

E-ISSN: 2709-9369
P-ISSN: 2709-9350
www.multisubjectjournal.com
IJMT 2024; 6(2): 44-47
Received: 02-12-2023
Accepted: 05-01-2024

Md. Imran Iqwal
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
MMAJ Academy of
International Studies,
Jamia Millia Islamia,
New Delhi, India

Turkey-Middle East Relationship Prospects and Challenges

Md. Imran Iqwal

Abstract

Turkey's foreign policy regarding the Middle East has changed dramatically during the previous two decades. Ankara's neo-Ottoman and anti-Western foreign policy activities have been increasingly visible under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) leadership. This article links Turkey's religious & geopolitical imagination to civilization list and neo-Ottoman views that have moulded its foreign policy aims and tools under the AKP leadership. According to the report, religious, & geopolitical vision is a consequence of Turkey's foreign policy shift toward the Middle East that might give the country a leadership position in the area. Overall, the growth of faith-based geopolitical imagination may be attributed to factors other than foreign policy concerns, such as economic objectives and domestic political goals. Turkey has employed a combination of soft and hard power techniques to stay in the area, with a more targeted balancing of soft power abilities. This quick transition might be due to internal issues like rising inflation, a falling currency, and the AKP's declining popularity. This essay will concentrate on modern trends in Turkish foreign policy regarding the Middle East.

Keywords: Middle East, religious geopolitical imagination; turkey; foreign policy; neo- ottoman

Introduction

The primary objective of Turkish foreign policy is to safeguard its interests in a challenging global and regional context. Turkey has always endeavoured to establish circumstances to enduring peace and progress with surrounding and distant nations. Turkey has seen several iterations of its foreign policy, but a significant transformation in the last two decades under the governance of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is evident. The AKP assumed power in 2002 and has since undergone three distinct periods of foreign policy. Firstly, it is important to note that this entity affirms its commitment to universal values, with a particular emphasis on the European Union. Secondly, it has adopted a pan-Islamist approach. Lastly, it has a fully independent foreign policy that is no longer perceived as anti-western but rather as a self-assured policy based on religious, & geopolitical imagination, which can be seen as an excessive sense of pride in oneself. The primary objective of Turkish foreign policy is to safeguard its interests within a challenging global and regional context. Turkey has always endeavoured to establish circumstances conducive to enduring peace and progress with surrounding and distant nations. Turkey has seen several iterations of its foreign policy, but a significant transformation has been evident in the last two decades under the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The AKP assumed power in 2002 and has since undergone three distinct periods of foreign policy. The country in question can be characterised by three key aspects. Firstly, it upholds universal values, with a particular focus on the European Union. Secondly, it has adopted a pan-Islamist approach. Lastly, it maintains a fully independent foreign policy, which was previously perceived as anti-western but is now characterised by a self-conceited religious, geopolitical imagination, reflecting an excessive sense of pride ^[1].

Ankara has increased its engagement and participation in the Middle East. According to some observers, this development suggests that Turkey is distancing itself from the West since they notice a discrepancy between Turkish assertiveness in the Middle East and its alignment with Western countries. However, others argue that the AKP has been compelled to steer its foreign policy towards the Middle East because of concerns about security, power projection, logical considerations, and a combination of national interests. The core aspect of that connectedness was rooted in pan-Islamism, which is seen as both civilization list and neo-Ottoman in nature. The pursuit of Turkish identity, intertwined with Islam and the Ottoman Empire, has been a significant goal. This objective was particularly prominent in the first half of the 2010s. However, after the Arab Spring in 2011, Turkey had some success in forming a network of alliances. Following the Arab revolt, the geopolitical and security issues in the area created opportunities for Turkish foreign policy to expand.

Corresponding Author:
Md. Imran Iqwal
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
MMAJ Academy of
International Studies,
Jamia Millia Islamia,
New Delhi, India

As a result, Ankara took the initiative to engage in military operations in Syria, Libya, and Iraq. Additionally, it initiated humanitarian and economic involvements. It entered into a new fight for regional leadership with Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Turkey has economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical interests in the Middle East [2]. Ankara's participation in Middle Eastern affairs has expanded, positioning Turkey as a significant actor in regional disputes. The use of hard power & securitised approaches is substituted with a more targeted and equitable set of soft power capabilities. The swift transformation might be attributed to internal issues such as escalating inflation, sharp depreciation of the currency, and a decrease in the AKP's popularity. Certain analysts claim that Ankara's recent shift in diplomatic approach towards the Middle East is a direct response to its ongoing political and economic turmoil. Some argue that the motivation for Turkey's actions is driven by a desire to secure its share of resources in the changing global and regional landscape. Turkey's current strategy of regional de-escalation presents a favourable chance for Ankara to transition from using military force to using diplomatic and economic influence, therefore addressing its economic difficulties. Thus, establishing normalised relations with Middle Eastern nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel, would provide opportunities for Turkey to enhance its diplomatic, strategic, & economic advantages in its foreign policy. The strained relationships between prominent regional players have had a negative impact on the accurate assessment of economic prospects. Turkish foreign policy focused little on the Middle East during the Cold War [3].

Turkish Foreign Policy Transformation

Ankara's alteration in Middle East policy is a direct reaction to several external causes, including regional and international influences, as well as internal concerns about security and the economy. Turkey has initiated a shift in its stances and is reestablishing its relationships, which were formerly characterised by animosity. The primary concept of this new phase is "realpolitik," where Ankara is resolute in setting aside all disagreements and prioritising the economy to bring about significant advances and end a period of heavy regional conflict while also emphasising the religious geopolitical vision. The United States, under President Joe Biden's administration, has shifted its attention from the Middle East to East Asia, prioritising its own internal affairs. Unlike the previous Donald Trump administration, the Biden administration has emphasised diplomacy in the Middle East. Currently, the United States is reassessing its military presence in the area. The United States has unequivocally said that it would not participate in the Saudi military involvement in Yemen. However, there is a possibility that Washington may reconsider its stance and re-engage in the nuclear agreement with Iran. The implementation of these modifications prompted Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, & the UAE to engage in a process of de-escalation. However, as Russia's influence in the area continues to increase and the United States reduces its involvement, Turkey has been compelled to take action in order to maintain a delicate equilibrium between the two powers. The AKP has distrust towards the political parties of both nations and holds divergent views on several matters; however, it has effectively maintained a favourable equilibrium in Syria and Libya. Consequently, Ankara's

Middle East strategy has undergone a transition in order to restore balance to the area. During the previous year's GCC Summit, the Gulf countries ratified the Al Ula Declaration, thereby resolving the conflict with Qatar. This regional growth provided another incentive for Ankara to engage with Riyadh, Cairo, & Abu Dhabi. Subsequently, Turkey and Qatar have initiated discussions with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, & the UAE in order to pursue peace. Another significant regional player that stimulated Ankara's interest was the escalating tensions among Greece, Egypt, Israel, & the Greek Cypriot government in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara considers cooperation with Cairo on matters related to the Eastern Mediterranean & Libya to be of utmost importance. Within the confines of its own borders, Turkey is now experiencing its most severe economic crisis. President Erdogan has been attributed responsibility for this predicament because of his steadfast commitment to unorthodox economic policies, particularly his insistence on maintaining low interest rates despite the concurrent increase in inflation. Turkey can revitalise its Western cooperation by serving as an example for emerging democracies [4].

Furthermore, it is said that he disregards the guidance of economic consultants and actively acts in opposition to their recommendations. Saudi Arabia is a significant regional actor in the Middle East. The establishment of strong diplomatic ties between Ankara & Riyadh might have a transformative impact on this area. A cooperation project has been launched between Ankara and Riyadh, and their ties have shown a favourable trajectory after a telephone discussion between President Tayyip Erdogan & Saudi King Salman bin Abdelaziz before the G-20 Leaders Summit in 2021. Currently, President Erdogan is currently visiting the United Arab Emirates to engage in bilateral and economic cooperation. This is his first visit to the Gulf state since 2013, and it involves the signing of many agreements. President Erdogan's visit to Saudi Arabia is anticipated. Undoubtedly, Riyadh also seeks to establish strong ties with Ankara, as this would assist Saudi Arabia in countering its adversaries or those who want to disturb its interests. World politics following World War II & the Cold War impacted Turkish foreign policy [5].

The diplomatic relations between Riyadh & Ankara will be prioritised above any other regional peace initiatives. This strategic step would provide Saudi Arabia with the necessary opportunity to expand its political influence, establish stronger connections, and foster collaboration with neighbouring governments that are seen as competitors, such as Iran. Improved bilateral relations would provide fresh economic, political, and military prospects, enabling Saudi Arabia to maintain its customary regional position and successfully address security problems. Saudi Arabia is currently engaged in armed conflict with Yemeni insurgents. Turkey has extensive expertise in the regions of Libya, Syria, and Azerbaijan. Additionally, it provided backing to Riyadh's stance during the Yemen conflict in 2015. Once mutual confidence is reestablished, Ankara will provide valuable military and political assistance to Riyadh. Whether Saudi Arabia chooses to pursue diplomatic contact with the Houthis or their patron, Iran or opts to increase military pressure, it has the potential to improve its current position significantly. Moreover, ongoing negotiations between the United States and Iran over the "nuclear deal" indicate that the two sides are likely to ultimately come to

an agreement. Riyadh must now be ready to effectively manage the potential consequences of many scenarios. Ankara has the potential to have a good impact on this significant matter. In the case of Turkey, it is preferable to have mutual investments rather than engaging in economic activities that are unproductive for both area economies. Investment dollars originating from Saudi Arabia will undoubtedly contribute to the vitality & durability of the Turkish economy, which it is now experiencing financial difficulties. Furthermore, reaching a consensus on the outstanding commercial issues between the two parties will incentivise private sectors to reestablish bilateral commerce and rejuvenate commercial performance. Turkey has started the process of reconciliation with Egypt by establishing communication with foreign ministries & intelligence agencies in order to enhance bilateral ties. Both governments are making efforts to avoid opposing each other on any regional or international venues. They have expressed their want to collaborate on developing a thorough plan to address and improve their mutual relationship. However, Ankara aims to continue its support for the continuing diplomatic process aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis. Turkey mediated based on regional cultural and economic improvements [6].

The economic impact of Turkish foreign policy

Turkey, which has long been seen as an economic powerhouse in the Middle East, is now grappling with a significant economic downturn that began in 2018. The nation is seeing a slow decline in its economic growth rate, which has resulted in a lack of interest from foreign investors. Additionally, the country is facing a high percentage of unemployment. The Covid-19 epidemic has exacerbated an already dire load. The Turkish economy relies heavily on tourism, and as a result of the epidemic, tourist sites were shut down, travel was prohibited. Additionally, it has exacerbated the poverty rate, therefore intensifying the complexity of the issue. Some opponents attribute this economic position to the measures implemented by President Erdogan. They assert that the dictatorial governance style of the AKP administration is responsible for the deteriorated condition of the economy. Ankara has exhausted all diplomatic avenues in order to resolve the conflict. Evident indications of shifts in foreign policy have emerged. The geopolitics of Iraq and Syria affect the regional security architecture and define Ankara's security and diplomatic policy [7].

Turkey is prepared to restore its ties with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) & Armenia in order to facilitate economic collaboration. President Erdogan emphasised Turkey's significant role in the Middle East during his remarks at the Virtual World G20 Summit sponsored by Saudi Arabia. He stressed Ankara's commitment to enhancing the stability, serenity, and internal harmony of our area. It was an unequivocal indication that Turkey would increase its participation in the recent changes in the area by engaging in dialogue with any longstanding adversary state. Furthermore, with regional and worldwide advancements, the majority of regional governments possess distinct motivations to mitigate their rivalries and reach a settlement. The policies that heavily rely on military force, confrontations, and indirect warfare are both costly and difficult to sustain over an extended period of time. One of the adverse socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19

outbreak and the decline in oil prices is the exacerbation of pre-existing issues. These adverse socio-economic effects are not limited to Turkey alone but are also affecting the other countries in the Middle East that are grappling with economic challenges. The process of normalising economic relations between Turkey & Middle Eastern nations is not straightforward and needs a longer duration. The majority of global and regional developments are now in progress, but their outcomes are yet undetermined. Ankara should reconcile its Kemalist & neo-Ottoman Middle East and Kurdish positions [8].

The Iranian nuclear negotiations are encountering difficulties, while the stability of Egypt, Syria, & Libya remains uncertain. Likewise, the relationship between Turkey and Israel is now in a fragile state. The unwavering backing of Ankara for Palestine and the AKP's distinctive connections with Hamas have contributed to a heightened level of complexity in the issue. Despite Turkey's continued status as a strong economic ally of Israel, the present circumstances provide significant challenges for Israel's management. Turkey must steer its economy towards the correct trajectory by implementing long-term strategies, and the adoption of the Middle East pivot economic strategy is a commendable move made by Ankara. In order to ensure stability, it is essential to develop and implement consistent economic policies while fostering positive relationships with neighbouring states. Regrettably, the organisation has been embroiled in problems that are placing Ankara in a perilous position. President Erdogan's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by supporting Azerbaijan, his dispute with France over the anti-Islamism movement, his advocacy for Kashmiris plus Palestinians at international forums, and his strained relations with the US have boosted his popularity among the Muslim community. Many view him as an exemplary and courageous leader. Conversely, these disputes have the potential to negatively impact Turkey's political and economic standing. The ongoing strategic battle among the primary actors in the area is a prolonged power struggle that will only undermine their diplomatic positions and result in more economic costs than advantages. The ongoing changes in the regional de-escalation strategy indicate a shift towards reconciliation in the area, which will help stabilise the strategic & economic situation. The AKP has energised Turkish Middle East policy [9].

Future Foresight and Challenges

Turkey has initiated a process of altering its foreign policy in order to establish regular ties with other Middle Eastern nations, both at the regional & bilateral levels. Ankara is actively seeking a mutually beneficial solution while facing conflicts in the regional and bilateral ties with important players in the Middle East, such as the United States, Russia, as well as the European Union. The 1990s saw harsh relations with Turkey and Syria [10].

In recent times, there have been noticeable signs of reconciliation with Turkey as well as other parties in the area. The period of geopolitical competition characterised by the use of military force to assert dominance and provoke conflicts among neighbouring nations seems to have come to a close, paving the way for a new chapter in international relations. Within this particular setting, the Turkish government has shown a heightened level of efficacy in its diplomatic endeavours. She has been really enthusiastic

about participating and assuming a mediating role in resolving regional problems. Turkey has not played a significant role in resolving conflicts in the area. The transition from using soft power to employing hard force might be seen as a manifestation of dissatisfaction in Syria & Libya. Turkey's anticipated alliance with Saudi Arabia & the UAE might satisfy its aspiration to become an effective mediator. It strongly feels that assuming the position of a facilitator or mediator will assist her in establishing connections with the Middle East. Within this particular framework, Turkey aspires to assume the role of a mediator in the Israel-Palestine issue, with the aim of fostering peace. Saudi Arabia will not participate, but with the Abraham Accord, the UAE has the opportunity to assume its position. The recent rapprochement between Turkey & the UAE has the potential to enable Ankara to serve as a mediator in the Israel-Palestine dispute, perhaps leading to significant progress in Saudi-Israel ties. This position will contribute to Ankara's establishment as the dominant participant in the area. Turkey has had single-party governments since 2002 and parliamentary elections since 1946^[11].

Conclusion

Turkey is highly motivated to expand its influence in both the regional and international systems. The country has effectively used both its diplomatic and military assets to strengthen its relationships at both the individual country and regional levels. Turkey has a favourable geographical location, abundant people resources, strong military capabilities, and a challenging economy. These factors contribute to Ankara's significant role as a vital player in neighbouring areas such as the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean, and the Balkans. Nevertheless, Turkey's aspirations to become a significant regional force are mostly focused on the Middle East. Ankara's foreign policy move requires domestic backing. As previously said, Turkey is now experiencing a time of political and economic unrest. However, the AKP administration is placing more emphasis on altering its foreign policy. This strategy is effective only when there is no economic crisis. In summary, despite the challenges of maintaining a balance between Saudi Arabia, Iran, & Israel, Turkey's decision to pursue a new foreign policy in the Middle East presents a favourable opportunity for advancing win-win collaboration. Undoubtedly, Turkey has the capacity to align itself with Middle Eastern nations for the sake of their collaborative efforts.

References

1. Akram S. Turkey and the Middle East. Accessed July 20, 2023. Available from: https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/1299570697_30995832.pdf
2. Altunışık MB. The New Turn in Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Regional and Domestic Insecurities. JSTOR; c2020. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29462>
3. Aydın M, Dizdaroğlu C. Turkey's Middle East Policies 1. Routledge EBooks; 2022 Feb 15:39-54. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003289807-4>
4. Bağcı H. Only Problems How Turkey Can Become an Honest Mediator in the Middle East, Again. In: Kurç Ç, editor; c2016. Available from: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep10116.4>
5. Coşkun A, Ülgen S. Political Change and Turkey's Foreign Policy; c2022. Available from: <https://carnegie->

- production-
assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Coskun_Ulgen_Turkey_final.pdf
6. Göksel DN. Turkey and the EU: The Limits of Unconditional Alignment. January 5, 2012. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18816>
 7. Sandano IA, Behan RA. Change in Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East. *Prog Res J Arts Hum.* 2023 Feb 11;5(1):63-71. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.51872/prjah.vol5.iss1.256>
 8. Palani K. Turkey and the European Union: Conflicting Policies and Opportunities for Cooperation over Iraq, Syria and the Kurdish Political Actors. In: Ala'Aldeen D, Cersosimo S, editors. April 1, 2018. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17614>
 9. Rabasa A, Larrabee FS. The AKP's Foreign Policy. In: *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey.* RAND Corporation; c2008. p. 75-90. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg726osd.12>
 10. Ülgen S. From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East. December 6, 2011. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13062>
 11. Taspınar Ö. Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism. JSTOR; c2008. Available from: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13064>