From Köprü (Bridge) to Merkez (Center)

Turkey’s Regional and Global Impact

ALDERSON AUDITORIUM in the KANSAS UNION

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Located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Turkey has always been pivotal in global affairs. While its international stature has been on the rise since the end of the Second World War, the nature of Turkey’s role in global affairs and its foreign policy directions continue to undergo considerable change.

During the Cold War, it was common to describe Turkey using the metaphors of “buffer” or “bastion.” At the close of the 20th century, Turkish political elites began actively promoting an image of the country as a köprü or “bridge” between East and West, indicating its function as an intermediary between continents, cultures, and geopolitical spaces. After the accession of the Justice and Development Party to power, the new economically liberal and religiously conservative elite began referring to Turkey as a merkez or “center locale,” suggesting a place of significance in and of itself to which people come, rather than merely a space “in between.” This seemingly subtle discursive shift has been accompanied by increasingly pro-active Turkish public diplomacy, building on Turkey’s expanding soft power in the Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia. As Turkey engages new regions and actors and continues building relations with old allies, it develops new capacities in regional and global contexts.

The evolving role of Turkey in regional and global affairs, in tandem with major historic developments including the global economic crisis and changes in the Middle East and North Africa following the Arab Spring, begs the question of the extent to which Turkey is a “game-changer” in the region and the world. The goal of this conference is to assess Turkey’s current role in regional and global contexts, its impact and foreign policy in relation to Middle Eastern nations, including Iran, Iraq, Syria and Israel, and its relations with Russia, the EU/Europe, China, and the US.

The conference organizers invite 200-word proposals for papers in the Social Sciences and Humanities that address the conference theme. Please send papers to crees@ku.edu, subject line: “Turkey Conference.” Deadline: December 1, 2013.

Possible topics may include but are not limited to:
- Turkey’s Soft Power
- Turkey in the Balkans, the Middle East, Caucasus, or Central Asia
- Turkey and Its Neighbors: Changes and Consequences of 10 Years under the “Strategic Depth” Foreign Policy Doctrine
- Turkey and the US: Enemies or Friends?
- International Dimensions in Turkey’s Domestic Politics
- Turkish History, Culture, Geography and Religion: New Strategic Assets in Foreign and Domestic Politics

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