

MODERN GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF TURKEY***Iskandarova Hilola****A third-year undergraduate student**in the field of International relations, TSUOS*

+998953373937

hilolaiskandarova330@gmail.com

Abstract: This article analyzes the modern foreign policy concept of the Republic of Turkey. It highlights Turkey's geopolitical perspectives, particularly its multi-vector strategy, soft power approach, geo-economic interests, and international mediation activities. The paper also examines tools of cultural and educational diplomacy implemented through organizations such as TIKA, the Diyanet, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Maarif Foundation. Additionally, attention is given to Turkey's relations with NATO and the West, as well as its cooperation with Eastern countries. Based on the analysis, the article presents Turkey's independent foreign policy aimed at regional leadership. The study may be useful for researchers interested in an in-depth understanding of Turkish foreign policy.

Keywords: Turkish foreign policy, multi-vector strategy, soft power, geopolitics, TIKA, Yunus Emre Institute, Maarif Foundation, Diyanet, regional leadership, international mediation, Turkic world, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, balanced policy, modern strategies.

Introduction: In the last decade, Turkey's foreign policy has undergone significant changes. These shifts are primarily related to the increased activism in foreign policy during President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's tenure, the adoption of new approaches aimed at enhancing Turkey's influence on regional and global scales, as well as historical, cultural, and economic factors. Due to its geographical location, Turkey serves as a geostrategic bridge between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which grants it a crucial geopolitical position. This article examines Turkey's modern geopolitical perspectives, their foundations, implemented foreign policy strategies, regional and global activities, as well as the strengths and challenges of this policy.

Methods: The article uses event analysis and historical methods.

Results: Historical Legacy and Neo-Ottoman Tendencies. The legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which once spanned three continents, plays a key role in shaping modern Turkish foreign policy. Current strategies reflect a revival of this heritage, especially through the "Neo-Ottomanism" concept aimed at strengthening ties with Muslim and Turkic nations. While Turkey initially focused on integration with the West — including aspirations for NATO and EU membership — it has since adopted a multi-directional approach (Altunışık, 2021). This new orientation is grounded in reinvigorated historical and cultural connections. In terms of Multi-vectorism, it is now a cornerstone of Turkish diplomacy. This approach maintains traditional alliances with the West while expanding relations with Eastern countries, the Muslim world, and Turkic states. At its core are balanced diplomacy, regional leadership, and an independent position in the global

system (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Soft Power Instruments. Turkey is successfully leveraging its cultural and historical assets as foreign policy tools through various institutions:

- TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency): Active in over 100 countries, implementing development and humanitarian projects, particularly in infrastructure, health, education, and social sectors (TIKA, 2023).
- Diyanet Foundation: Promotes Islamic values and religious education, building mosques and schools in multiple countries (Diyanet Foundation, 2023).
- Yunus Emre Institute: Promotes the Turkish language, literature, and culture worldwide.
- Maarif Foundation: Enhances Turkish educational diplomacy through the establishment of schools abroad.

These institutions have expanded Turkey's soft power influence across the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Geoeconomic Interests. Economic diplomacy is a key priority. Turkey seeks to expand its economic footprint globally via goods, investments, construction firms, and transport-energy corridors. For example:

- Turkey cooperates with the UN, African Union, and other international bodies to access African markets.
- Through logistics initiatives such as the "Zangezur Corridor" and "Trans-Caspian Route," Turkey aims to control strategic Eurasian transit paths.
- Synergy between TIKA and the private sector enhances Turkey's image as a global supplier and infrastructure developer.

Mediation in International Crises. Turkey plays a prominent mediating role in global conflicts:

- It has been an active mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, notably proposing the "grain deal."
- Turkey intervened in the Syrian crisis by establishing border security zones to both protect national interests and address humanitarian concerns (UNHCR, 2023).
- Turkish diplomacy has expanded in Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, and other crisis regions.

"Balanced Equidistance" Diplomacy. Turkey follows a policy of "turning away from no one, but leaning on no one entirely." This approach allows it to:

- Maintain military-strategic ties with NATO and the U.S.;
- Cooperate economically and in security with Russia, China, and Iran;
- Deepen cultural integration with the Turkic world;
- Strengthen its leadership image in the Islamic world.

The Middle East remains a strategic region. Turkey's military involvement in Syria, its position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and neutral stance toward Iran demonstrate its efforts to secure regional influence. Hosting millions of Syrian refugees and establishing safe zones reflect both humanitarian aims and geopolitical strategy. Turkey also strengthened its position in the Gulf by increasing military and economic support to Qatar, balancing power dynamics among Gulf states (Öniş, 2020).

Tensions with the West and NATO. Despite long-standing strategic ties with the West as a NATO member, Turkey's recent foreign policy has sparked frictions:

- The purchase of the S-400 missile system from Russia strained U.S.–Turkey relations, leading to its removal from the F-35 program.
- EU accession talks stalled, while human rights criticisms intensified.

Nonetheless, Turkey remains active in NATO. Its mediation role in the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war reflects its continuing global diplomatic relevance.

Turkic World Integration and Central Asia. Turkey has intensified engagement with Central Asia and the Caucasus based on the “Turkic solidarity” principle. Through the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), it promotes political, economic, and cultural integration. The "Turkic World Vision – 2040" adopted at the Istanbul Summit outlines Turkey's long-term regional strategy (TDT Secretariat, 2022). Cooperation with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan is deepening in military, educational, and economic sectors. Turkey is also actively involved in transport, energy, and information technology projects across the region.

Conclusion: Turkey's modern geopolitical vision is not merely a set of foreign policy directions but a complex and multidimensional strategic approach that integrates history, culture, religion, economics, security, and international diplomacy. Contemporary Turkish foreign policy is grounded in the principles of multi-vector engagement, balance, and independence. While maintaining its traditional strategic partnership with the West, Turkey is simultaneously deepening its cultural, religious, and economic ties with Eastern countries.

In particular, integration processes with Turkic states, efforts to assert leadership in the Islamic world, and mediation roles in international crises define the core of Turkey's new foreign policy paradigm. As discussed in this article, Turkey has effectively expanded its global influence through active use of soft power tools, promotion of geoeconomic interests, and preservation of diplomatic equilibrium. Cultural and educational diplomacy, carried out through institutions such as TİKA, the Diyanet Foundation, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Maarif Foundation, serves as a practical foundation of this strategy.

However, this foreign policy path is not without its challenges. Domestic political pressures, economic difficulties, competition and conflicts on the international stage, complicated relations with the European Union, and tensions within NATO represent real tests for Turkish diplomacy. Therefore, the successful implementation of Turkey's foreign policy requires constant renewal, adaptability, and strategic foresight.

In general, Turkey is actively seeking its place on the global political stage, and its modern geopolitical vision plays a vital role in this endeavor. This policy is not only aimed at safeguarding Turkey's national interests but also serves as a tool to promote regional and global security, economic stability, and cultural cooperation.

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