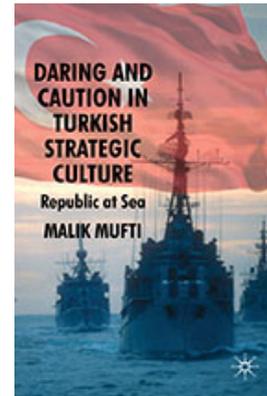


Malik Mufti, 2009, *Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture. Republic at Sea*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 233 pages.

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The main idea behind the book was initially outlined in a 1998<sup>1</sup> article. Malik Mufti realized, even as security crises were unfolding in the first years after the end of the Cold War that a mutation took place in the Turkish foreign policy. The core principles of the Republican minimalist posture determined by a risk-averse, inward looking strategic culture shaped by the traumas of the Great War, did not correspond any longer to the domestic and external realities. Even more dramatic, these imperatives were now for the first time after many decades impossible to uphold, leaving room for the reassertion of a cosmopolitan risk-taking counter-paradigm. Mufti looks at this transition through the cultural lenses of the main decision-makers involved in formulating and implementing security policy. As the investigation covers the entire Republican period, the book is correspondingly divided in three parts (nine chapters in total) that continue the maritime metaphor: 'taking root', 'taking sail' and 'floundering'.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to imagine why the author tackled the critical question of the origins of assertiveness exhibited by Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s. A reason emphasized by Mufti is that due to shifting configurations of power, the central desiderata of the Republican doctrine – internal order and modernization/homogenization ('Peace at Home') – could no longer be achieved by disengagement ('Peace in the World'). Consequently, whenever the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government were too weak to uphold the latter imperative, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) adventured in external interventions to destroy internal enemies (e.g. against the PKK havens in Iraq in 1995 and Syria in 1998).

A second explanation for the eagerness of some generals to fight even in Iran and Greece is derived from the fact that '[t]he enhancement of TAF's

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<sup>1</sup> Malik Mufti, 'Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Winter 1998), pp. 32-50.

technical and strategic capabilities during the 1990s brought... a psychological transformation as well, reflected in greater self confidence and the pleasure that the ability to yield power brings' (p. 122).

Mufti's book is part of the constructivist security studies paradigm. However, the author's adherence to the concept of 'strategic culture' i.e. to the idea that 'historically conditioned paradigmatic beliefs, values and symbols shape how decision-makers perceive the security and wellbeing of their polity' is not deterministic. He does believe that the causal autonomy of strategic culture' can coexist with 'the conscious manipulation of cultural rhetoric and symbols by political leaders'. He demonstrates this by illustrating the crucial role of leaders like Suleyman Demirel and Turgut Özal in interpreting and reshaping the strategic cultural paradigm, according to their own evaluation of external opportunities and threats.

The first two chapters analyze the context in which the Republican paradigm emerged, discussing both its founding documents (e.g. the Six Arrows Doctrine) and the foreign policy model of behavior it consecrated with specific reference to Atatürk's archetypal statecraft. Chapters three and four innovate theoretically, by interpreting two decades (1950-1960 and 1983-1993) previously perceived only as deviations from the Kemalist doctrine, in the terms of what Mufti conceptualizes as a counter-paradigm in Turkish strategic culture - the Imperial or 'Neo-Ottoman' one.

Fatin Zorlu, Adnan Menderes and Celâl Bayar (leaders of the Democrat Party and of Turkey in the 1950s) denounced the modest ambitions of the CHP establishment, wanting to transform Turkey in a 'Little America', but they utterly failed in their Middle Eastern gambit, provoking the first military coup in the history of the Republic. This adventure was completed three decades later when contingent developments made Turgut Özal Prime-Minister. Benefiting from the crisis of the Republican paradigm in the 1980s, he formulated a program of changes amounting to a paradigm shift, but was in the end sabotaged by the establishment: "Özal hitched the daring temperament of the Democrats...to a broader and more resonant neo-Ottoman vision that embraced the newly mobilized identities (religious and ethnic) in Turkish society as a source of strategic power rather than vulnerability" (p. 5).

The next two chapters examine the post-1991 'years of living dangerously'; the beneficial new status-quo emerging at the turn of the millennium after the defeat of the PKK, the triumphs in the Greek territorial waters dispute,

and the Cyprus missile crisis. The last chapter focuses on the more acute crisis the Republican establishment entered after the US Iraq invasion and the spectacular rise of the Islamic-rooted, but conservative democratic AK party.

These events definitively broke the consensus within the upper echelons of TAF both with regard to the means and to the most desirable ends of national security. Irrespective of the prevailing option at domestic level, be it accommodation with AKP or a new coup (less and less probable after the latest developments) or externally: strengthened alliance with US, going for the EU accession or for Eurasianism, will inescapably bear the mark of the Republican strategic culture legacy. It is so because the 'vector outcome of the cross-currents depends on which set of fears and suspicions seems most urgent to the individuals in position of command...' (p. 164)

Mufti used the most appropriate data to support his evaluations of the Turkish strategic cultural paradigm. Apart from policy documents, statistics, and scholarly work, the book builds on 65 interviews. He investigates the perceptions of top Turkish politicians (including the former PM, Bülent Ecevit and the current President Abdullah Gül), high and middle-rank diplomats and senior officers of TAF and Turkish Secret Service (MIT). The author also interviewed former US ambassadors to Turkey and other specialists of the State Department working on Turkey and the Middle East.

The book is a highly valuable reading to all those interested in understanding contemporary Turkey, the behavior of its elites and their foreign policy thinking. Although the analysis focuses on particular crises testing the commitment of Republican elites to their strategic culture, the reader is provided with helpful reviews of the main political and social evolutions happening in between the momentous episodes. Overall, Mufti has done an excellent job, which beyond the practical policy-making usefulness will surely inspire cohorts of future security scholars.