

**NEO-OTTOMAN PROJECT OF THE PRESIDENT
R.T. ERDOGAN: GEOGRAPHY AND POWER LEVERS
OF GREAT STRATEGY**

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Abstract. In the foreign policy of Turkey the "neo-Ottoman project" is connected with the activities of the country's President R.T. Erdogan and the "Justice and Development Party" ("Abaletve Kalkinma Partisi" (AKP) – political force which declared its political ambitions with the victory in the parliamentary elections in 2002. Conceptually, this model of Ankara's relations with the outside world was developed by Ahmet Davutoglu, the head of the Chair of International Relations at Beykent University, who later headed the Foreign Policy Department of Turkey and became the main person in the implementation of the "rhythmic diplomacy" strategy. In the views of the President Erdogan and the political elite of the new guidelines the announced course reflected Ankara's desire to regain the greatness and influence of the "golden age" of the Ottoman Empire. As time of implementation of this geopolitical project has shown its successful regional locations, such as the "Organization of the Turkic States" and the "Turkey-Africa" formates, caused great concern among the countries of the Mediterranean region, as well as partner countries (Russia) and allied countries (USA, EU countries). Today, the success/failure indicator of the "neo-Ottoman project" for Ankara is two undeniable facts. The first fact is the unfolding of the "big game" in the South Caucasus around the prospects of a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result of the 2020 war in which the players of the world forefront with their own interests

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are already involved, and the second fact is the recognition of the President Erdogan that in 2028 he will leave big politics.

The purpose. The purpose of the study is to reveal the phenomenon of the "neo-Ottoman project" as a geopolitical projection of Turkey's "soft" and "hard" power within the former Ottoman Empire. As a certain strategy of Ankara's greatness policy, it [power projection] has been considered in a systemic approach which has made it possible to clarify the most controversial events and facts of the project. The achievement of the goal has facilitated by three tasks, the content of which has disclosed in three sections of the study.

This is to reveal the identity of the President R.T. Erdogan as a new wave politician; to position "neo-Ottomanism" as a geopolitical project of Turkish greatness within the borders of the former Ottoman Empire; and to reveal the content of Ankara's efforts in the implementation of the "rhythmic diplomacy" strategy. The chapters are organically connected and reflect the content of the problem.

Methodology. The research has been carried out on the basis of the use of comparative, dialectical, historical and systemic methods. This has made it possible to consider the phenomenon of the "neo-Ottoman project" as a whole picture of the restoration of the greatness of Turkey of the past, to reveal its peculiarities and retrospectives.

Results. The mechanism and tools of the "rhythmic diplomacy" strategy has been revealed. Attention is paid to the peculiarities of its [tools] application in geographical and regional projects in Central Asia and in African countries. It has been proven that since 2010 – the beginning of the "Arab Spring" Turkey's activity in the Mediterranean region as the former "place of greatness" of Ankara began to be perceived as a challenge to the interests of the traditional players of world politics in this region. This forced the Turkish government to adjust its line of behavior. This was clearly demonstrated during the last visit of the Turkish president to Egypt and a meeting with the country's leader.

Practical implications. The results of the study can be used in the block of humanitarian disciplines that consider issues of international politics and regional security.

Value/originality. The scientific novelty of the study consists in revealing the ontological foundations of the phenomenon of "neo-Ottomanism" in

the development of the course of "greatness" of Turkey initiated by the President R.T. Erdogan and clarification of successes and problematic issues in the implementation of the declared policy. The strategy of "rhythmic diplomacy" has been considered as the synchronization of Ankara's efforts in the key regions of the former Ottoman Empire and in the states of the Central Asian Five. The strategy involves the creation of various formats of cooperation where Ankara has taken a leading role.

Conclusions. The project of "neo-Ottomanism", which since the 2000s has been consistently implemented by Ankara, is the materialization of Turkey's course to acquire the status of a "regional state". Having lost the prospects of joining the EU, the new wave of Turkey's elite turned to the historical memory and narratives of the past as the eternal foundations of statehood and the greatness of the national spirit. It is symbolic that Ankara's foreign policy ambitions are in tune with the slogans and modalities of Ahmet Davutoglu's "Strategic Depth" (2002) which should be regarded as a reassessment of Turkey's European prospects. The conflict of interests that gave rise to the project of "neo-Ottomanism" was clearly manifested in the most sensitive place of its vitality which is the South Caucasus. Starting from 2020, when the Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended, it became a "stumbling block" for establishing peace in the region. Today, the "Armenian node" threatens the countries of the region with a new escalation of violence and a radical reformation of the security environment.

1. Introduction

In the distance of time in modern Turkey in the figure of the President R.T. Erdogan as a politician and a leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) can be seen as the embodiment of the spirit of the history of the best times of the Ottoman Empire, when expansion as a principle and policy tool brought recognition, influence and wealth. It is about the period of the history of Turkey of more than 600 years (1299–1923), when the slogans "Ottoman Empire", "the power and wealth of the Ottoman Sultan" caused respect among the leaders of the countries of Europe, the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, and the influence of the Turkish sultan was as great as the king of France or the emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Since then, the "chessboard" of great politics has undergone many changes. Leader countries and outsider countries have changed in Europe

and in the world, but interests as the eternal engine of history and expressions of the spirit of the nation [1, p. 284–290] in the caves of consciousness of the Turkish elite and politicians were reminded of the heroic past and higher goals of the nation.

In the system of international relations, this is a natural line of behavior of national elites and states, just as it is for any person to feel happy. But for the Turkish self-consciousness, the "memories of great history" against the background of a long and humiliating stay in the "hallway of the European express" and the "phantom pain" of past greatness turned into a great resource for the materialization of dreams and the politics of revenge. In addition, the European policy of unification through the directive method of management where the principles of "subordination" and "dependence" are given the role of a cementing mechanism of management, starting from the 2000s, finally pushed Ankara away from Brussels. Turkey began to recreate its greatness on the familiar principle of "build yourself". In fact, this meant that Turkey embarked on the path of building a "Turkish miracle" on the analogy of the "Singapore miracle", whose father was Lee Kuan Yew, but with one amendment – relying on its historical heritage, mentality and interests of Turkey as a regional state.

Considering the specifics of the stated topic, it should be noted that there are no targeted and integral studies that would highlight the contradictions and mechanisms of the phenomenon of "neo-Ottomanism" in its modern dimension. The existing discourse is purely fragmentary [in terms of issues] and local-regional in nature. Examples of such approaches are editorial and author articles that are regularly published under the auspices of Reuters, Euronews, Newsfull, DeutscheWelle, etc. Fragmentary in content and articles by individual authors they are considered, highlighting current problems and events. We are talking about the materials of V. Kaspruk, N. Gumenyuk, L. Kiyanitsa, N. Lototska, L. Safaryan, A. Guymol and other authors.

2. President R.T. Erdogan is a Politician of the New Wave

The political career of R.T. Erdogan in the high corridors of power began during the turbulent world political processes of the last 30 years and the financial, economic, and political affairs of Turkey itself were not in the best condition. However, in the conditions of many risks and acute political struggle within the country R.T. Erdogan proved to be a patient student and

a talented politician. 10 years as the prime minister of the country and the third consecutive term as the president (re-election in 2023) became for him an era of stability tests and a test of his talents as the head of the country. The intricacies of the political situation of this time were taught by the conservative politician not only the "secret art" of the game of words and nuances, but also, judging by everything, brought up the Machiavellian type of leader. Endurance, cunning and caution with partners, and determination, consistency in achieving a goal where there is a result/benefit – became the main features of the head of the country which declared about his ambitions in the early 2000s.

The diversity of the slogan that "the East is a thin business" gives many examples when the politician R.T. Erdogan took seemingly "illogical steps", but in the mass consciousness he looked like a decisive leader which gave him popularity. His style was felt by many partners, and maxims of great politics such as "average people can have friends, but politicians never" or "gratitude is not a category of politics", it seems that he adopted them as a time-tested tool of European and world diplomacy. However, the main feature of his style is "permanent impermanence", a set of dual opposites dictated by the situation, circumstances and interests. This fully corresponds to the formula of conducting international affairs which was formulated by the British Prime Minister G.J.T. Palmerston: "We have no eternal allies and we have no eternal enemies; our interests are eternal and constant, and it is our duty to protect these interests".

As time shows in the promotion and confirmation of the "neo-Ottoman" project which has become an existential issue in the political life of the President Erdogan, this line of behavior is his characteristic dominant. Its effectiveness was ensured by the combination of the energy of the "offensive" and the important geostrategic resources of Turkey itself – the Black Sea straits and oil and gas pipelines from the countries of Central Asia to Europe. In its totality, this resource stimulated and stimulates the "great game of interests" of competing states in the region, even under the condition that they are members of NATO and the EU [2, p. 20–28]. But, both in the first and second cases, Ankara is the "master of the situation".

One of the first was the character of the President R.T. Erdogan was felt by the closest friends and ideological allies of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). It is about the "Muslim Brotherhood". The flood of the "Arab

Spring" (2010–2012), in which the "Muslim Brotherhood" played an active role, destroyed not only stability in the countries of the Mediterranean region which caused the rejection of the figure of R.T. Erdogan in the political circles of the local elite, but over time he turned into a significant threat to stability in Turkey itself. The collapse of the "Muslim Brotherhood" in North African countries forced their followers to emigrate to various countries, among which Turkey was the most hospitable. According to emigration statistics in 2023, there were more than 5 thousand active members of the organization in the country. The non-acceptance of radical Islam by a significant part of Turkish society together with the non-acceptance of "guest radicals" clearly undermined the rating of "AKP" and the President R.T. Erdogan himself. The way out of the situation of growing social tension was the decisive actions of the authorities which included the deportation of "Muslim Brotherhood" representatives from the country and the banning of the movement's structures [3].

The next logical step in the deradicalization of religious life in the country was the course towards the "secularization" of Islamism which the "Party of Justice and Development" positioned as reconciliation for the sake of the public good. It is considered the conservative direction, and beyond its borders – the heir to the ideological positions of the radical wing of the "Muslim Brotherhood". In this way the leader of the AKP R.T. Erdogan sought to reconcile Turkish society with the authorities and to strengthen the political basis of the Ottoman project which was gaining strength in the region. Such a combination looked like a simultaneous game on three tables – national, European and regional where Ankara claimed the role of "defender of the rights of all Muslims".

In addition, the secular Kemalist elites fueled by nationalist feelings for Turkey's acquisition of the status of a regional leader, were ready to turn a blind eye to the fact that the Islamization of the country was defined as the all-encompassing denominator of this project [4]. But the prospect of religious conservatism played a role in reducing the number of supporters of the AKP which threatened the political prospects of the president himself. And such a course of events R.T. Erdogan has predicted [5].

The visit of the head of Turkey to Egypt in February 2024 and the meeting with the country's president As-Sisi testified that the radical religious extremism of the "Muslim Brotherhood" was given an appropriate

political assessment, and the crisis in relations between the countries caused by their activities was overcome [3; 6]. Of course, this was a good signal for the leaders of the countries of the region who were still feeling the consequences of the "Arab Spring", and were perceived quite cautiously Ankara's political ambitions.

As the highest principle of activity of the leader of a country with a rich history which strives for greatness, determination and firmness of the President R.T. Erdogan was (and still is) observed in dialogue with the EU. In the last 20 years, it [dialogue] had hopelessness about Turkey's membership in the European Community. A coolness was also felt in relations with the USA and NATO, where Turkey regularly demanded concessions from allied partners in military and political issues.

An example of the difficult history of the relations between the parties can serve as humiliating footage the EU leaders during the meeting with the President Erdogan in March 2020. The world media scrolled through the footage when, during the protocol ceremonial meeting, the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen humiliateingly sought a place for herself on the sofa for secondary persons, and at this time the President



of the European Council Charles Michel, and the President of Turkey were located far away from her. The image of the second person in the EU, von der Leyen, was clearly damaged, but in the system of big politics this gesture indicated her "place" in the solution of bilateral problems and the "feminine principle" in politics. The conclusion of this visit of high-ranking EU officials to Ankara became an eloquent fact of the state of relations between the parties. The President of Turkey did not take part in the final joint press conference of the parties at all, but called the meeting with European politicians "productive". Let us recall that the purpose of the EU leaders' visit was Turkey's compliance with the 2016 bilateral agreement on refugees [7].

The Erdogan's character was also felt by the United States as the NATO leader. Washington's non-fulfillment of the contract for the delivery of F-16s to Turkey for a long time put the question of Sweden and Finland's membership in NATO on a "pause", and the issue of Islamophobia in Sweden and its support for the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party became an additional irritant in the relations of the allies. After all, both countries overcame their NATO marathon: Finland became a NATO member in 2023, and Sweden – in 2024. But the USA also took a "step to meet" Ankara. In January 2024 they approved the decision to sell the promised F-16s to Ankara. The agreement provides for the sale of 40 new F-16s to Turkey and the modernization of another 79 fighters that were already in use in the Turkish armed forces [8]. In these events of world politics Turkey demonstrated the "character" of a fighter who has his own views on European affairs and the prospects of his country in the world order of the XXI century.

3. "Neo-Ottomanism" As a Strategy of Ankara's Greatness

The deep meaning and secret springs of Ankara's new strategy in international affairs can be conveyed to us by a Japanese proverb that emphasizes that "the content of the picture is not in the figures depicted on the canvas, but in the tones and background against which they are". The geography, scope and goals of the "neo-Ottomanism" strategy, which is gaining momentum in the circles of the Turkish establishment, can best be clearly and demonstrably observed when we look at the Turkish presence in such key areas of world politics as the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the

South Caucasus, North Africa, the Red sea, African countries, Central Asia. The general picture of this large geospace, surprisingly, actually coincides with the geography (with the exception of the countries of Central Asia) of the heyday of the Ottoman Empire and the power of the Turkish Sultan [the map of the Ottoman Empire in 1683] [9]. Its second feature is that in the history of great geopolitics, two World Wars have passed through these borders, and today they are perhaps the most important place where the interests of the leading world players compete and a critical area of national stability and security for a large number of countries. On the one hand, for Ankara's self-assertion, this is a very profitable resource, and on the other, it is a field of many risks, the symptoms of which should be felt.

Given the term of political activity of the President R.T. Erdogan and the political force "Justice and Development Party (AKP)", the leader of which he is, the preservative of "neo-Ottomanism" should be perceived as a timely reinterpreted resource of the history of the "strength of spirit" of Turkish identity and its narratives. This [the spirit] reflected the time-forgotten nature of "Ataturkism" of the Turkish elite which never left the thoughts of "the great achievements of past generations" and the hope for the awakening of national self-awareness in a historical sense. The strength of the sprouts of "neo-Ottomanism" should be sought both in the lessons of the past which Turkey received as a result of the two world wars, and in the lessons of the present. In the first case, she twice found herself on the "other side of history", but thanks to the British crown and the inability of Russia and the USSR to influence the situation at that time, she retained the status of "mistress" of the Black Sea straits. In the system of the world economy the control of the straits [trade routes] gives strategic importance to the state – the owner of considerable status and weight in the international environment, and its political course becomes the subject of attention of both allies and partners. In the second, the European perspective [membership in the EU] seems to have ceased to be an interesting project for Ankara. Based on their own experience, the leadership of Turkey was finally convinced that Europe is increasingly becoming a "Christian club" which means the historical non-acceptance of Turkey in it on religious grounds. That is, as an Islamic country.

The European bureaucracy itself and its leaders, who consistently pursued (and continue to pursue) a course of non-acceptance of Turkey

in the EU, have caused a backlash in Ankara. It is about the fact that in Ankara the "first persons" of the EU, it seems, have long since ceased to be perceived with the "piety" of dear guests and "teachers". After all, the European bureaucracy was not interested in Turkey itself and the geography and scope of its interests, but in the European project as a "big dream", where Ankara's line of behavior will correspond to the formula "equal among equals". The reaction to such a perspective was demonstrated by the Turkish leader quite convincingly in 2016 which means that the relations between the parties are in a state of "complete uncertainty" as evidenced by the 24 years of the status of "official candidate" for EU membership.

Turkey's neo-Ottoman project should be considered as a consistent policy of fragmented materialization of Ankara's interests in the countries of the Afro-Asian space through the creation of diverse regional structures with their subsequent integration into a single economic and spiritual and cultural space. It is clear that Ankara takes the leading role and leadership in this new supra-regional formation. So, today we are talking about the well-known Organization of Turkic States [which is already a proven platform for interstate cooperation], and prospective integration structures in the South Caucasus region, in North Africa, the Near and Middle East – Asia Minor, and the Red Sea region with the involvement of the countries of the African continent.

For the first time, such a vision of the future of Turkey was formed in the work of Ahmet Davutoglu, head of the department of international relations at Beykent University in 2002 in the work "Strategic depth. Turkish foreign policy". In it, he substantiates the need to strengthen the subjectivity of the country in the conduct of international affairs and the return of Turkey's influence on the regions of the former Ottoman world. In the context of achieving the stated goal, the key opinion of the author is the understanding and assimilation of the country's leadership of the past years of the history of the art of politics, when "before the Ottoman Empire there was no single West", and today, when there is no European unity before Turkey either. In the conditions when European diplomacy is engrossed in the struggle of interests and the creation of conflicts, according to the author [A. Davutoglu], Turkey should conduct subtle diplomacy both with the EU as a whole and with its members while pursuing the goals of "strategic depth". That is, the return of its influence to the regions of the historical Ottoman Empire. The

author's thoughts fix certain basic priorities and "operational" principles of the policy of "strategic depth".

The basic elements as the basis [foundation] of the project should be:

– own vision and understanding of the events taking place in the world and in the countries of the Middle East (the Arab-Israel conflict, the problems of Palestine and Lebanon, the nuclear program of Iran, etc.);

– meaningful and systematic policy of Ankara which is devoid of contradictions in any region of the world;

– the spread of Turkish "soft power" based on a new discourse: "security for all", "economic interdependence", "political dialogue", "harmony and mutual respect" [10].

According to A. Davutoglu, the scraps of the new foundation should be the "operational" principles which he lists in the number of five. The first principle proclaims the need to maintain a balance between the freedom of citizens and their security. The balance of interests is the key to a constructive dialogue between the authorities and society in the formation of an environment of resistance in the state to risks and dangers. The second principle concerns the external contour of security, that is, relations with neighboring countries. It should be built on the basis of "consent and mutual respect" ["zero problems with neighbors"]. The third involves "peaceful diplomacy", that is prevention of crises and joint neutralization of challenges. The fourth declares the multi-vector nature of Ankara's foreign policy. Turkey's membership in blocs and unions should not affect the state and level of relations with countries that are not members of these organizations. The main guideline should be benevolence and mutual benefit. The fifth principle proclaims "rhythmic diplomacy" [10]. In the future this measured caution was called the policy of "noble solitude" which meant Ankara's gentle withdrawal from the rhetoric of the "bloc way of thinking" of European politicians and the embrace of Washington in the context of Turkey's fulfillment of obligations regarding "joint action" within the framework of NATO.

Already as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (2009), Ahmet Davutoglu presented the policy of "noble solitude" more objectively and purposefully. He said the following: "Draw a circle around Turkey on the map with a diameter of 1,000 kilometers – 20 countries will fall into it, draw a circle with a diameter of 3,000 kilometers – 70 countries will fall into it. Turkey will be interested in its surroundings" [11].

So, the minister's slogan that "Turkey will take an interest in its surroundings" is quite organically correlated with the declared principle of "rhythmic diplomacy" and the steps it began to implement for its materialization. In the context of revealing the strategy of "neo-Ottomanism", it is necessary to consider the most significant events of the XXI century and projects in which Ankara took an active part, and which brought certain political, economic, humanitarian and military dividends to Turkey.

4. Ankara's Efforts and the Results of "Rhythmic Diplomacy"

The organization of the Turkic states is the most significant achievement of the foreign policy goals of Ankara's "rhythmic diplomacy". The impetus for its creation was the Nakhichevan Agreements (Nakhichevan, 2009) which was later consolidated and expanded by new institutions of unity: the Economic Council of the Turkic-speaking States, the Association of Law Enforcement Bodies of the Military Status of Eurasia, the Turkic Academy, the International Organization for the Joint Development of Turkic Culture and Art, etc.

It can be said that the "game of history" in the 90s of the past and at the beginning of the new XXI century arranged in such a way that the Asian "five" – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan" – with the collapse of the USSR found themselves at the crossroads of a new round of the great geopolitical game and needed external support. In a situation of confusion and a vacuum of reliable allies Turkey turned out to be the most acceptable country. Two factors played in its favor. The first was related to the country's economic performance in the first decade of the 2000s. In the second [the second factor] – the historical unity of the spirit of the peoples of the countries of the region was manifested. That is regarding their linguistic, cultural and religious community. Both the first and the second served as a convincing foundation for the President R.T. Erdogan to position Turkey's role in the region as a "common good for everyone and everything". In October 2019, at a meeting of the Turkic Council in Baku, he stated that he does not separate Central Asian countries from Turkey: "Turkestan is our ancestral nest, our main source" – he said. We are all too a big family of 300 million people who speak the same language, believe in the same religion, have the same history, culture, and share the same civilization. I know that our

Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen brothers look at Turkey as we look at them. They consider our country their home" [12].

The member states began to build the home of the "Turkic world" with the help of "soft" power. Its main tool was the gradual transformation of the language space based on the "Latin alphabet" [13; 14]. Beginning in 1993 the leaders of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan decided to switch their countries from Cyrillic to Latin. On the part of officials such a step was explained by the origin of the Russian-speaking population and the need for national cultural revival. But the transition process itself was prolonged for political purposes. In Kazakhstan it began to be implemented in 2017 and should end in 2025. In Uzbekistan it began on January 1, 2023.

Another tool was the creation of various educational and cultural institutions of Turkey in the countries of the region with the aim of attracting young people to Turkish culture and getting to know its way of life and customs [14]. Thus, in the early 1990s the "Turkish Agency for International Cooperation", "International Organization of Turkic Culture", "Yunusa Emre" Centers, "Hizmet" Lyceums, etc. were founded [15].

Considering the conflict potential of the region, Ankara gradually began to involve the countries of the region in its military sphere of influence. It is about the intentions of Turkey to materialize the prospective project "Army of Turan". The seriousness of Ankara's intentions is evidenced by the fact that in October 2020 the Minister of Defense of Turkey visited the countries of the region on a business trip [12]. But it is too early to talk about the success of this entity, at least due to the realities of the military and political orientations of the countries of the region: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan are members of the Organization of collective security agreement, and the neutrality of Turkmenistan is approved by the UN. In addition, Ankara's closest ally of Azerbaijan, as an existential link between Turkey and the countries of the region is an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Such a step on the part of Baku may hide negative consequences and image losses for Azerbaijan itself. In addition, judging by the statement of R.T. Erdogan, which he made on March 8, 2024 at a meeting with the TÜGVA youth group in Istanbul [16], the time of his political life has a definite term – 2028 (the date when his term as president ends), and the new "political winds" may bring new geopolitical realities for Turkey and the countries of the region.

A sign of these likely changes were the results of local elections in the country in March 2024, which brought significant losses in the levers of political and administrative influence for the political force "AKP". AKP's main opponents, the Republican People's Party gained control over a large part of western Turkey, and won in most of the Black Sea and central Anatolia, areas traditionally considered hostile to Erdogan's party policies. Istanbul and Ankara also remained behind the opposition which was considered by the opponents of "AKP" as a "political earthquake" [17].

Africa and the Middle East. According to analysts the success of Turkish policy in African countries is based on two pillars – the "absence of imperialism or colonialism in Turkey" and the presence of "mutual respect and mutual benefit" in it which is not characteristic of colonizers. These words belong to the President of Turkey R.T. Erdogan [18]. Based on these announced guidelines Ankara has created a unique model of partnership, in which the intention of Ankara's leadership is to avoid conflict situations with the strategies of other countries, but at the same time keep its interests in the sights of political decisions.

The following statistics testify to Turkey's activity in the African region. The President of Turkey R.T. Erdogan made 53 official visits to the countries of the region and was in 31 countries. As of 2022 Ankara has opened embassies in 44 countries (up from 12 in 2002) and plans to increase their number to 50 [18]. Ankara participates in the work of almost all significant African organizations: the Economic Community of West African Countries, the Economic Community of Central African Countries, the East African Community, the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, etc. In 2021 Turkey's trade with the countries of the region reached 30 billion US dollars (compared to \$6.8 billion in 2005). The share of the countries of the region in the total volume of trade in 2021 was almost 10% (versus 4.5% in 2003) [18].

The result of Ankara's organic policy in Africa, according to the non-governmental organization AfricaLeads, is that by the indicator of the "image" of the partner countries of the region. Turkey is among the five countries that are located outside the continent which is considered a great criterion for success. This contributes to the perception of Ankara as a reliable partner and a desirable country in promising large international, economic and humanitarian projects. In total Turkish

companies took part in 1,150 projects for a total amount of more than 78 billion US dollars [18].

In December 2021 the III Turkey-Africa summit was held in Turkey which was attended by leaders [13 presidents] and ministers from 39 countries of the continent. Such a representative meeting attracted considerable attention of the world and European mass media, not so much because of its main slogan "Expanding partnership in the name of joint development and prosperity", but because too "sensitive issues" of major politics were also discussed at it. It is about Ankara's consistent course in the African region to strengthen its positions through the well-known mechanism of military presence and arms exports. It is no secret that such a strategy automatically increases its role in the domestic political life of partner countries and becomes an irritant in relations with other players. In addition, as recent events in the countries of "French" Africa have shown the military elite of these countries has become more active in assessing the domestic political life. First of all, this was manifested in state rebellions and the removal from power of "traditional" elites, who were focused on preserving the colonial heritage and the power of the former host countries.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in the period from 2015 to 2019 the African arms market was dominated by Russia. It accounted for 49 % of the continent's imports. Since 2020 its positions have been significantly reduced due to pressure from the military-industrial complex of Turkey [19].

The new dynamics of the market were caused by two reasons. The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan [supported by Ankara] (2020) was a war of technological "agenda" for which the military formations of Armenia and Karabakh were unprepared. The combination of technological weapons systems, such as Bayraktar-TB2 drones, and traditional weapons in mountainous areas as a limiting factor in the actions of units and units enabled the armed forces of Azerbaijan to dominate the operational space, inflict significant losses on the enemy, and eventually defeat them. This is the first reason. The second reason is dictated by the commercialization of the "Bayraktar" project and its active promotion to the arms market. Since the Karabakh war the "Bayraktar-TB2" system has become a hallmark of the Turkish military industry, and it itself is a "locomotive" that opens markets for other types of weapons.

According to the data of the Assembly of Turkish Arms Exporters the largest buyers of Turkish arms among African countries are Ethiopia, Angola, Chad, Morocco, Libya, Somalia, Tunisia [19]. The French publication "Capital" states that Turkey gradually expanded its influence in Africa thanks to a network of 37 military offices on the continent which is in line with the goal announced by the President Erdogan. And this is too ambitious – to triple the sale of Turkish weapons and bring the volume of sales to 78 billion US dollars [20].

The power factor in the meaning of "hard power" on the African continent was demonstrated by Ankara in Somalia, Libya and Chad. Thus, in September 2017 the Chief of the General Staff of Turkey, general H. Akar, took part in the opening of a military base in Somalia, and in May 2021 Turkey began construction of a military base in Balji in Chad. It should be noted here that previously a detachment of the Turkish armed forces sided with the rebels who overthrew the regime of Mahamat Ali Mahdi [21]. Currently, Turkey is actively supplying Chad with light aircraft, drones, small arms and participates in the training of military specialists [22].

Ankara's attempt to gain a foothold in Libya and play against Russia, where Moscow has traditional "anti-colonist" positions and friends among the country's elite and political forces [the Popular Front, the February Union, the Hezbollah Front, and the Communist Party] suffered a fiasco [21]. The new president of Libya, Faiz Sarraj, who came to power in 2019 failed to become the leader of the nation as the former Gaddafi despite the support of Ankara. It is about Ankara's use of a "terrorist resource" that it controls in the city of Idlib (Syria). Here Turkey played the role of a "terrorist hub" by transferring about 10,000 fighters to Libya in support of Faiz Saraji [15]. However, despite such activity in the end it received a "bitter lesson of the great geopolitics" of the new era. Of course, it has a lot of negativity for the project of "neo-Ottomanism" on the African continent. It is about the denunciation of the already signed agreements in the military sphere and the agreement between the parties on the "expansion of the maritime borders of Turkey" in the Mediterranean Sea to Derna [21]. At one time the content of these treaties between the two countries irritated Athens, Nicosia and Moscow, from whom the leadership of Libya and Turkey received the corresponding "notes".

In the Middle East there are two critical points for Ankara's "neo-Ottomanism" project – these are Syria and Palestine. They were both parts of the former Ottoman Empire and, according to the Treaty of Versailles (1918), came under the mandates of France and Great Britain respectively.

The Syrian issue has been on the agenda of international politics since 2011. Its prologue was the "Arab Spring" which, starting in 2010, destroyed the regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen. "Spring" announced new guidelines for social and political life, and most importantly, it marked the return to power of the forces that were based on the spiritual postulates of the "Muslim Brotherhood". It is clear that this was no way correlated with the values of Western democracy, but on the contrary, the "Muslim Brotherhood" put many issues of public life under the control of the respective religious communities.

The transformation of the political crisis in Syria into the civil war (2011–2014), and then into the war with international terrorism (2015–2018) which affected the interests of too many countries, as shown by the picture of international coalitions, seems to be fundamentally changed Ankara's views on the great geopolitics of the new century and its place in the new world rankings [23; 24]. Despite its membership in NATO and special relations with the USA, Ankara realized that by supporting the Syrian President B. Asadau with Russia and Iran in the fight against international terrorism, it would receive more than when it stood on the side of the USA and the NATO bloc which sought to overthrow him. This line of behavior did not threaten Ankara in any way due to several reasons. The first reason was that Turkey has repeatedly demonstrated that the solidarity and disciplines of NATO membership are not only a norm of relations between allies, but also a resource of "bargaining and profit" in politics, especially when issues concern security. Under such conditions the system of dependence of the parties to the relationship begins to be governed not by promulgated norms, but by the circumstances of the time/new situation and "higher interests". So, from the point of view of competing interests at this time and under these circumstances Turkey had nothing to lose here.

The second reason was related to the issue of a more delicate sphere – the need to change the image of the country which it acquired during the first period of the war (2011–2015) in Syria. At that time Turkey actively supported the terrorist "Daesh/ISIS", "Jahaban Nusra", "Free

Syrian Army" and other terrorist groups in the fight against Damascus. In addition, Turkey looked like a robber country through whose territory the wealth of Syria – oil, museum exhibits, etc. – went to the West. The informative picture of the looting of Syria by "fighters for democracy" clearly did not work for the image of Ankara and its political leadership. The defeat of the most odious terrorist project "Daesh/ISIL" and Ankara's participation in the settlement of the Syrian issue added weight to Ankara as a peacemaker. It actively participated in the implementation of the Moscow Agreements of March 5, 2020 which created a mechanism for the reconciliation of the warring parties, but again with certain reservations [requirements] for itself.

It is about the fact that due to Ankara's participation in the anti-terrorist operation in Syria, the President R.T. Erdogan learned a very important lesson for himself which emphasizes that in addition to "soft power", Turkey must also possess "hard power". After all, in the problem of terrorism and its consequences for the country, hopes for allies increasingly looked like too "exaggerated expectations", at a time when Turkish realities said otherwise. The remnants of ISIS armed formations in Syria (the city of Idlib which according to the agreements is still controlled by Turkey) and the activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in the East of the country have become quite an irritant in Turkey's relations with Damascus on the one hand, and Turkey with Washington and NATO – from the second. The stumbling block was the "Kurdish issue" on which Ankara's allies had and still have their "plans". Such duplicity put Ankara in the position of a "target" for terrorist attacks and, as a result, possible socio-political upheavals in the middle of the country. In addition, Syria also has many questions for Ankara regarding the implementation of the agreements it has already reached. First of all, this concerns the withdrawal of military formations from the northern border regions of Syria (the so-called security zone) and the final demilitarization, and transfer of the city of Idlib, where the remnants of ISIS terrorist structures are located to the control of Damascus. Negotiations on these issues that took place between the parties in 2023 did not bring any results. At the same time the President R.T. Erdogan called on Damascus to take joint action against Kurdish terrorist groups which was accepted by Damascus as another insult and Turkey's intention to dictate its vision regarding the spirit of the already signed documents [25].

Palestine. Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire for almost 400 years. The years 1922–1947 were the time of the intention of the people of this historical territory to acquire their own statehood, when, as a result of the First World War and the decision of the League of Nations, it was under the Mandate of Great Britain. The complexity and acuteness of the issue at this time are conveyed by the White Papers of the British Government (U. Churchill), the White Book – 1930 (Pasfield memorandum) and the Balfour Declaration which are devoted to exactly this issue [26].

As evidenced by these documents, the main problem of the Palestinian pacification process was the desire of the London government to consistently implement the "Jewish hearth" project on the territory of Palestine at the expense of the resettlement of the Jewish population from other countries. First of all, it was about European countries. The consequences of this policy were the aggravation of the land issue (settlers bought up land) and the dominance of representatives of the Jewish community in local authorities. Attempts to create a Special Joint Commission to settle the most acute issues of two large ethnic groups, as proposed by Lord Passfield (White Paper-1930), failed.

The main reason for the fiasco was the fact that the "extreme right" played on the situation on both sides which was strengthened by the consistent departure of official London from the recommendations of the author of the White Book-1930 [26]. As a result, in 1947, Great Britain refused the Mandate referring to the "problematic nature of the issue", and the plan for the partition of Palestine (1947) and the creation of two states – Palestine and Israel which was adopted by the UN (Resolution No. 181 On the plan for the partition of Palestine) turned out to be "a big farce politicians" for a long time. Its results were a series of Arab-Israeli wars and the tragedy of the Arab population of Palestine in Israel's modern war with the Hamas movement.

Today, among the countries of the Middle East region Turkey's voice in defense of Palestine and its population is the loudest, most demanding and uncompromising. Ankara assesses the conduct of IDF military operations in the enclave against Hamas as a war crime against the civilian population, and Tel Aviv's policy as genocide. In a speech at the 15 traditional Iftar dinner with the ambassadors of the countries accredited to Turkey he said the following: "In the last 5 months Israel has turned Gaza into a large

extermination camp, the examples of which we saw only during the Second World War... Gaza has turned into the largest cemetery of children and women... Israeli officials should be held accountable for the deaths of Palestinian children not attack us to cover up the truth about the genocide... Israel listens to no one, continues its war crimes, and even becomes arrogant enough to threaten countries that call on it to cease fire... Unfortunately, I am forced to state that it is the "double policy" of those who provide military and diplomatic support to Israel that gives Netanyahu and his accomplices such courage" [27]. Let us remind you that during the five months of the war in Palestine more than 32,000 people (mostly children and women) were killed and 73,000 were wounded. The tone of the Turkish leader's assessments and statements leave no doubt about Ankara's support for Palestine and its struggle for the independence of the Palestinian state from Tel Aviv.

One of the factors of Ankara's position is the fact that, contrary to the USA and the EU, Ankara does not consider the Hamas movement a terrorist organization and considers it a "group of liberators and mujahideen who defend their land and their people" from Israeli arbitrariness in their legal territory. It should be said here that Ankara is not alone in this assessment. For example, it is supported by Russia, whose leadership considered Hamas as a component of the national liberation movement of the Palestinian people as early as 2006 [24].

The situation of permanent war between Palestine and Israel was discussed by the President R. T. Erdogan proposes to end the 1967 borders through a peace agreement between the parties and the creation of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem [28]. Ankara's position clearly contradicts Israel's views, but here one should take into account the Arab world, the already declared positions of world political leaders, and most importantly, the main ally of Tel Aviv – the USA. They also support this idea. Voted "against" Israel in the UN Security Council for the first time (March 25, 2024) (the US abstained from the UN Security Council resolution on Israel's immediate ceasefire in Gaza which was perceived by the Israeli leadership as a betrayal [29]) Washington made it clear to Tel Aviv that its internal problems – the presidential race and the election of the owner of the White House in 2025 – cannot become hostage to the "free behavior" of its satellite in the Middle East. Let us

recall that 14 members of the Security Council voted for the decision proposed by 10 member countries.

South Caucasus. In the project of the Ottoman Empire, according to R.T. Erdogan, the region of the South Caucasus is the key to its "integrity and closed organicity". The materialization of these ideas of Ankara and Baku should have taken place after the end of the Azerbaijan-Armenian war over Karabakh in 2020 and the signing of a peace agreement between the two countries. However, both capitals clearly did not take into account the importance of this region in the geopolitical plans of the USA and EU leaders. Unexpectedly for many, Armenia also demonstrated its vision of the situation. It is enough to refer to the works of the former US Deputy Secretary of State Z. Brzezinski as "Great Chess" or "Choice. World Dominance or Global Leadership" to understand how important this area is to the policy of US world dominance. It seems that today the White House and its allies seek to compensate for the defeat in Afghanistan (2020) by patronizing Armenia and thus strengthen their position in the region. Yerevan actively plays along with this strategy of new players. On the one hand, the leadership of Armenia clearly does not want to conduct a peaceful dialogue with Baku, and on the other hand, due to the "good will" of Yerevan, it is turning into a "multi-layered factor" of a new battle for the Caucasus.

The meeting in the "2+1" format held on April 5, 2024 between representatives of the parties (the Prime Minister of Armenia N. Pashinyan, the President of the European Union Ursula von der Leyen, the US Secretary of State E. Blinken, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and security policy J. Borrell) became a signal for Turkey and Baku that the USA and the EU support Armenia in its aspirations for security, peace and prosperity, and are ready to provide Yerevan with large funds for these purposes. The President of the European Union, Ursula von der Leyen stated that "We would make investments to strengthen the economy and society of Armenia making them more durable and stable in the face of upheavals", and the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken emphasized that the main goal of the meeting was to confirm transatlantic support for "prosperous future of the Armenian people, as well as a more integrated and more peaceful region of the South Caucasus" [30].

The rapprochement of the parties should be stimulated by aid from the European Union in the amount of 270 million euros (over the next four

years) and the United States. They will allocate more than 65 million dollars to support reforms in Armenia. As noted by E. Blinkentse, it is 50 % more than two years ago [30].

According to experts, the tonality and modality of the statements of the meeting parties were heard not only in Ankara and Baku, but also in Moscow, Tehran, Tbilisi and the countries of the Central Asian Five. This means only one thing there will be a "reaction in response". Which one exactly – only time will tell.

According to the Azerbaijani political scientist and host of the program of TVAZT Atayev, "Armenia is torpedoing all previous agreements... Today, the conflict settlement process takes place on three platforms: Russian, European and American. But the Armenian side has started its new game". [31]. Its contours began to be determined in Washington, Brussels and Paris. How it happens in practice can be seen in the agreements between Paris and Yerevan regarding the delivery of various weapons systems [32] and the intensification of the political dialogue between the leaders of France and Armenia. So, Yerevan deliberately began to heat up the situation in the North Caucasus driving the issue of the peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan into a corner of aggressive rhetoric and new scenarios of struggle. And this is quite a threat to the success of the entire project of "neo-Ottomanism" by R.T. Erdogan and he understands it well.

5. Conclusions

1. The project of "neo-Ottomanism" by R.T. Erdogan should be seen as the materialization of the policy of reviving the "greatness" of Turkey as a regional power. Historical memory and nostalgia for the narratives of the past, supported by a part of Turkish society and the country's elite, combined with the economic situation of the early 2000s, contributed to the country's stabilization and growth. The rise of the economy in the first decade of the new century served as a basis for Turkey to declare its foreign policy ambitions. Supported by R.T. Erdogan's "Strategic Depth" (2002), Ahmet Davutoglu and Ankara's consistent implementation of the "rhythmic diplomacy" strategy enabled the successful implementation of a number of international projects in a short period of time in which Turkey began to play a leading role. First of all we are talking about the "Turkey Peace" and "Turkey – Africa" projects. The regional, political and economic geography

of these entities makes it possible to assess the "benefit" of new acquisitions by Turkey and the potential risks it faces from competing countries.

2. Today, the main threat to the "neo-Ottoman empire" project of R.T. Erdogan is carried by the rapid dynamics of political events unfolding in the South Caucasus. With the recognition of the oil and gas prospects of Azerbaijan and the countries of Central Asia for the world economy. This region found itself in the field of "big politics" of non-regional players pursuing their own goals. Since 2020 – the time of the end of the Azerbaijan-Armenian war for the liberation of Karabakh – the Ankara-Baku tandem found itself in the "struggle circle" of allies, friends and partners, whose statements, rhetoric and actions are not only contradictory in the slogans of diplomacy [change of concepts], but most importantly – lead to escalation of conflict and confrontation. The polyphony of interests of the countries that shape the situation in the region does not work for peace, but for the transformation of the region into a "clone of the Middle East" where permanent "peace/war" determines the interests of the "great" and "powerful" states.

3. 2028 is the time when the President R.T. Erdogan will leave big politics. Who and what force will support the project of the "Neo-Ottoman Empire" becomes a question not only for the "AKP", but also for the country's political elite. Most of the new political forces, such as the "Republican People's Party" – the main opponent of the "AKP" in the struggle for power in the country, profess European orientation and values. This means that on the track of a "united Europe" they will be asked to change their foreign policy appetites and make concessions on many issues of interest to Brussels and Washington. The first issue will be the "Neo-Ottoman Empire" project.

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