avoid the threat, not only is a new foundation needed for global security but an architecture overall that structures the game.

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- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Carl Schmitt, Theorie des Partisanen. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot [1963], 1975) 39. "Je straffer eine reguläre Armee diszipliniert ist, je korrekter sie Militär und Zivil unterscheidet und nur den ununiformierten Gegner als Feind betrachtet, um so empfindlicher und nervöser wird sie, wenn sich auf der anderen Seite auch nicht uniformierte Zivilbevölkerung am Kampf beteiligt. Das Militär reagiert dann mit harten Repressalien, Erschießungen,
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