

Struggle Roots

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Turkey: Roots of Internal Conflicts

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The roots of crises in Turkey

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There is no country in the contemporary world that could endure as much historical and geographical burdens as modern Turkey does. On the one hand, Turkey has inherited the long history of the Ottoman Empire (July, 1299 - October, 1923) - that was the most powerful empire in its time. However, after about 600 years under the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish nation experienced a violent transformation into secularism, contrary to its identity and culture, with advent of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In terms of geography, Turkey's location in the center of the world - at the intersection of roads and sea straits, and the supply lines and the transfer of energy - makes it a theater for ambitions and aspirations (of foreign forces). Although geography was in Turkey's favor during its golden time, however it became a burden during the time of weakness. Moreover, its current borders have created a demographic crisis because of the country's ethnic, religious and sectarian diversity.

This research paper attempts to present a brief overview of the roots of crises in Turkey by looking deeply into reality with an in-depth understanding of history and geography. Such understanding will go beyond small details and daily variables, to monitor the constant and deep part of the Turkish crises.

In this way, the spatial area of the study is determined, i.e. contemporary Turkey, defined by its known and stable boundaries in the current policy map, with a view to the surrounding geography as long as this could affect the shape and perception of the Turkish crisis.

Also, the historical period studied in this paper starts from the establishment of the Kemalist Republic of Turkey (1923) until the time when the AKP took power in 2002. Because the AK party's experiment is still active and has not finished yet, this paper



attempts to monitor the roots of crises, in the sense that it can be described as a summary of the papers that may have been placed in front of the Justice and Development Party when it assumed power in the country.

The study consists of two main axes: historical and geographical, i.e. the historical factors that shaped the contemporary reality, as well as the geographical factors, where modern politicians move.

First axis:

The crisis of “history” in Turkey involves three important eras:

1) The Ataturk era:

During the Ataturk era, Ataturk adopted the policy of “Westernization” and established Turkey as a nationalist identity and a political entity on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, which provoked the Turkish people to engage in a long and persistent Islamic resistance.

2) The era of coups:

It is an era where military coups were intertwined with political pluralism. After joining the Western camp during the Cold War, Turkey abandoned the one party era to an era of political pluralism, which was dominated by military hegemony. Whenever the military – who used to consider themselves guardians of Turkey’s identity – noticed that politics started to move away from the secularist identity of “Turkey”, a military coup takes place, redrawing the political environment again. This continued over the one pole era after the Cold War up to the so-called "Neo-Ottomans". During this era, there were strenuous attempts by the “Islamists” to express themselves, most prominently Necmettin Erbakan, whose attempts to form a political party were repeatedly aborted through military coups.

3) The neo-Ottoman era:



The neo-Ottoman era has been represented by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his colleagues: Abdullah Gul, Ahmet Davutoglu, Bulent Arinc and others; who adopted a new path contrary to their 'godfather' Erbakan, and assumed have power in Turkey, starting conflicts with the "deep" state.

Second axis:

Turkey's geographical location in terms of the Straits, coasts, mountains, bays, and islands has drawn crossroads and means of control and protection with the country's surrounding area. The treaties of Sevres and Lausanne, signed by the Turkish government after First World War, have drawn border lines separating land areas and administering the work of the sea straits, creating many tense points, which are likely to become hot spots at any time.

1) The problem of the privileged location:

Turkey is located at a significant point - at the Bosphorus, at the confluence of the three seas: the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Aegean Sea - and at the edge of competing civilizational projects, which makes it a hot battleground at the economic, political and cultural levels.

2) The politically hostile environment:

The AKP has inherited a hostile environment; some from the Ottoman Era and some from the Nationalist Era, which made Turkey completely surrounded by a closed ring of political hostility. This always threatened Turkey with isolation, and aroused fears towards its projects and ambitions.

3) The demographical crisis:

In Turkey, there is ethnic, religious and sectarian diversity - that led to creating a "nationalist identity" on the Western-style, as well as the demarcation of borders since

Lausanne Treaty and beyond – turned into a constant problem that used to raise political and social crises. Also, each population component has become a problem in itself or in its relation with other components.

Summary

Incidents have created a hostile environment surrounding the Turkish politicians from all sides. The issue of historical enmity has become a problem for any political system in Turkey. Any attempt to expand Turkey's role outside its borders usually raises historical tensions and makes the political action extremely difficult.