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QUESTIONING THE PIVOTAL STATUS OF TURKEY IN AMERICAN HEGEMONY*

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Abstract

The United States has determined certain pivotal states (regional states) in the world to sustain its global hegemony. These pivotal states are considered as a kind of bridge between the United States and the third world. As such, Turkey's geostrategic, economic, political, cultural features and regional dynamics make it a real pivotal state and the United States has continuously needed Turkey's alliance and strategic partnership to lift its effectiveness and maintain its hegemony in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. However, Turkish-American relations have gone through tough times than ever before in the history of the two countries' bilateral relations. Since Donald Trump took office, he has continuously marginalized Turkey and has neglected its NATO ally and strategic partner in main regional issues. Besides, Trump's moves towards the Middle East, particularly for Syria, has posed a challenge for Turkey's national security. In this context, Turkey's current status from the point of the United States should be brought into question by handling the latest issues between them. The aim of this study is to examine the pivotal status of Turkey in American hegemony under current conditions.

Keywords: Pivotal State, Middle East, Syria, Donald Trump.

1. Introduction

During the Cold War and following the post-Cold War era, the United States has used up its economic and military power, its internal and external resources and has spent trillions of dollars for maintaining its hegemony in the world. This situation has become a backbreaking process for the United States, and it has been figured out explicitly by the policymakers that this kind of leadership under these circumstances is entirely unsustainable. There must be a more natural way to rule the world without having trouble and economic burden. "With the end of the Cold War and the consequent early end of the twentieth century (and even, according to some, the end of history) a new geopolitical framework, a new strategic construct, is needed (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 379). The United States, in other words, is not enthusiastic about making use of its precious resources to perpetuate this unsustainable policy, and thus the idea of *the Pivotal States* has come to light in U.S. foreign policy. "Yet the United States need not respond to

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every instance of chaos and instability in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Limited resources prohibit it from doing so in any case. Instead, the United States should focus on pivotal states in the developing world" (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 381). A strategic plan is needed for the United States to sustain its hegemony by specifying significant countries in significant regions. According to U.S. foreign policy, these chosen countries will be the guardians of American interests all around the world. Based on this, the world has been divided into seven regions, and nine pivotal states have been chosen. "The pivotal states are Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, South Africa, Brazil, Algeria, and Mexico" (Zelikow, 2000). They are unique countries in terms of their geostrategic position, military power, population, size, economic potential, and capacity to affect regional and global issues. By putting *the policy of Pivotal States* into practice, the United States will easily balance the current order in both the close-range and the far-flung regions of the world.

2. The Features of a Pivotal State

There are some states that incorporate strategic interests of the great powers, and they are unceasingly in the public eye and a center of attention. Every country does not have the feature of a pivotal state. What makes a country an actual pivotal state is that it must be a hotshot player in its region. It enjoys excellent territorial and regional dominance, economic and political power and is necessarily acknowledged as a natural regional leader among the countries in the region. "Pivot states are states that possess military, economic or ideational strategic assets that are coveted by great powers" (Sweijs, 2014, 1). It is not precisely a great power, but a significant regional actor. "All of them are large, populous states with a growing middle class, considerable infrastructure and educational investments, and emerging markets potential that involves increasing integration into the global economy." (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 7) The pivotal state is a developing country and is generally regarded as a binder between the great powers and the third world. It establishes cohesion, constructs collaboration, and plays the role of a middleman between them. In other words, there is no necessitation for the great powers to be interested in small, destabilized, underdeveloped and far-flung countries. They generally have their pivotal states to take care of their issues. Thus, there are not any deadlocks for the great powers to penetrate the third world. In that case, the great powers always need specific pivotal states to extend their influence and carry out their politics around the globe.

Some momentous positive changes or adverse fluctuations may quickly and profoundly affect the countries around it, and this alteration may also affect the interests of the great powers. "A pivotal state is a hot spot that could not only determine the fate of its region but also affect international stability" (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 33). Put it differently; the pivotal state has the possibility of being a great power or a potential "rotten apple in a barrel" (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 34). Every pivotal state is on a knife-edge about being either fruitful or a complete disappointment. It depends on the productivity and achievement it shows during this process. In a sense, it is not hundred percent clear which scenario will prove to be right in the long run, yet it will be reasonable to show special attention to them in terms of critical matters such as regional cooperation, economic and political stability, fighting against terrorism and radical fundamentalist organizations, poverty and mass migration that may affect international order and global security.

The pivotal states are located in very central positions of critical regions so that it is not a big deal for them to make contact and create constructive bilateral relations with other countries in the region. Whenever the great powers try to implement a policy in the third world, which is for the benefit of their interests, the pivotal states become a part of that policy or activity without delay, work heartily, and finally, the interests of the great powers are restored. The pivotal states project may, if the fundamental steps are taken, forestall regional and global insecurity and support prosperity throughout the world. If instability emerges in some parts of the world, it may permeate to other regions, and accordingly create a domino effect. This instability may stir up a regression in international order.

A pivotal state is so important regionally that its collapse would spell transboundary mayhem; migration, communal violence, pollution, disease, and so on. A pivotal state's steady economic progress and stability, on the other hand, would bolster its region's economic vitality and political soundness and benefit American trade and investment. (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 153)

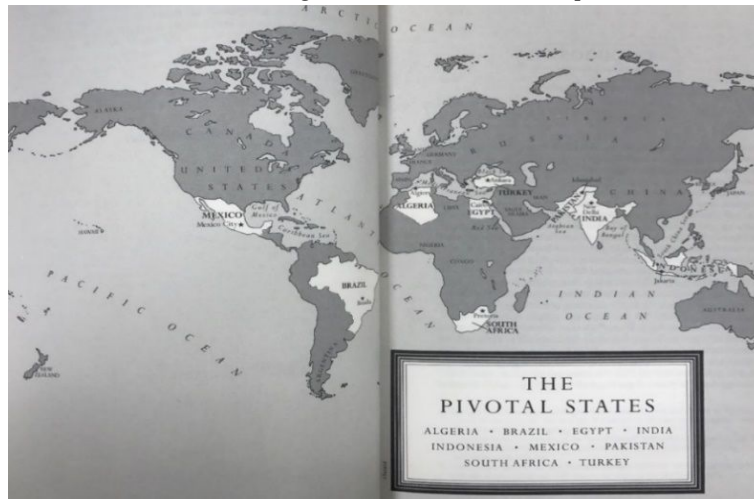
The pivotal states, if they are supported sufficiently, can be a potent antidote for a possible pandemonium or disarray in critical regions of the world. They have the potential and fortitude to restore regional disagreements before it becomes a world-wide crisis. If the pivotal states hold firm, their spheres of influence and peripheries will see an ongoing amicable atmosphere in the future. Ultimately, the pivotal states will always remain invaluable partners of the great powers (the United States, China, Russia, etc.) in possible hegemonic, economic or political wars of the future. The more the great powers exercise influence

over the pivotal states and pull them up to their orbit, the more they get a considerable share of the cake in the world hegemony.

3. Significance of The Pivotal States in U.S. Foreign Policy and Turkey's Current Status

"The United States is the sole state with preeminence in every domain of power -- economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural -- with the reach and capabilities to promote its interests in virtually every part of the world" (Huntington, 1999, 2). There is no doubt about American hegemony in the world; however, if everything is fine and there is no need to worry about U.S. world leadership, why does it need a new and more practical foreign policy to sustain its hegemony and the current world order? There are 196 countries in the world whose independence have been officially registered. From the viewpoint of the United States, it is impossible to deal with or show special attention to all these countries. It is entirely superfluous and time-wasting to be interested in every nation-state one by one. It takes a lot of time and effort. "The United States should adopt a discriminative policy towards the developing world, concentrating its energies on pivotal states rather than spreading its attention and resources over the globe" (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 35). The United States feels the need of coming up a solution to rule the world with less labor, problem, and economic burden. Hence, the idea of the pivotal states has emerged as a new and more practical policy.

Figure 1: The Pivotal States Map

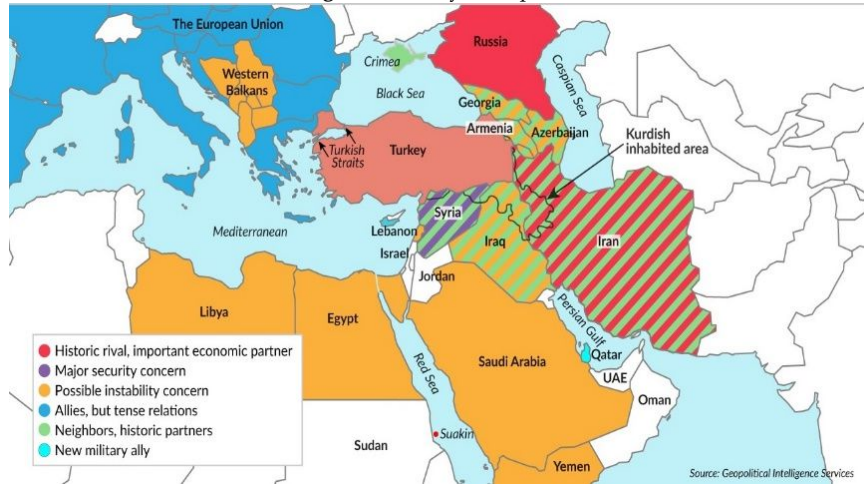


Source: Chase, R., Hill, E., Kennedy, P. M. (1999). *The Pivotal States: A New Framework for U.S. Policy in the Developing World*. New York: W.W. Norton.

The pivotal state strategy is to choose, support, and strengthen these prominent and exclusive states that are more significant than others in terms of American security and interests around the world. The pivotal states, in other words, are geostrategically substantial for both the United States and its allies. One point must be underscored here that the countries that directly affect security and global interests of the United States are directly called the pivotal states, and nine countries, as stated above, can best serve the purpose of it in terms of U.S. foreign policy. They constitute one-third of the world population, and when these countries tilt to a direction, most of the countries in the developing world will also tilt to that direction in the future. For this reason, their position, stance, and stability are indispensable for the United States.

When it comes to the significance of Turkey, "The United States considers Turkey as an active pivotal state because of having a strategic position, regional power, crowded population, economic potential, and the capacity to affect regional and international stability" (Ayata and Ercan, 2007, 24). Turkey has always been exceedingly paramount to the United States and the perpetuation of American domination in this region. Turkey, as a pivotal state, has an essential dominance over a large geographical area and this centrality gives it a significant role of stabilizing the regions of major instability and turbulence.

Figure 2. Turkey's Geopolitical Position



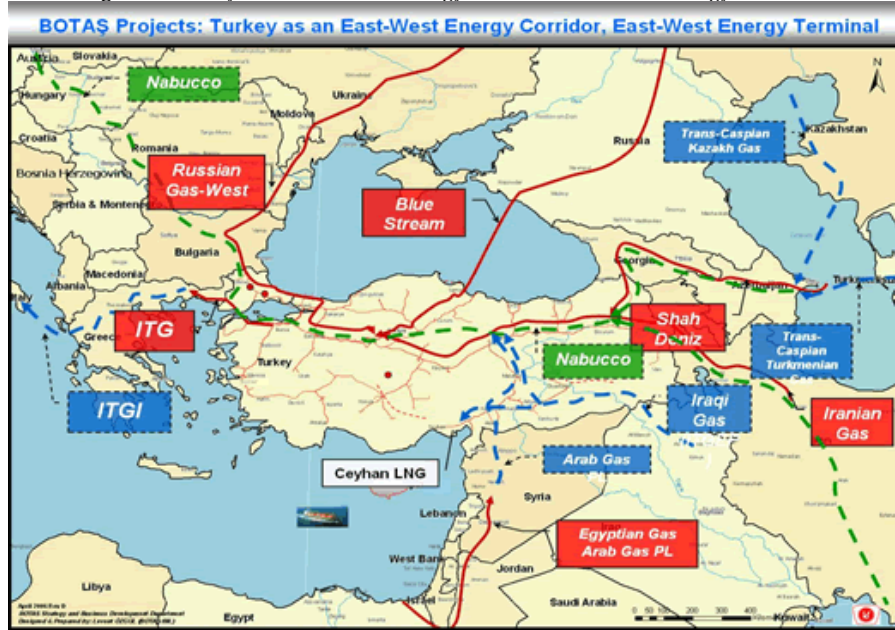
Source: "Turkey's Geopolitical Vectors" (2018). <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/turkey-has-the-right-to-protect-its-national-interests-politics,2472.html> (17.03.2018)

What gives Turkey a great position in its region is its advantageous location. "Geography awards a privileged geostrategic and economic position to Turkey. It sits on a natural hub of the Mediterranean, where thousand-year-old land and maritime trade routes meet and cross" (Liechtenstein, 2018). Turkey is located in the center of the Balkans, the Aegean, the Caucasus, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe, and its pivotalness is instrumental in reaching a common ground between these critical regions and countries. Accordingly, having an advantageous location enhances the pivotal significance of Turkey in international relations. "Located in geopolitical terms for so many decades in the south-eastern corner of Europe, today Turkey lies at the center of a rapidly evolving new geopolitical region of Turkish peoples from Eastern Europe to Western China - a region in which it will be the central player" (Fuller, 1993, 1).

For American interests, Turkey's unique character among the Muslim countries made it a valuable asset in bringing the cultural gap between Europe and the Middle East. Its geographic position and military bases facilitated information gathering and intelligence about potential terrorist activities as well as operations against such groups. Similarly, the US was important for Turkish interests, for its place in the global balance of power, as a security provider, and as a key supporter in Ankara's bid for membership in the European Union. (Müftüler, 2006, 61)

"Turkey has a geopolitically, geo-economically and geo-culturally proper nature that could enable it to serve inter-culturally and inter-religiously as a bridge of dialogue and tolerance in Anatolia as well as to bring it to a situation where it could cooperate politically and economically with both Asia and Europe" (Arslan, 2012, 1). This centrality, bridge position, and regional strength between Asia and Europe enable Turkey a considerable elbow room in international relations, and a pivotal Turkey can become a cornerstone for the United States for its plans in the Middle East. Turkey also plays a critical role in creating long-term peace and stability in the Middle East, in which the United States has vital interests. Peace and stability in the Middle East affect the order of an expansive region, the security of energy and, most importantly, the free cash flow. Therefore, if Turkey holds firm, its region will experience an open-ended peaceful atmosphere in the future. The United States is well aware of the fact that if Turkey's internal and external dynamics are damaged or it falls into a decline in some way, this will have irreversible repercussions and perturbs the balance of the region in the long run. The pivotal state project cannot be carried out successfully without Turkey's involvement since Turkey constitutes the backbone of this project, and its possible instability may cause a domino effect which may also turn into an international crisis or mayhem.

Figure 5: Turkey as an East-West Energy Corridor, East-West Energy Terminal



Source: "Turkey As An East-West Energy Corridor" (2018). <http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/Turkey/NaturalGas.html> (22.04.2018)

Last but not least, Turkey is located between considerable energy producers and consumers. This condition enhances its economic significance when it is compared to other regional countries. Turkey lies in the center of the Middle East, Russia, and the Caucasus which are principal energy producers of the world and the West, mainly Europe, which is directly one of the most significant consumers of the world. "This privileged natural bridge position provides Turkey with both opportunities and responsibilities in terms of energy security. In this regard, while developing its energy strategy Turkey aims to strengthen its position between East-West and South-North Energy Corridors" (Turkey's Energy Profile and Strategy, 2017). Turkey is on the verge of creating an important role for itself in the global energy market since it can easily control the energy-transport corridors whose security is of paramount importance to the West. It is possible to assert that the secure flow of energy from the East to the West would not be possible without the guarantor position of Turkey. Most importantly, Turkey has been used as an energy hub, and the United States has somewhat broken the hegemonic superiority of Russia on energy distribution route. "American efforts to promote construction of new pipelines through the Caucasus to the Black Sea and Turkey were a part of a larger campaign to break Russia's monopoly of control over the transportation of oil from the region" (Klare, 2008, 154).

4. Questioning the Pivotal Status of Turkey Under Current Conditions

The United States has experienced a considerable conversion and reorganization both in domestic policy and foreign policy since Donald Trump took office. Trump has adopted a policy of conducting what is thoroughly dissimilar to Obama's equilibrium policies in the Gulf region, Iran, the question of Israel and Palestine and Turkey. Obama did not favor any regional power to become too dominant and tried to form the balance of power in the Middle East. Trump's marginalizing policy, on the other hand, has created tension in this hot region. He is entirely against Iran and sees it as an absolute enemy. "Iran was the principal enemy in the region" (Entous, 2018). He has used the loyal customers Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf states as a tool to create a block against Russia and Iran.

Furthermore, he has given unconditional support to Israel on the subject of Palestine and has surprisingly neglected its strategic partner and NATO ally Turkey in the decision-making process in the Middle East. Trump has disappointingly disregarded Turkey in principal regional issues, particularly in Syrian crisis and has cooperated with terrorist organizations to create so-called stability and peace in the Middle East. This reckless attitude has disarrayed Turkish-American relations and gave rise to confidence crisis from the point of Turkey. "U.S. support for the SDF has put enormous strain on ties with NATO ally



Turkey, which views the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - a group that has waged a three-decade insurgency in Turkey and is considered a terrorist group by the EU, Turkey and the United States" (Perry and Coşkun, 2018). In the present case, Turkey, which is an essential regional power and a real pivotal state, has gradually changed its foreign policy in terms of its relations with the United States and needed to create a new and necessary block with Russia and Iran to redress the balance in its sphere of influence.

One of the most significant problems between Turkey and the United States is that the United States has no tangible Syrian policy under Trump Administration. This situation is one of the most significant issues for Turkey. Before Trump, the Obama Administration created a tactical and provisional relationship with the YPG during the Kobane crisis. The United States aided the YPG and pushed back Islamic State (IS) fighters together with an international airstrike led by the U.S. Turkey shut its eyes to that process momentarily. However, together with Trump administration, this provisional relationship turned into a permanent and strategic one. "The U.S.-led coalition is working with its Syrian militia allies to set up a new border force of 30,000 personnel; the coalition said on Sunday, a move that has added to Turkish anger over U.S. support for Kurdish-dominated forces in Syria" (Perry and Coşkun, 2018). This move is regarded as border security for the U.S; however, it is implicitly a terror army for Turkey.

Initial aid for the YPG was primarily prompted by the US' need to have a stake in the conflict and monitor the situation in regards to Daesh. The SDF has been largely successful in this regard, driving out Daesh militants from numerous areas in Syria, including the group's strongholds in Raqqa, Mayadeen and Deir Ez-Zor, and also gaining control of strategic oil reserves in the process. (Hasan, 2018)

Various terrorist organizations in Syria desire to establish a de-facto Kurdish state, and they consider the United States as their big brother and rely heavily on it for further help and support. Additionally, the United States does its best to break Iran's influence in the region. "The US intends to maintain an open-ended military presence in Syria, not only to fight Isis and al-Qaida but also to provide a bulwark against Iranian influence, ensure the departure of the Assad regime and create conditions for the return of refugees" (Borger, 2018).

When this is the reality, the United States is not content with Turkey's relations with Russia and Iran. In other words, Trump Administration is quite uneasy with this regional alliance. It says that Turkey should not buy S-400 missile defence system from Russia since it is a NATO ally. However, it does not provide its Patriot missiles and other essential ammunition that Turkey urgently needs. Under recent developments, Turkey bought S-400 missiles from Russia, and the components of the weapons have been transported to Turkey in July 2109. Immediately afterwards, the U.S. removed Turkey from the F-35 program after its purchase of Russian missiles. "The United States said on Wednesday that it was removing Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program, a move long threatened and expected after Ankara began accepting delivery of an advanced Russian missile defense system last week" (Reuters, 2019).

Not only Donald Trump's but also U.S. Administration's unbalanced policy and unreliable attitudes, Pentagon's negligent approaches, and threatening moves and strategic relationship with Russia in critical areas have considerably changed the atmosphere in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has begun to move away from the Western bloc and has necessarily turned its face to the Eastern bloc to redress the balance in the region. "Russia has also created a climate of cooperation between Turkey and Iran, another geopolitical novelty that means only one thing: NATO has been fragmented and defused throughout the current Middle East" (Valori, 2017). This is possibly the most significant impact of the Syrian crisis on Turkish foreign policy. Turkey has made strategic agreements with Russia to establish Akkuyu nuclear power plant, the TurkStream project, S-400 missile system and other military agreements, economic and commercial relations and so on. These vital projects and significant bilateral ties with the nemesis of the United States will affect Turkish-American relations soon. However, this strategic partnership with Russia will strengthen Turkey's position in the Eastern bloc. Unfavorable attitudes of the United States have made Turkey closer to Russia. Thus, Turkey and Russia have developed positive bilateral relations and made strategic agreements that will possibly affect the regional dynamics profoundly. In parallel with these developments, it is possible to presume that the United States is losing its vital pivotal state, Turkey, in the region owing to collaborating with terrorist organizations and neglecting its strategic NATO ally. It should not be forgotten that Turkey's pivotal status has not changed, Turkey is still a regional power and an arbiter in the region, but U.S. attention to Turkey has changed to a great extent.

The United States under Trump Administration regards Turkey as an unexceptional - mediocre - state or treats equally with Russia and Iran or Iraq and Syria. There seems there is no difference between



Turkey and other states in the region. However, Turkey is a pivotal state, an essential regional actor, and has a strong voice in its sphere of influence. Turkey and the United States are allies in NATO for a long while and have a long-standing strategic and multi-pronged bilateral relations. If the way things are going, this strategic partnership is not expected to exist in the future.

Conclusion

“America ensures its hegemonic capacity through its own structural power enabled by security, production, finance, and knowledge capacity in international economy-politics exceeding regional dimensions” (Strange, 1987, 565). However, one thing is certain that the United States has swallowed up its economic, political, military power and its valuable resources to become the superpower of the world and this unsustainable process has clearly made it worn out for quite a while. “With the end of the Cold War and the consequent early end of the twentieth century (and even, according to some, the end of history) a new geopolitical framework, a new strategic construct, is needed” (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 379). Accordingly, the U.S. needs to devise a strategic plan to continue its hegemony by designating specific countries in critical regions. These chosen countries will be the ultimate guardians and the supporters of the status quo and American national interests. Thus, the idea of the pivotal states has come to life in U.S foreign policy. “The United States need not respond to every instance of chaos and instability in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Limited resources prohibit it from doing so in any case. Instead, the United States should focus on pivotal states in the developing world” (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 381). Among these pivotal states, Turkey stands as one of the most prominent countries when its region is taken into consideration. That is, Turkey’s geopolitical, economic, political, and cultural features make it a natural pivotal state for the United States. “The United States considers Turkey as an active pivotal state because of having strategic position, regional power, crowded population, economic potential, and the capacity to affect regional and international stability” (Ayata and Ercan, 2007, 24). “Whoever rules in Ankara, Turkey’s geostrategic importance will remain intact” (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1999, 119). That being the case, Trump Administration undervalues Turkey’s importance in international relations and pays no mind to Turkey’s strategic partnership and pivotal status. The United States under Trump Administration takes no notice of Turkey’s concerns in regional issues. That is, Turkey’s national security concerns in Syria and Iraq have no meaning for the U.S President. They distract Turkey’s attention with fallacious statements. To make matters worse, Trump Administration regularly arming the terrorist organizations on the southern border of Turkey, saying that the PYD/YPG is its land force in Syria. Notwithstanding all the efforts of Turkey, the U.S. is doing the opposite. By taking irrecoverable steps, the United States is losing its pivotal state, and Turkey has compulsorily turned its face to the East which is Russia and Iran. Regarding this, Turkey has urgently come to its senses to become a part of a regional and robust alliance and has made common cause with Russia and Iran.

It is as clear as crystal that the United States is losing its pivotal state, regional partner and NATO ally. Mutual environment of confidence has begun to fail between the governments. This troublesome atmosphere is expected to continue as long as Trump is at work, and if the current Middle East policy of the United States does not change, there will be more trials and tribulations in the upcoming years. The strategic partnership, alliance, pivotal status, geostrategic significance, historical bilateral relations, economic and commercial cooperation and other significant issues that Turkey and the United States have for the last seventy years do not have a meaning for the current U.S. President. He generally looks at things from a businessman perspective. However, state governance necessitates more than what he does in international relations. As a true pivotal state and a significant regional actor, Turkey must pull itself up by its own bootstraps to secure its national interests, produce technology to get rid of the bondage from the West or maintain necessary armaments by making a deal with Russia and other regional and global suppliers, use its regional and global potential to take advantage of its strategic position in international relations, establish new regional and global alliances with neighboring and other countries and strengthen the current ones to cement its position in its own region.

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