

Thomas Volk

# Turkey's Perception of its Role in the Middle East

From Bridge to Pivot. 1983–2002



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## Abstract

This book analyzes the changing self-perceptions of Turkish key decision-makers regarding Turkey's regional foreign policy in the Middle East between 1983 and 2002. It examines how Turkish self-perceptions in the region have changed since the military intervention in 1980 and the election of Turgut Özal as prime minister in 1983 until Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Islamic-influenced Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) took office in 2002 and what factors can explain these changes. Specifically, it is analyzed how and why Turkish self-perceptions have changed from a bridge country (*köprü ülke*) in the 1980s to a central country (*merkez ülke*) around the turn of the millennium. It is argued that a changing regional self-perception of Turkey must always be seen in the context of and in interaction with national and international transformation processes and the tension between nationalism and Islam within Turkey.

In its basic argument, this work contradicts the opinion in the literature, according to which a "neo-Ottoman" tendency in Turkish foreign policy has only been discernible since the AKP government took office. Rather, it is argued that the origins of a shift in the axis of Turkish self-perception and greater involvement in the Middle East are to be found earlier and that Turkey's increased interest in its immediate neighborhood began as early as the 1980s.

A realist-constructivist theoretical approach is followed and theories of identity formation and critical geopolitics are considered to explain how self-perceptions as a precondition for concrete Turkish foreign policy decisions have changed throughout the two decades of observation. For this purpose, all foreign policy debates of the public parliamentary sessions from 1983 to 2002 of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, T.B.M.M.*) were analyzed and critically contextualized.



## Preface

This book is based on the author's PhD thesis entitled *Turkey's Self-Perception in the Middle East, 1983-2002: From bridge country (köprü ülke) to central country (merkez ülke)*, which was successfully defended at the University of Basel, Switzerland, in November 2021. It is the result of years of study of Turkey and its foreign policy. The interest in Turkey arose during the bachelor studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg, where first knowledge of the Turkish language could be gained. Subsequently, the scientific examination of Turkey was deepened within the framework of the German Turkish Masters Program in Social Sciences (GeT MA), which is offered jointly by the Humboldt-University of Berlin and the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. During the master's program from 2009 to 2011, Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East was studied in particular and the master's thesis was written on the changing Turkish-Israeli relations.

The author thanks in particular the main supervisor of his PhD thesis, Professor Maurus Reinkowski (University Basel), who has accompanied him since the beginning of his studies and who has always impressed and motivated the author with his analytical strength and academic engagement with Turkey. Special thanks also goes to Professor Hüseyin Bağcı (METU Ankara), the second supervisor, who has accompanied the author since the studies in Ankara and Berlin and has played a crucial role in the scholarly engagement with Turkish foreign policy.

The full concentration on the dissertation project from 2012 to 2014 and the facilitation of a research stay in Ankara, also to examine original sources in the Turkish National Assembly, would not have been possible without the financial support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) within the framework of a PhD scholarship.

*Preface*

Finally, the completion of the PhD thesis that led to this book would not have been possible without the constant encouragement, confidence and companionship of my family and friends. My special appreciation goes to Andreas Hoibl, Sebastian Sönksen, and Alp Yenen. As the first of my family to go to university, I dedicate this book to my beloved mother, Marija Volk, who always believed in me and made possible for me the most valuable thing ever: Education.

Thomas Volk

Tunis, January 2022



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## Note on the translation and transliteration

Although the modern Turkish alphabet has used Latin letters since 1928, some letters are different (in pronunciation).

The following chart provides an overview of the specific pronunciation of the letters:

C, c	<i>j</i> as in jump, or <i>dsch</i> as in the German <i>Dschungel</i>
Ç, ç	<i>ch</i> as in chart, or <i>tsch</i> as in the German <i>Tschüss</i>
Ğ, ğ	this letter is called the <i>yumuşak g</i> , or soft <i>g</i> , and lengthens the sound of the vowel before, hence one does not pronounce this letter
İ, ı	<i>a</i> as in along, or as in the German <i>Ochse</i>
İ, i	<i>ee</i> as in feet, or as in the German <i>Finanzamt</i>
Ö, ö	like in the English word burn, or <i>ö</i> as in the German <i>König</i>
Ş, ş	<i>sh</i> as in sunshine, or <i>sch</i> as in the German <i>Schauer</i>
Ü, ü	<i>u</i> as in cube, or <i>ü</i> as in the German <i>Überschrift</i>
Z, z	a hissing <i>s</i> as in base, or as in the German <i>Vase</i>



## List of Abbreviations

AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> (Justice and Development Party, JDP)
ANAP	<i>Anavatan Partisi</i> (Motherland Party, MP)
AP	<i>Adalet Partisi</i> (Justice Party, JP)
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CHP	<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i> (Republican People's Party, RPP)
COMCEC	Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (of the OIC)
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress ( <i>İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti</i> )
DP	Democratic Party ( <i>Demokrat Parti</i> )
DSP	<i>Demokratik Sol Partisi</i> (Democratic Left Party, DLP)
DYP	<i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i> (True Path Party, TPP)
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
EU	European Union
GNA	Government of National Accord (of Libya)
GTM	Grounded Theory Method
HDP	<i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i> (Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP)
HP	<i>Halkçı Partisi</i> (Populist Party, PP)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations (as an academic discipline)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MDP	<i>Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi</i> (Nationalist Democracy Party, NDP)
MEDO	Middle East Defense Organization
MHP	<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i> (Nationalist Movement Party, NMP)
MİT	<i>Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı</i> (National Intelligence Organization)
MNP	<i>Millî Nizam Partisi</i> (National Order Party, NOP)
MP	Member of Parliament

*List of Abbreviations*

MSP	<i>Millî Selamet Partisi</i> (National Salvation Party, MSP)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council
NUC	National Unity Committee
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PKK	<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i> (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RP	<i>Refah Partisi</i> (Welfare Party, WP)
SHP	<i>Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Partisi</i> (Social Democratic Populist Party)
T.B.M.M.	<i>Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi</i> (Grand National Assembly of Turkey)
T.C.	<i>Türkiye Cumhuriyeti</i> (Republic of Turkey)
THY	<i>Türk Hava Yolları</i> (Turkish Airlines)
TIS	Turkish-Islamic Synthesis ( <i>Türk-İslam Sentezi, TİS</i> )
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNO	United Nations Organization (United Nations, UN)
US	United States of America (USA)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YÖK	<i>Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu</i> (Council of Higher Education)