TURKEY AND THE NEW MIDDLE EAST BALANCE OF POWER

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**Turkey and the new Middle East balance of Power**   
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Turkey’s foreign policy is going through a massive transformation. This trend is primarily driven by the new Turkish setting of calling again and again to become a participant in the EU membership. But will Turkey be able to overcome a variety of problems, continue making reforms, and avoid a debilitating intervention in the Middle East?

This article leaves aside Turkey’s domestic drastic changes taking place recently and examines the aspects of foreign policy driven by prospects of EU membership. One of the most critical challenges for Turkish foreign policymakers will be how to handle problems coming out of the Middle East, especially regarding post-war Iraq, and how Turkey responds to these challenges?

If Turkey were to enter the EU, a thoroughly transformed Turkey might become an example to the Middle East for stability and a secular, modern, and democratic form of governance. This Turkey could also help the EU export security to the region and address the area’s conflicts. The alternative to such an outcome could be an unstable Turkey, influenced by a combination of Islam and Turkish nationalism; alternatively, it could become an “illiberal democracy” dominated by the military and hard-liners.

The area known as the Middle East, and its extension to the north through the former Soviet Union, is characterized by long conflicts. Several examples include Chechnya, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the Armenian-Azeri conflict over Nogorno-Karabagh are vivid exhibition of that. That same region is generally characterized by poverty as well as either failed or repressive states reflecting what is so called “illiberal democracy.” Relations among states are characterized by deep mistrust, absence of cooperation, and periodic resort to violence. This situation is reinforced by the chaos in Iraq and growing terrorism from Jihadist groups.

Turkey had enjoyed relative stability and security. Its place in the “West” was, by and large, secure and uncontested. In this period Turkey remained aloof from developments in the Middle East and its foreign policy was typically characterized by non-involvement. Turkey shielded itself from the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well  as the effects of Pan-Arabism. Whatever involvement it had was limited to the economic realm, particularly from

the mid-1970s onward. The end of the Cold War brought major changes and challenges to Turkey both internally and externally.

In terms of the Middle East, the 1990s was a period when Turkey became steadily more involved in the region. The state establishment pursued a policy of expanding Turkey’s relations with the United States as well as Israel. It supported the UN intervention in the 1990/91 Kuwait Crisis. Turkey also made possible the creation of a safe haven for Kurds in northern Iraq, while deploying a military presence in the area to combat the PKK. Turkey supported the Arab-Israeli peace process and actively participated in the multilateral talks initiated with the Madrid conference in 1991. However, once the peace process stalled and entered a deadlock, Turkey’s relations with Israel expanded.

However, despite an attempt by Turkey to project neutrality, the Islamic world as Iran and a number of Arab countries tried to get the Islamic Conference Organization in Tehran to adopt a decision critical of Turkey’s relations with Israel. Consequently and in retaliation, Turkish President Suleiman Demirel found himself having to leave the summit prematurely. In October 1998, Turkey threatened Syria with a military intervention in a successful effort to have Syria expel the PKK’s leader, Abdullah Ocjalan, who enjoyed sanctuary there.

Some observers view that Turkey has never before been this close to achieving its forty-year-old aspiration of joining the EU as a full member. This would also be the sealing of an almost two-century-long process of Westernization and effort to create a modern, secular and democratic society. Yet the chaos and instability created by the U.S. intervention in Iraq is deeply affecting Turkey. It put a lot of pressure on its foreign policy regarding whether or not to support the United States or intervene in northern Iraq. This is a very critical issue for Turkey’s relations with the EU and the Middle East. In the same token, the terrorist attacks of 2003 in Istanbul also threw a shadow on whether Turkey would be able to sustain its political reforms and economic recovery that condition its march toward EU membership. Will Turkey get sucked into a quagmire in Iraq and the Middle East, or will it be able to stay out of any military involvement? Will Turkey be able to shield itself from al-Qa’ida-linked terrorism, handle its domestic economic problems, and continue making and implementing reforms? Will Turkey become a player in the region that can help to extend an EU-like “security community” into the Middle East, or will Turkey engage in policies that might bring a new balance of power to the Middle East?

**Foundations of the New Turkish Foreign Policy**

The most prominent Turkish foreign policy stands is: “Peace at home and peace abroad,” this is considered the keystone of Turkish foreign policy. Kamal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic said in his State of the Nation speech on November 1, 1928: “It is quite natural and therefore simple to explain the fact that a country which is in the midst of fundamental reforms and development should sincerely desire peace and tranquility both at home and in the world”. In that respect Turkish foreign policy did not leave any room for idealism other than it most cherished goal of becoming an equal member of the Western world of nations.

Turkish foreign policy spokesmen have always asserted that they pay particular attention to the safety and security of their country and to their capability to protect the rights of the citizenry against any aggression.” While Turkey’s wished to live in peace with all nations and maintain friendly relations with great and small powers alike, it was always prepared to defend itself from potential aggressors.

One of the most important focal points of Ataturk’s foreign policy was its dislike for military alliances and pacts. This stemmed from his conviction that every alliance provoked a counter-alliance by causing suspicion and insecurity among other countries, which would be against both Turkey’s principles and interests.

During the Ataturk era, Turkey’s international orientation was non-alignment, which seemed to best fit its objectives in the immediate post-World War One period. Turkey was a war-torn country in need of internal reconstruction, which made seeking peace a necessity. Two basic foreign policy goals reigned throughout the period: to create a strong, modern state which could defend its territorial integrity and political independence, without external assistance, against external aggression; and to make Turkey a full, equal member of the Western European community of nations.

The main principle of Turkey’s Middle East policy, to avoid interference with that region’s affairs was formulated within this general framework. Although bilateral relations with regional states were established, the main thrust remained leaving the Arabs alone. The 1937 Sadabad Pact concluded with Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan was a good example of how Kamalist foreign policy distanced itself from the Middle East. Rather than being an example of regional cooperation and collaboration, as it is sometimes claimed, the Pact’s principles were those of non-interference in each others’ affairs.

However, in accounting for early new Turkey’s foreign policy, one should not be misled by the common perception that it totally avoided Middle East affairs. In fact, it was Ataturk himself who patiently waited until March 15, 1923, when he mentioned Alexandretta (Hatay, the Sandjak of Alexandretta) as having been Turkish land for 4000 years, and in the mid-1936 signing of the Montreux convention (the treaty governing passage through the straits, so vital for Turkey’s interests as to overshadow every other concern), Ataturk cautiously waited and helped the Turks of Hatay (Alexandretta) to pave the way for its incorporation into Turkey. Finally in October 1936, Ataturk, noticing the international environment was favorable for such a move took the initiative. By suddenly leaving for Adana to inspect the troops, he made sure that the French would understand his readiness to resort to military means if the Alexandretta problem was not solved in favor of the Turks. In the final analysis, Ataturk’s basic strategy proved to be very effective and gained the aim.

On the other hand and just to maintain a balance in the presentations of arguments concerning Turkish foreign policy this example provides an indication of the lower priority given relations with the Middle East, which came during the 1924-25 upheavals in Morocco. The Turkish attitude toward the proto-nationalist struggle showed that Turkey’s ignorance of regional independence movements, for which the Democratic Party (DP) government was harshly criticized during the 1950s, was not without precedent. At first, the Turkish press and public opinion took interest in the Reef rebellion (Suburban Rebellion) and drew parallels with Turkey’s own War of Independence. However, from 1925 on, the government press and the elite began to voice concern that it might hurt Turkey’s interests to draw the wrath of the French and the Spanish at a time when their support was needed in the League of Nations to secure a favorable solution of the Mosul dispute a very important concern for Turkey in its future relations with Iraq. Thus, the roots of Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East were laid in an era when Turkish foreign policymakers tended to avoid involvement in Middle East affairs. The fact that relations with the West were given top priority sometimes led Turkey to avoid entanglement with the Middle Eastern states. For this reason one could say about the argument that Turkish foreign policy in the Gulf Crisis constituted a deviation from traditional Kamalist foreign policy stood on an interpretation of Kamalist foreign policy as preaching total avoidance of Middle East affairs. In fact, Turkey’s position was based on its interpretation of how any such involvement would affect its higher-priority West-oriented goal.

**American Intervention and Turkish Foreign Policy**

The decision of the Turkish parliament, on March 1, 2003, not to support the government’s recommendation to allow U.S. troops to enter northern Iraq via Turkish territory brought the relationship with the United States to its lowest ebb since the U.S. arms embargo against Turkey in 1975. This situation was unique since Turkey has been a long-standing ally of the United States. The situation was further aggravated in April, and again in July, when U.S. troops arrested small Turkish military units in northern Iraq. Following the arrests in July, local U.S. officials alleged that the unit was plotting to assassinate the local Kurdish governor. Although the crisis was diffused, Turkish mistrust of the United States deepened, and the incident itself was seen as a manifestation of U.S. disillusionment with Turkey. Another important development with respect to Turkey’s handling of the Iraq crisis was the way in which it refrained, partly due to EU opposition, from any unilateral intervention in northern Iraq. The Turkish security establishment, including the military, watches developments in Iraq with concern, fearing that any undermining of Iraq’s territorial integrity might produce a

Kurdish state. Such a development could then lead to irredentist claims on the Kurdish-populated sectors of Turkey, or alternatively, could encourage some among Turkey’s Kurds to become more insistent in their demands for independence. Turkey’s security establishment also worries about the continued presence of PKK militants in northern Iraq.

Notwithstanding, a review of U.S.-Turkish and Turkish-Middle East relations was largely caused by Turkish displeasure with the attitude of its allies who failed to support Turkey on the Cyprus issue. The Middle East countries’ support of the Greek Cypriots caused the Turks to come to terms with their cultural and historical bonds. The so-called new Turkish foreign policy, drafted in the mid-1960s as a result of these discussions and considerations, was expected to correct mistakes committed during the 1950s that were blamed for the deterioration of relations with the Middle East which, in return, caused Turkey’s isolation in the region and alienation at the UN concerning Cyprus. In this sense, Turkey’s pre-1960 policies toward the Middle East produced a negative feedback that led to cognitive inconsistency in and increased opposition to its policies.

The most prominent feature of the new Turkish foreign policy was its emphasis on multi-faceted policy making. Turkey’s foreign policy orientation, although subject to criticism by radical rightist and leftist circles alike, remained unquestioned at the policymaking level. When applied to the Middle East context, this policy required less cooperation with the United States, and a more balanced attitude towards the Arab-Israeli dispute. Nonetheless, Turkey refrained from overruling cooperation with the United States and preferred to make its decisions ad hoc. Decrease of tension in the region, enabled by the end of Turkish-Western efforts to direct the regional course of politics and the resurgence of inter-Arab rivalries, allowed the Turks to distance themselves from U.S. policies without incurring any costs. A good example of this effort was seen in 1964 when Turkey, together with other CENTO (Central Treaty Organization, the name the Baghdad Pact took after Iraq’s withdrawal in 1958) members, Iran and Pakistan, concluded an agreement to create the organization of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). Although RCD seemed to be duplicating non-military functions of CENTO, it served an important political and psychological role.

However, regarding the use of NATO bases for non-NATO purposes, Turkish policy makers preferred to preserve a degree of ambiguity which they believed to have a deterrent value of its own. Although Turkey maintained that it would not allow the use of its bases during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, it is premature to argue that this was an indication of a complete reversal in Turkish foreign policy simply because Turkey refused to cooperate with the United States while adopting a policy of benevolent neutrality that tilted toward the Arabs. It would be more accurate to argue that Turkey adopted a policy of caution in its attitudes towards Middle East crises as it carefully weighed the pluses and minuses of each potential action and decided accordingly. In this sense, Turkish foreign policy carefully stuck with one of the main principles of Kamalist foreign policy and that is pragmatism.

By the end of the 1970s, however, although Turkey was still refusing to make any formal strategic commitment outside the NATO framework, became more eager for consultations about cooperation for security in the Middle East. To quote one analyst of Turkish foreign policy, these developments brought back the traditional images of international politics held by the Turkish policymakers. To give an example on this important remark, in November 1983, the Turkish government concluded an accord with the United States whereby American troops in the Multinational force in Lebanon (deployed in Beirut at the request of the Lebanese government, following the 1982 Israeli attack on PLO forces in Beirut, with the task of assisting the Lebanese Army in restoring the central government’s authority) were given the right to use the NATO base at Incirlik. The permission Turkey granted the Multinational force to use the Incirlik base during the Gulf crisis (1990-91) was another example of how Turkey cooperated with the West when deemed necessary, and felt conditions to be ripe for such cooperation. Without changing the basic tenets of their foreign policy, Turkish policymakers were able still to prepare the future to pull the Middle East states to their side to the extent that was possible given the Iranian growing power dimension and the major regional power

role that the Egyptian would like to play in the area. In short, Turkey’s new foreign policy starting in the 1960s was later defined as the traditional Kamalist policy, in part to justify it. In retrospect it was defined as: non-interference in the domestic affairs of Middle East countries and in inter-country relations; equality among states; maintaining both diplomatic relations with Israel and political support for the Arab cause; preserving links with the West in regard to their impact on Turkey’s relations with the Middle East and vice versa and last but not least the development of bilateral relations.

The old new principles still continue to guide Turkish foreign policy makers during the 1990s. What is surprising is that the same set of principles is taken as a reference point in trying to prove that Turkish foreign policy in the Gulf Crisis constituted a deviation from the traditional Kamalist foreign policy. However it could be well argued that Turkey’s foreign policy toward the Middle East shows continuity. Although there have been some adjustments, the policy’s main tenets remained the same. One important factor as an indication against change was perhaps Turkey’s Middle East policy itself. Cautious to distinguish between pragmatism and opportunism, the foreign policy establishment did not deviate from past practices. In sum, side-effects of and spillovers from certain policies, if mistaken for substance in the larger framework of change and continuity, may be misleading. The history of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East presents a fine case study to test these premises. If one has to account for policy changes, the only watersheds were when Turkey opted to join a collective alliance (NATO) in 1952; and when it began developing multilateral relations as of the late 1960s. Otherwise, accelerated or decelerated relations and ad hoc reactions cannot be categorized as change given the historical perspective.

**Updating the New Turkish foreign policy: Pragmatism and Foreign Policy Decision Making**

By the summer of 2003, the inability to restore order and stability in Iraq well after the end of formal hostilities led to increasing calls in the United States for Turkish assistance. This time the U.S. government appeared to handle the issue more carefully in terms of Turkish sensibilities and also authorized the potential release of $8.5 billion in credits without openly linking it to Turkish troop deployments in Iraq. The military and the government wanted to make this deal but public opinion continued to oppose any involvement in Iraq, fearing Turkey would be seen as helping to entrench a U.S. occupation. In an effort to legitimize Turkish involvement in the eyes of the public, both the government and the military stressed that Turkey’s role would be a humanitarian one emphasizing the restoration of public services. Notwithstanding, the Turkish security elite’s immediate concern was the repercussions that chaos and instability in Iraq could have on Turkey. They feared the break up of Iraq and the emergence of a Kurdish state.

They argued that sending troops would block these outcomes while guaranteeing Turkey a place at the negotiating table where Iraq’s future would be discussed. These Turkish officials were particularly disturbed by the prominent Kurdish presence

in the U.S.-appointed Governing Council in Baghdad at the expense of the Turcoman presence, which they attributed to the Kurds choosing to cooperate closely with the United States. There was also deep concern about the fact that the PKK had again started operations in towns along the border with Iraq and threatened further attacks deeper into Turkey. The security elite scrutinized every American move and statement concerning northern Iraq and concluded that the United States was conspiring to set up a Kurdish state. Hence, a military presence in Iraq was required to counter this danger.

Another important factor influencing the decision to send troops to Iraq is far less evident. The government has been very successful in adopting a series of very difficult reforms in an effort to enhance Turkey’s chances of starting accession negotiations with the EU. These reforms substantially improve and pluralize Turkish democracy. Most importantly, the government succeeded in limiting the power of the National Security Council, and thus of the military and the security establishment. Since this group is more eager to intervene in Iraq, the government thought that dispatching troops would curry favor with a domestic constituency its other

policies have injured.

In as much as seeing the new Turkish foreign policy from a geopolitics perspective, one could recall that during the Cold War, Turkey had a relatively cozy security arrangement. It was an important part of NATO and was closely integrated with the major political and economic institutions of Western Europe. Turkey also had an associational relationship with the then European Community. But one should also recall that the end of the Cold War changed this situation dramatically. The Balkans drifted into chaos while in Turkey a Kurdish secessionist struggle led by the PKK adversely affected both internal security and Turkish democracy. The situation was aggravated by the aftermath of the first Gulf  War, which left a vacuum in northern Iraq from where the PKK was able to mount operations into Turkey. Economic sanctions against Iraq also led to the loss of business in that country, which used to be a major source of income for the economy of southeast Turkey.

The situation was further complicated by the covert or overt assistance that neighboring and even EU governments offered to the PKK. This was a period when Turkey came to the brink of war with Greece in 1996 and Syria in 1998. Relations were foul and confrontational with Iran. Turkey’s close and intimate relations with Israel provoked considerable resentment in the Arab world; so much so that the then Turkish president found himself storming out of an Islamic Conference Organization summit in Tehran in November 1997. Relations with a number of  EU countries were often strained over human rights violations and the Kurdish problem. Turkey to say the least was gripped by a deep sense of mistrust towards the external world and particularly the EU and the United States. Many in the country, including the military and bureaucratic elite, believed that the United States was actually supporting the PKK. Internationally, Turkey was often seen as a security liability. The exception was Turkey’s restrained policy in respect to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Against tremendous public opinion for a unilateral intervention of some kind to save the Muslims from Serbian massacres, the government was able to adhere to a multilateral approach and contributed positively to the process that culminated with the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995.

The whole picture began to change by the late 1990s. A period that marked the beginning of the process of rapprochement, between Greece and Turkey in 1999, followed by the Helsinki European Council decision to extend to Turkey candidate

status, were critical developments edging Turkey closer

to the EU and toward political reforms. The U.S. role in helping Turkish officials to capture the leader of the PKK in

Kenya followed by the visit of the U.S. President to Turkey for the OSCE summit in November 1999 were two events that boosted the standing of the United States in Turkey. This same period also coincided with Turkey’s active involvement in NATO operations against Serbia over Kosovo as well as in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in Kosovo. In the United States, Turkey was

presented as a pivotal state in terms of the security of the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Close cooperation between the United States and Turkey was also extended to the strategically important issue of the

transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea region

through Turkey to the West.

It is remarkable how much the events of September

11, 2001 further enhanced the security value of Turkey as a Muslim country that could be a model liberal market

economy and secular democracy to an Islamic world beset by Islamic radicalism, repression and economic failure. Moreover, Turkey contributed to the force stabilizing Afghanistan after

the Taliban was defeated. In short, Turkey had become a net contributor or exporter of hard and soft security. Though it is labeled by Turkish officials as a fruitful period it was not  without its difficulties. A coalition government in Turkey lacked the cohesion and determination to see through

political reforms needed to meet the EU’s Copenhagen criteria. Powerful opponents to membership in the EU still remained in spite of wide popular support. Yet the United States remained adamant in its support for Turkey’s EU membership and tried to exert considerable pressure on a number of EU governments.

Transformation of politics in Turkey is drastic at the domestic level. However a similar process also of fundamental change can be observed in respect to foreign policy. The manner in which the Iraqi crisis was handled by the government is in

itself a reflection of this process. The government managed to stay out of Iraq and shied away from using confrontational means of foreign policy in contrast to the Turkish policy of a few years back. A good example of Turkish foreign policy evolving towards a “Europeanized” approach to foreign policy is the manner in which the crisis of Turkey’s veto over the use of

NATO capabilities for European security force operations was finally resolved in November 2001. Turkey had been vehemently objecting to the EU countries using NATO capabilities without allowing Turkey the right to fully participate in ESDP decision-making. After long and tough negotiations between Turkey, the United States and Britain, a compromise arrangement was reached. The arrangement reflected a “win-win” outcome that made it possible for EU countries to gain access to NATO facilities while Turkey’s security concerns were addressed without undermining the European security force’s

independent decision-making procedures. Furthermore, this also opened the way at the Laeken European Council meeting for Turkey to be invited to participate in the Convention on the Future of Europe. The decision not to become directly involved in Iraq can also partly be attributed to a greater willingness, as compared to the past, to heed to objections coming from the external world mainly from Middle Eastern countries. Part of this transformation is also reflected in the erosion of the influence that traditional central players in foreign

policymaking, such as the military and civilian hardliners,

have enjoyed.

Elected officials are today more likely to have their views and interests taken into consideration then was the case in the past. Furthermore, public opinion and civil society have been able to make their voice heard on foreign policy issues and exercise some degree of influence.

The new Turkish foreign policy is well reflected in its

policies toward the Middle East. Previously, Turkey’s military relations with Israel had attracted negative attention while Turkey had poor relations with the Arab countries, particularly Syria. In sharp contrast, today Turkey has good relations with both Israel and many Arab countries including Syria. The issue of water and the question of Alexandretta (Hatay) are no longer highly contested or divisive issues straining relations between Syria and Turkey. Inter-governmental relations have reached a level where both countries were recently able to agree to

clear an area the size of the island of Cyprus from mines that had been put into place back in the 1950s when relations had first started to deteriorate. The current Turkish government has noticeably tried to keep good relations with Israel, though at the same time without hesitating to criticize both Israeli policies toward Palestinians and the Palestinians’ use of suicide bombings.

Iraq and what is to become of it in the future will continue to be a critical issue for Turkey. As already mentioned, the military and the hardliners in Turkey are particularly concerned about Iraq disintegrating into three separate states. They do not trust the United States and suspect it intends to create a separate Kurdish state. These decision makers are already feeling quite nervous about the U.S. reluctance to clamp down on the PKK in northern Iraq. It is very likely that the military and the hardliners will object to any arrangement that may seem to reduce Iraq’s territorial integrity, even a federal one, especially if it is based on ethnicity. On the other hand, the government itself may actually be less dogmatic on the issue, especially if federalism does emerge as a genuinely supported option within Iraq and the region. In any event, the future territorial and political shape of Iraq will be an issue to which Turkish foreign policy players will pay considerable attention.

Turkey has manifested interest to work in the direction of developing a genuinely democratic and secular Iraq. However, in Turkey there is considerable skepticism and apprehension

about the likelihood of such a regime emerging. Such an Iraq would also be a country less likely to pose any political or

military threat to Turkey. In contrast, an unstable Iraq, or one heavily influenced by Iran, would constitute such a threat. Turkey’s stand on the Iraqi crisis and its adoption of political reforms has helped to strengthen its relations with the EU. However, until recently, the Cyprus problem continued to stand in the way. Statements from EU officials and European

politicians made it clear that the absence of a solution on Cyprus could well impede Turkey from getting a date for the start of accession negotiations, even if Turkey met the Copenhagen political criteria. The implication of the solution of the Cyprus problem and Turkey finally embarking on a

path of EU membership is significant in terms of the future of the Middle East. At a time when there is growing urgency to bring stability and democracy to the Muslim world and the Middle East, a Muslim country like Turkey with strong

prospects of EU membership will be capable of playing a

much more constructive role in the region. Such a Turkey is going to be much more likely to make positive contributions to the efforts to rebuild Iraq. Similarly, a stable Turkey will also be able to play an important economic role in the region, especially as the current Turkish government’s political background

relates much more easily to the publics and governments of the Middle East. They have already, on a number of occasions, been able to directly advocate democratization, the rule of law, and women rights in the Muslim world that no previous government in Turkey could have done. Lastly, a Turkey that is anchored with the EU and that is capable of mobilization the long years of cooperation with Israelis and Palestinians

may be able to contribute to efforts to breakout of the deadlock between the two parties.

**Conclusion**

The new development in the Middle East especially that of the continued rift in the balance of power as Iran is advancing its influence in Arab countries at the same time that is developing nuclear fear among Arab exporting countries is perplexing and viewed by the Americans and the Europeans as a region that needs fixing. Turkey is the new element that is thrusting the new dilemma of the larger Middle East concept. It is feared yet it is becoming welcomed by most of the Arab Sunni regimes with reservation by Egypt. While the recent wrangling in Turkey between the generals and the Islamists has drawn attention to Turkey’s domestic policies, a significant shift in the country’s foreign policy has gone largely unnoticed: after decades of passivity, Turkey is now emerging as an important diplomatic actor in the Middle East. Over the past few years, Ankara has established close ties with Iran and Syria, with which it had tense relations during the 1980s and 1990s; adopted a more active approach toward the Palestinians’ grievances; and improved relations with the Arab world more broadly.

These new approaches in the foreign policy of turkey are not significant important departure from the basic principles of the recent Turkish foreign policy especially those espoused by Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, as previously mentioned, the founder of the modern Turkish republic, was that Turkey should limit its involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, and except for a brief period in the 1950s, Ankara largely stuck to it for reasons related for better preparing for the future. Turkey’s recent focus on the Middle East, however, does not mean that Turkey is about to turn its back on the West. Nor is the shift evidence of the Islamic sympathy of Turkish foreign policy, as some critics claim. Turkey’s new activism is a response to structural changes in its security environment since the end of the Cold War. And, if managed properly, it could be an opportunity for Washington and its Western allies to use Turkey as a bridge to the Middle East.

During the Cold War, the main threats to Turkish security came almost exclusively from the Soviet Union. Today, Turkey faces a much more diverse set of challenges: growing Kurdish separatism, sectarian violence in Iraq that could spill over, and the rise of Iranian power and influence. Since most of these come from Turkey’s southern periphery and the wider Middle East, Turkey has understandably begun to focus more attention on the region. In the Middle East, Turkey could play a leading role in resolving political conflicts; boosting economic cooperation and investment within the region; and supporting political, economic, and social reforms.

As the most democratic Muslim country in the Middle East, one with rich experience dealing with and adapting to Western institutions, Turkey is regarded at least by some International strategists as the best-suited Middle Eastern country to lead the effort to advance regional stability and development by reorienting the down shift in the regional balance of power.

The European Union and the international community

are trying to support Turkey in this role. On the other hand, Ankara has demonstrated a consistent commitment to good relationships with all countries of the region, regardless

of their domestic, regional, or international policies. Except for occasional military actions against Kurdistan Workers

\Party (PKK) pockets in northern Iraq that Ankara

considers essential for its national security, Turkey has made clear in its foreign policy to abstain from interference in the internal affairs of other countries. After some years of hesitation, Turkey has begun improving

relations with the Kurdistan regional government in northern Iraq, a key factor in improving stability and security in that country. Turkey was also one of the first countries to contribute to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force

(ISAF) in Afghanistan.

Turkish efforts over the last two years to mediate between Syria and Israel, and, more recently Palestinian organizations, as well as its offer to mediate between Iran and the United States, as it looks, have been met with limited success so far. But they have nonetheless underscored Turkey’s capability and potentially suitable positioning to act as a regional leader. While primarily leaning toward the West in the past, the Turkish government (controlled by the Justice and Development (AK) party) has, especially over the last few years, improved its relations and image among the Muslim countries of the region and specifically the Sunnis, occasionally at the cost of Western reservations or objections.

Boosting economic relations and investment between Middle Eastern countries would, especially if accompanied by relaxation of travel, residence, and work-permit limitations, gradually contribute to the overall improvement of living standards, education, and social services in the region. The result would be the mitigation of the actual and potential dangers of extremism and ethnic conflict. Turkey’s experience and democratic reforms (free and fair elections, media, education, privatization, and modernization), is in a position to help other Middle Eastern countries implement reforms. Doing so could also help Turkish officials unblock their own reform process and move ahead with EU-required measures that have been slimming down considerably for the last two years.

The modalities of EU involvement in such a regional initiative remain undetermined, but it seems that most observers perceive a leading role for Turkey would be one of the best guarantees of success. Many Turkish officials have expressed a desire for greater Turkish engagement in the region. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s recent visit to Ankara has signaled Washington’s support for Turkey’s role in the Middle East, and EU officials have seconded that support. It looks like there is no other positive alternative to pursue when it comes to finding solutions. So the prospect is to build on these initiatives in order to keep the Middle East peace process active even as Brussels and Washington are preoccupied with immediate concerns closer to home.

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**تركيا وموازين القوة في الشرق الأوسط الجديد**

تشهد السياسة الخارجية التركية تغيرات كبرى ومصيرية وخصوصًا أنها تطالب بعضويتها الاتحاد الأوروبي.

هل تستطيع تركيا التغلب على التعقيدات بتحقيق هدف مشاركتها في الاتحاد الأوروبي وهل من الممكن إجراء التحولات الضرورية في سياستها وخصوصًا من خلال عدم تدخلها في قضايا الشرق الأوسط؟

تحاول الدراسة أن تضع جانبًا مجمل التغيرات المحلية التي تحدث حاليًا في تركيا والتركيز على مختلف جوانب السياسة الخارجية التي تقودها  إلى عضوية الاتحاد الأوروبي.

أحد التحديات المصيرية التي تواجه صانعي السياسة الخارجية التركية تكمن في القدرة على التغلب على التعقيدات والمشاكل الآتية من الشرق الأوسط وبخاصة تلك التي تلت الحرب على العراق وكيفية رد تركيا على مجمل هذه التحديات.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/turkey-and-new-middle-east-balance-power#sthash.LLa3ges6.dpuf