

By Roger Green, Principal reviewer for the UK Defence Forum

A Review of a Global Strategy Forum pamphlet entitled:

Turkey: a new bridge in a network world by The Rt Hon Michael Ancram QC MP.

This pamphlet by Michael Ancram is a good 'pocket guide' to Turkey in respect of its developing foreign policy and its internal political problems. Due to its geographical position and Islamic culture, Turkey has long been seen as the bridge between the Eastern and Western spheres although its influence post-Ottoman Empire has diminished. In recognising that the world has moved on from the dominance of superpower blocs and has become more networked, Ancram suggests that perhaps Turkey is now building a new kind of bridge based on commerce, diplomacy and facilitation between conflicted nations. It is this notion that the pamphlet sets out to explore.

It is the idea of Turkey as a pivotal, central nation through its activism in the Middle East and self-confidence in regional affairs that has registered with world leaders. This has been described by analysts as neo-Ottomanism and is the philosophy being pursued by the ruling Turkish AKP party who are also looking to re-balance their outlook after too many years of looking too much to Europe. In terms of regional activity Ancram provides adequate evidence of Turkey's role as an intermediary over a wide range of conflicts whilst recognising that Turkey is Israel's closest friend in the Muslim world but remains the only NATO country to have welcomed the Hamas leader. He also raises the more vexing question over Turkey's increasingly close relations with Iran and whether Iran will become a friend or a threat to Turkey in the region.

In terms of Turkey's future membership of the EU, the pamphlet lays out the principle arguments demonstrating the value of Turkish membership whilst acknowledging that this would also bring concomitant issues that the EU would need to address. Ancram uses Turkey as an example of why the EU's current 'in-or-out' system is too rigid and why a more flexible system would be of wider advantage. In noting the improvement in Turkey/US post the Bush regime, he points out that President Obama's support of Turkey indicates that he has seen what Europe has missed and that continental European leaders trenchantly opposed to Turkish EU membership should perhaps think again.

The pamphlet rounds off this study of Turkey with a brief review of its domestic policy and the associated constitutional difficulties and historic problems, and comments on the major political crises it has had to face since 2007 that have damaged its international reputation and derailed its EU prospects. Its economic record under the AKP has been good but has suffered during the global financial crisis. It continues to have economic potential as long as the AKP can continue to provide strong leadership although support for the AKP declined in the 2009 elections. That was particularly so in the Kurdish regions but the government is working hard to embrace the Kurds through a number of initiatives that if successful could mark a turning point in Turkish-Kurdish relations.

To end this study, Ancram provides a 'bare bones' list of points that will influence Turkey's future direction and role, and where the responsibility for the key decisions lies. It is clear that whether Turkey's future position will become weaker or grow in influence will depend directly on how Turkey's leaders manage their dealings with the major players in Europe including the EU, the Middle East and the US.

The pamphlet is published by the Global Strategy Forum (www.globalstrategyforum.org). The Global Strategy Forum is an independent, not-for-profit organisation whose purpose is to research and stimulate discussion on international affairs and security issues.