

Soft power and sharp power in Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party rule

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The Republic of Türkiye is an example of a state with an imperial past, significant economic and military potential, and a strategic geographical location. At the same time, the multifaceted identity of Türkiye – a muslim state that has chosen to “forget” its Islamic heritage and become a full member of the Western world – makes it a very attractive study of analysis for international relations scholars. Türkiye under the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) rule has moved away from the conservative foreign policy of the founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and under the leadership of the party which has been in rule since 2002, is an example of a middle power with ambitions to become a global power in international relations.

This thesis examines the soft power and sharp power concept and their impact on Turkish foreign policy. The theoretical framework is built on neoclassical realism theory in international relations which incorporates into the realist paradigm such elements from other theoretical approaches as: the importance of the relationship between state and society, the role of domestic politics, the constructivist approach, the importance of international norms. The neoclassical theory is significant for an analysis of evolution in both foreign policy and the international order, which is relevant to the topic of this dissertation.

The findings suggest that tendency towards the use of sharp power tools in Turkish foreign policy has been increasingly influenced by the progressive erosion of democratic standards following events such as the Gezi Park protests, the failed coup attempt in 2016, as well as the regional changes associated with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in MENA region. Following Turkey’s transition to a presidential system in 2018, this phenomenon became even more intense as a result of the extreme subordination of foreign policy to the individual, increasing its unpredictability and reinforcing the propensity of Turkish decision-makers to brinkmanship strategy in foreign policy.

Keywords: softpower, sharppower, Turkish foreign policy, competitive authoritarianism, democratic backsliding.