

Turkey in the Twenty-First Century

Apr 3, 2001



Brief Analysis

Over the past four years Turkish foreign policy has been experiencing a transformation. Turkey now sees itself not only as part of Europe but also as part of Asia. The Asian character of Turkey, which has been downplayed for decades, has been revitalized, making Turkish foreign policy more active in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union and helping Turkey to improve relations simultaneously with the Arabs and Israel. Turkey's relations with the European Union are progressing favorably; EU membership is a goal, but not an obsession for Turkey.

Recent Financial Crisis The current crisis in Turkey embodies characteristics that are both specific to Turkey and the result of globalization more generally. Turkey – like other emerging markets such as Argentina, Mexico, and Russia – has experienced corruption and mismanagement. The characteristic specific to Turkey in the current crisis, however, is lack of capital accumulation. Unlike developed countries, Turkey is short of the necessary capital accumulation to absorb the effects of financial crises. Although receipt of international funds is critical to restoring the economy, it will not be the end of the world if these funds do not come. Turkey will eventually bounce back from any economic hardship.

Relations with Iraq and Syria United Nations sanctions against Iraq have failed to achieve the desired consequences. Meanwhile, they have hurt the Iraqi people, in particular, Iraqi children, who are suffering from malnutrition and lack of education. These children, who in twenty years will be the leaders of Iraq, are growing up with hatred towards the rest of the world. This should be a concern for all parties involved in the sanctions.

Turkey, too, has suffered as a result of the sanctions against Iraq. In economic terms, Turkey has lost \$4 billion annually since the Gulf War. Besides their direct economic effects, the sanctions have also hurt Turkey socio-politically. Iraq borders the southeastern region of Turkey. Sanctions have undermined the economy of this already poor region, where trade with Iraq was a vital part of economic activity. This situation fed the terrorism of the Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK), costing the lives of 30,000 Turks and Kurds. Meanwhile, billions of dollars, which could have been invested in the Turkish economy, were spent to suppress the PKK and its terrorist activities.

Sanctions against Iraq should be reorganized, with consideration of their consequences. Iraq must unconditionally comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions, but economic sanctions should be eased to accommodate the needs of the Iraqi people. Illegal smuggling, which undermines the sanctions, should be prevented.

Immediately following the Gulf War, Turkey experienced an influx of 400,000 Kurdish refugees from northern Iraq. The burden for their well-being fell solely on Turkey. The maintenance of a "no fly zone"(NFZ) helps prevent the recurrence of such an event. Thus, Turkey supports the NFZ not only for the sake of the United States but for Turkish interests as well. Without claiming any special knowledge of the Iraqi opposition, one can generally say that an effective opposition movement must be well-rooted in its own country and people.

Relations between Turkey and Syria have improved since Syrian support for PKK terrorism has declined. However, there are still several bilateral problems, and more work must be done to improve relations further.

The Middle East Peace Process In the last eight months of the Clinton administration, Turkey was involved in efforts to facilitate dialogue and reach a final settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. In the last days of the administration, the possibility of a settlement was closer than ever before. Unfortunately, this opportunity was missed, and, in light of recent developments, the chances of going back to that situation seem remote. Baring the unforeseen, violence within Israel will almost certainly continue, and it could spread to neighboring countries, increasing radicalism and undermining moderate governments in the region.

The Israeli government should ease restrictions on the Palestinian economy, which only fuel further violence. The only viable solution is to begin negotiations and end violence simultaneously. Although he lacks the power to stop it completely, Yasir Arafat should try to reduce the violence in the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority; he should also be more forthcoming in negotiations.

The Bush administration's reluctance to get involved in the peace process is certainly understandable, especially since the Clinton administration, despite intense efforts, failed to achieve its goal. However, the United States should remain involved; there is no other country that can fill its important role in the region. It should be noted that Turkey's bilateral relations with Israel will not be affected by peace process development.

Rapprochement with Greece The rapprochement between Turkey and Greece has been significant. When bilateral talks began in 1999, the most difficult issues were left out in favor of more limited, achievable goals. People-to-people relations have improved significantly and will continue to do so as long as politicians do not block the path. Nongovernmental organizations are heavily involved, and trade is booming. Nevertheless, issues involving the Aegean Sea and Cyprus remain the most difficult problems to be solved.

The Aegean Sea: The continental shelf issue is a workable problem. Contrary to common understanding, Turkey seeks application of international law to the problem (in particular, the application of paragraph 33 of the UN charter). However, Greece is not ready to engage.

Cyprus: The Cyprus issue is more difficult than the Aegean problem. Acceptance of the Greek Cypriot part of Cyprus to the European Union without the agreement of the Turkish Cypriots will create many problems. However, Cyprus is not on the official agenda of Greek-Turkish discussions.

Caspian Energy Corridor Russia is an important economic partner for Turkey, but these two states also will always compete, albeit hopefully in a peaceful manner. Russia opposes Turkish interests regarding regional oil pipelines. However, transporting Caspian crude oil via the Black Sea, as Russia wants, is not an optimal solution, since it would increase oil tanker traffic and endanger the Turkish Straits. Turkey will abide by the Montreux Treaty [on free passage of international ships in peacetime], but, if necessary, it will limit passage of oil tankers in order to avoid environmental damage to the straits and tragic human consequences for the surrounding Istanbul population. Turkey, a secular, democratic republic, is a role model for the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union and supports these states in their quest to become more democratic. The Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is not only economically important but, by linking Azerbaijan and Georgia with Turkey and the West, also has strategic importance. It would promote democracy and guarantee the sovereignty of countries in the region. The Eurasian reality will define the twenty-first century, and Turkey will play a crucial role in that process.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Niyazi Günay.

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022



Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

Energy & Economics (</policy-analysis/energy-economics>)

Gulf & Energy Policy (</policy-analysis/gulf-energy-policy>)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Turkey (/policy-analysis/turkey)