

Erdogan's Concerns and Turkish Foreign Policy Priorities

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Abstract: The Turkish government's recent diplomatic performance is phenomenal compared to that of other countries in the Middle East. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has led Turkey for 18 years since he becomes the Turkish prime minister. Learning from experiences of the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party in last century, Erdogan comprehends the unifying power of Turkish Islamism. Yet given Turkey's entrenched secular and military traditions, it will be an arduous task to eliminate the system of military tutelage and Turkey's nation-state identity. Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP, founded in 2001) face up to these challenges. The party follows Ahmet Davutoglu's foreign policy doctrines during its early diplomacy. While maintaining close connections with Western countries, Turkey aspires to play a proactive role according to its strategic depth and implements a "zero problem policy with neighbors". By adjusting diplomatic principles, Turkey endeavors to resolve disputes and establish rapport with circumjacent countries. By means of intervention, participation, and intermediation, Turkey promotes win-win solutions and a multi-dimensional foreign policy, aiming to become a leader in international affairs of Middle East and Central Asia.

1. Introduction

Consulting Western values like human rights, civil liberties, and rule of law to guide the country, the AKP intends to substitute Islamism for conservative democracy. The party fully complies with EU criteria when enacting policies and takes advantage of public support for European Union (EU) membership to push forward domestic reforms in aspects including political system, legislation, and military. From 2002 through 2012, the AKP realizes what is called a quiet revolution and significantly improved the country's outlook. Relative economic prosperity and high national pride among Turkish people enhance the AKP's legitimacy and boost Erdogan's personal charisma. The following 9 years, among chaos ensuing the Arab Spring, Turkey proactively seeks the role of a regional leader and designs political strategies to maneuver among the US, Russia, and the Europe.

Turkey has an incomparably strategic position. Geographically, it is a bridge between Europe and Asia, the traffic pivot of trade and natural resources routes in Mediterranean, Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions, and functions as a southeastern Barrier between European countries and refugees and immigrants from the Middle East. Historically and politically, Turkey is known as a Muslim country which has undergone the process of secularization and modernization. Turkey also possesses the second mightiest military strength in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and maintains long-lasting close relations with the West. This study aims to analyze Erdogan government's domestic politics and foreign policymaking during the two 9-year periods before and after the Arab Spring; how Turkey balances relations with big powers, namely, the EU, America, and Russia; and the opportunities and obstacles it has encountered, with an emphasis on the differences in Turkish policymaking in the two periods and the underlying reasons for such differences.

2. History and Political Background of Modern Turkey

When Sultan Mohammed II conquered Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire started to lead the Islamic world against the European Christian countries. The empire collapsed after World War One, resulting in the independence of countries in Eastern European, Caucasian, and Arab regions. Following Kemal's Revolution, modern Turkey was established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. During the period between the two world wars, Turkey kept altering its national orientation and joined the Allies at the last moment. It joined NATO in 1952 and since then stood firmly at the forefront of the fight against the Soviet Union and its allies.

The total area of Turkish territory is 76.96 million square kilometers, of which 2.42 million square kilometers locates in Europe. According to Turkish Statistical Institute, the country's 2018 GDP was 789.043 billion dollars with a GDP per capita of 9632 dollars. By the end of 2018, Turkey had a population of about 82 million. Presenting a stationary pyramid structure with 9.1% above the age of 65, Turkey is on its way towards an aged society.

Approximately over 80% of Turkish people identify as Turks, and 15% are Kurds. 98% of the population are Muslims, among which 85% are Sunnis and the remaining are Alawites.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's political reforms brought about a modern-day examination of democratic transition. In the bipolar world of the Cold War years, Turkey sided with the West and this caused its conversion from one-party to multi-party. During the consolidation of the new multi-party system, the Turkish army, who were resistant to Islamic Fundamentalism, mounted four coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 to overthrow the elected government. The military reshuffled political parties in the name of rectification and gradually shaped the country into a multi-party democracy with military tutelage over society and politics.

Erdogan joined the pro-Islamist Welfare Party and Virtue Party successively, which were shut down respectively in 1998 and 2001 by Turkey's constitutional court. Erdogan was also imprisoned and banned from politics for five years on the charge of undermining the secular state.

The constitutional court continuously intervened in Islamist parties' opposition to secularism, which caused a division within these parties. In November 2001, Erdogan and mildly pro-Islamist members of the Virtue party founded the AKP.

With the lessons and experience gained from the past campaigns, the AKP substitutes the polarization between Islamists and secularists for conservative democracy and incorporates modern Western concepts into the party doctrine. The party holds high the banner of EU membership and campaigns on the slogan of political, economic, and social reforms, drawing particular support from Anatolia and regions with high concentration of the lower classes. Taking advantage of its ability to mobilize the bottom, the AKP runs on an ideological platform and is characterized as centrist, or center right.

The 2002 parliamentary election took place when Turkey was facing political crisis, two economic crises, and division of the coalition government. The AKP responded to the public demands for reform and won 34.2% of the vote, becoming the biggest party in the Turkish parliament. Turkey has been under the AKP administration since then.

3. Domestic Politics and Foreign Policymaking

3.1. Internal Affairs

Foreign policymaking is usually the extension of internal politics. Erdogan's foreign policy is a reflection of the changes in Turkey's domestic politics and election results.

At the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Turkey became an official EU candidate with three attached conditions on human rights and resolution of disputes over territory with Cyprus and other neighbors. When the AKP took office in 2002, aiming to restore political and macro-economic stability, Erdogan government implemented a series of reforms. This included restructuring the financial sector, advancing free trade to increase investment and consumption, and accelerating the

transition to information society. The government also released new banking laws, reinforced fiscal discipline, and simplified the taxation system for a better business environment. Due to these efforts, Turkey extricated itself from the economic crisis in 2004, with the inflation falling to single figures for the first time in the past 30 years and an 8.9% increase in GDP. The GDP per capita increased from \$3360 in 2002 to \$11707 in 2012, and the 2012 inflation was 6.16%, at its lowest level since 1968. The AKP realized what is called a “silent revolution” within 10 years and made Turkey a rising star in the Middle East and the world.

The reform success won Erdogan and his party strong support from Turkish people and at the same time brought them a broader sense of mission. As an example of democratic Islamic country, Turkey aspires to be the source and impulsion of regional change. As US President Clinton stated, “The coming century will be shaped in good measure by the way in which Turkey itself defines its future and its role today and tomorrow”. Turkey seeks to take an active part in shaping the future world.

In responding to the question about what role Turkey plays in the relations between the West and the Arab world, Erdogan claimed that while Turkey is a European and Middle Eastern country at the same time geographically, it belongs to the West politically. He described, “We have been part of the Western political system from the very outset, while maintaining a special and multifaceted relationship with the Arab world with which we have historical and religious ties.” Erdogan believed that with the “comparative advantage” of understanding both parties, Turkey’s role in the communication between them is “even more significant.”

In 2011, the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements triggered turbulence in Turkey. In May 2013, the Gezi Park movement took place in Istanbul. Young people took to the streets to protest against the government over the course of weeks and the influence swept across the country. Workers unions began to join in and organized a nationwide strike in June. As these events unfolded, Erdogan had his first encounter with internal political crisis, followed by a rapid economic downturn. According to statistics carried out by the World Bank, Turkey’s GDP dropped from \$950.579 billion in 2013 to \$852.677 billion in 2017, and total imports and exports underwent a decline from \$478.619 billion to \$460.942 billion.

The economic slide continued in 2018 with a 7.92% decrease in GDP and a 0.05% increase in total imports and exports. The registered unemployment rate was 11% and 20.3% for young people between 15 to 24 years old. The exchange rate of lira against US dollar in August dropped significantly by over 30% compared to the previous year. Additionally, inflation soared and by October, CPI had reached 25.24%, the highest number in 15 years.

In 2019, Turkey’s economy wasn’t on the mend. Nominal GDP in the first three quarters fell by 9.08% year-on-year; annual foreign trade decreased by 12.89%; registered unemployment rate was 13.8% and 26.1% for 15 to 24-year olds; CPI dropped from the highest 20.35% to the lowest 8.55%; inflation rate still ran high. All of these would negatively affect the AKP’s next presidential election.

3.2. Changes in the Middle East and Erdogan’s Diplomatic Choices

On March 20th, 2003, the Iraq War broke out. The US Army won an overwhelming victory and took control of Bagdad on April 9th. This enabled America to further strengthen its hegemony over the Middle East, and the role of its traditional allies, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, was diminishing. The George W. Bush administration actively pushed forward the “Greater Middle East Initiative”. Through democratization and liberalization, with the supplement of the media and education, the Middle Eastern countries, voluntarily or passively, underwent a series of political, economic, and social reforms.

In 2004, the EU expanded. Ten countries in the middle and eastern Europe, including the Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta, all became members. Bulgaria and Romania joined in in January 2007, and in 2013 Croatia. Turkey received a candidate status in 1999. Though the Erdogan government was not satisfied with this unsuccessful entry, which widen the gap between Turkey and the bloc, Turkey continued implementing reforms to meet EU criteria and kept

accession talks in process.

In 2008, the international oil price reached a peak of \$147 per barrel and then fell to \$33 per barrel as US demand for Middle Eastern oil dramatically slowed after the shale revolution beginning in 2009. The fortune acquired from crude oil shrunk, which threatened to tip up the balance of the oil-supported regional power.

President Obama proposed the New Middle East Policy. This included using dialogue and contact as the principle means to maintain peace and stability in the region, gradually withdrawing American troops from Iraq, promoting active talks with Iran, and restoring relationships with Islamic communities. Additionally, the US promoted and coordinated the "Asia-Pacific Rebalancing" Strategy, indicating an Asian shift in America's strategic pivot and further affecting the power balance in the Middle East.

During the 2011 Arab Spring, Arab republics like Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria suffered prolonged turmoil, which evolved into a civil war in Yemen, Syria, and Libya. The monarchies like Jordan, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia quelled domestic unrest using tactics of ademption and suppression.

Upon taking office as the US president, Donald Trump paid a visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia. Then on January 29th, 2020, Trump officially announced the US Mideast peace plan out of three years of careful designing, voicing support for Israel on almost every Israeli-Palestinian issue. Palestine rejected the plan, and the apparent partial treatment by the US would inevitably lead to a steady deterioration in the relationship between Israel and Palestine.

Changes in America's foreign policy exert influence on the diplomatic choices of other countries.

Erdogan's foreign policymaking can be broken down into two 9-year periods. The early period is from 2003, when AKP started to take office, to the Arab Spring in 2011, and the second is from 2012 to 2020.

In the first 9-year period, the Middle East was entering an era of unrest and transformation. The AKP repositioned Turkey as a regional power possessing "strategic depth" and adjusted national policymaking to make Turkey a moderate ally, broadly improving relationships with neighboring countries. Erdogan focused on developing a multidimensional policy combining interethnic dialogue and energy diplomacy with Turkic-speaking countries, aiming to establish large-scale cooperation networks. During this period, America placed its attention on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Russia was restoring its broken economy and coping with the consequences of NATO expansion. Taking advantage of the moment, Erdogan increased Turkey's investments in central Asia and promoted cooperation with local countries in various aspects including religion, education, culture, and economy.

The Turkic-speaking countries in central Asia and the Caucasus have a natural sense of ethnic identity and remain close connections with each other. Working with the Hizmet Movement, the Erdogan government provided government scholarships for students in central Asia to study in Turkey and run a large number of schools there teaching Turkic language, religion and technology. Turkey is not only the most important economic partner in the Caspian for Kazakhstan, but also the second largest partner of Kyrgyzstan, the largest investor in Turkmenistan, and maintains a traditional friendship with Azerbaijan, who ranks third among Turkey's gas suppliers.

As with the Arab countries, Turkey started by normalizing and restoring relations with countries such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, taking "zero problem policy with neighbors" as the principle when making diplomatic decision. As a result, located in a region hard-wired for contradictions and conflicts, AKP's Turkey Maintained a relatively positive relationship with all Arab neighbors.

During Erdogan's second 9-year period, the Middle East faced with prolonged unrest following the Arab Spring: the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Egypt and upheavals ensued; wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen; endeavors to crackdown on the ISIS; the diplomatic crisis in Qatar; and the nuclear program in Iran... Despite the ailing economy, the Erdogan government insisted on invading Syria to attack the Kurds in order to safeguard Turkey's territorial integrity. They also insisted on buying the Russian-made missile and adopted policies on Kurdish, Qatari, and Libyan

problems from an opposing stance against the West, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. When chances for Turkey to play a leading role or exert influences on the region, Erdogan government took decisive action to participate in regional affairs. While actively engaging in high-profile incidents, Turkey reached out to unite Muslim countries to seek a greater say in regional forums and at the same time took military initiative in regional conflicts with the advantage of NATO membership.

Although the US and the European countries weren't interested in backing Turkey's actions, they would neither let Turkey make aggressive diplomatic choices independently, considering its strategic position. Amidst the enduring political turbulence in the Middle East, the Erdogan government cleverly maneuvered with the US, the EU, and Russia and sought a favorable balance among these global powers. There also exhibited a shift in Erdogan's policymaking with the emergence of conflicts with neighboring countries and tensions in Turkey's relations with Europe and America in the second 9-year period.

Behind this lies not only Turkey's aspiration for regional leadership, but the AKP's efforts for the 2023 presidential election.

4. Turkey and Other Middle Eastern Countries

4.1. "Zero Problem Policy with Neighbors" And the Establishment of New Order in the Middle East

There are three political factions within Turkey. The secularists who are West-leaning and would like Turkey to become a European country, the Islamists who embrace fundamentalism and focuses on the Middle East and the Arab world, and the nationalists who view Turkey as a regional leader and emphasizes Turkey's responsibility with the Turkic countries in the Caspian and the central Asia.

In November 2003, Davutoglu was the chief foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister Erdogan and assisted him with foreign policymaking. Under the guidance of his "Strategic Depth" doctrine, Turkey reached out in three directions on the way of balance diplomacy. While continuing its traditional partnership with Western countries and actively sought for accession to the EU, Turkey at the same time united the southern countries under the shared Islamic belief of "neo-Ottomanism" and established ethnic and historical identities with the Turkic countries in the east.

When the AKP won power in 2003, it refused to join the US-led invasion of Iraq and didn't let the US army access Iraq via Turkey. Additionally, the AKP condemned Israel's blockade of Gaza and supported the Hamas forces, which gained the party leader Erdogan a high reputation in the Muslim world.

In January 2004, Syria president Bashar al-Assad visited Turkey. Erdogan paid a return visit in December and signed a free trade treaty with Syria. In Bashar's second visit to Turkey, he claimed his support for Turkey's cross-border actions against terrorism, which caused a sensation throughout the Arab countries. The two countries were in a positive relationship until 2010.

Turkey took an active part in helping Iraq restore from warfare, undertaking construction programs including expressways, the American embassy in Iraq, and the Erbil International airport. Preparations for reconstruction started in April 2003. In July 2008, Erdogan visited Iraq and the two countries negotiated documents to resolve the problem regarding the cross-border strikes by Turkish army against Kurdis forces in Iraq.

Erdogan visited Tehran in October 2009. He talked with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei, claiming that Turkey supported Iran to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Later in December, President Obama met with Erdogan in Washington and said that Turkey can be an important player in nudging Iran to withdraw its nuclear programs.

In October 2009, Turkey signed a peace treaty with Armenia in Zurich, which ended the century-long hostility and started the normalization of relations between the two countries.

The Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis visited Turkey in January 2008, which was the first official visit of a Greek Prime Minister to Turkey since 1959. The two sides broke the ice and had talks to ease tensions over bilateral disputes. Although problems still remained, the relations between Greece and Turkey have come to a new phase.

Above are the efforts Turkey's Erdogan government has taken to establish friendly relations with its neighboring countries. Turkey shifted its foreign policy concept and changed the distanced, wait-and-see attitude. It started to act proactively as a mediator between Western and Muslim countries, aiming to establish a balanced negotiation mechanism within the Mideast and build a new regional order.

4.2. From Zero-Problem Policy to Proactive Diplomacy

The Muslim world had complicated factions. Since the downfall of Saddam's regime in Iraq, the dominant Shiite Islamic regime in Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood increasingly spread their influences in the Middle East. After the 2011 Arab Spring, Brotherhood won the presidential election in Egypt. All these pushed the rearrangement of political powers in the Middle East region.

In 2013, Egyptian military launched a coup to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood's regime, deeming it as a terrorist organization. The same year, the situation in Syria went out of control with the advent of a new international terrorist group ISIS. ISIS members occupied mass territories in Iraq and Syria and posed major challenges to the Middle Eastern War on Terror. During the anti-terrorist wars, Kurdish forces rapidly gained strength and occupied more lands, transforming into a nonnegligible threat to Turkey's national security and territorial integrity. The current urgency and necessity to suppress the Kurds, let alone the previous military action Turkey took to help Syrian anti-government forces overthrow the Assad regime in 2011, were all evidence proving the fact that Turkey stalled its peace-sustaining process and its "zero problem with neighbors" policy.

Noticing the surrounding changes, Turkey decisively sent troops or consulted military methods to crack down the Kurdish power in Syria and Iraq. Turkey's NATO membership provided the country with an advantage of collective defense. When Turkey became the first to support the overthrow Assad's regime in Syria in 2012 and provided for Syrian anti-government movements, Erdogan asked NATO for air protection in order to prevent reprisal attacks from Iran, who was backing Assad. NATO responded favorably by dispatching four Patriot air defense systems to Turkey. However, after failing to resolve the disputes with other NATO members, Turkey purchased the non-NATO missile systems from Russia through military bidding processes and established its independent military mechanisms, whereby exerting pressure on other members.

In the anti-terrorist wars against the ISIS, the Kurdish army gained significant strength with support from the US. This aroused Turkey's vigilance and ruling out the slightest possibility of Kurdish independence thus became one of Turkey's major concerns. In August 2016, Turkey launched "Operation Euphrates Shield" with its invasion of Syria to fight Kurdish forces; in October 2017, Turkey established de-escalation zones in Syria according to a consensus reached in Astana, in order to prevent the expansion of Kurds in the border areas between the two countries; in October 2019, following the US withdrawal from Syria, Turkey initiated an anti-Kurdish military operation called "the Fountain of Peace" and created a "safe zone" along the Turkish-Syrian border. So far, Turkey has objectively removed the safety threats around the southern border.

In June 2016, Turkey and Israel signed a bilateral treaty to normalize their relationship. However, in May 2018 when President Trump decided to move embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, Erdogan said that the US "lost its mediator role in the Middle East peace process", recalled Turkish ambassadors in from the US and Israel, and expelled the Israeli ambassador. Erdogan's tough attitude towards the two countries made him a hero in Muslims' minds, which set a cornerstone for the AKP to extend influence in the Middle East.

In recent years, Libya has plunged into civil war. Turkey backed the brotherhood-background Government of National Accord (GNA) and signed an agreement on an exclusive economic zone, which was opposed by nearly all surrounding countries. On GNA's invitation, Turkey sent troops

and equipment to Libya on January 29th, 2020, aiming not only to aid its ally in the competition for Mediterranean oil and gas, but also to increase its own chances of win by incorporating more countries into this agenda.

The Erdogan government embraces a proactive and pre-emptive diplomacy and participates in major issues through military intervention and mediation. However, despite the massive global attention Turkey will receive, fighting simultaneously in Syria and Libya will pose a great challenge to Turkey's national capability, foreign policymaking, and domestic politics considering the potential risks and long-term trend in both fields.

5. Turkey's Relations with the US

5.1 US-Turkish Relationship during Obama Administration

In April 2009, the US president Barack Obama visited Ankara. He reaffirmed US support for Turkey's EU accession and praised the relative reforms Turkey had implemented. He described the country as a bridge between Islam and the West and called Turkey a "critical" ally and an important part of Europe. However, the Obama government demonstrated full support for Kurdish forces and trained them during fights against ISIS terrorism, which widened the gap between the two countries.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of emerging markets caused a balance shift: while Europe moved from imbalance to balance of power, the opposite trend took place potentially in Asia-Pacific area. Based on this judgement, the Obama government adjusted the US global strategy and pivoted American foreign policy more towards the western Pacific region, which had a broad and long-lasting impact on America's current and future geopolitical, economic, and military relations with these two regions. When it came specific to the Middle East, adjustment measures have always been underway, from Obama's New Middle East Strategy to Trump's Mideast Peace Plan.

When Obama announced the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in December 2012, the Iraqi elected government quickly established close relationship with Iran, on the ground of a shared Shia Islamic belief. The Kurdish autonomy in the northern Iraq increasingly consolidates, which never fails to affect Turkey's nerve.

In 2016, Erdogan said he was disappointed with the stance America took on Syrian issues. The Syrian war posed threats to Turkish southern borders, interfered with Ankara's national defense, and forced Turkey to receive as many as 3 million refugees.

In July 2016, Turkey demanded an immediate extradition of Fethullah Gulen, accusing him of organizing the failed coup attempt against the Erdogan government. This made the bilateral relationship between the two countries fall into low ebb.

5.2 US-Turkish Relationship during Trump Administration

In purchasing air-defense missile systems, Turkey failed to reach an agreement with the US on price and technology transfer. Upon Turkey's request, the NATO stationed four Patriot Missile systems on Turkish soil in January 2011, with which Turkey shot down Russian aircrafts in November 2015. Due to the independent position Turkey held with regard to Syrian issues, the NATO recalled all the missile systems in 2016. After the 2016 coup attempt, Turkey decided to buy a Russian-made S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft system, which drew a furious response from America. The Trump government prohibited the sale of F-35 fighters to Turkey, passed bills to impose sanctions, and cancelled the purchase agreement on the Patriot missile. In October 2019, the American Congress termed the mass killing Armenians in 1915 as genocide and imposed sanctions on Turkey. This recognition led to a negative impact on Turkey's international reputation.

In the same month, the Trump government announced a retreat from Syria and abandoned its long-time ally, the Kurds, which caused huge controversy in the US. Turkish attacks on the Kurdish forces began immediately after the US withdrawal. Trump responded with sanction threats and sent the US vice president to Ankara in demand of a truce.

In November 2019, Erdogan visited the White House and both sides worked to repair mutual relations, indicating that the US-Turkish relationship was far from breakdown. In an effort to soothe America's anger at the purchase of Russian missile, the Turkish Foreign Minister suggested the US offer to sell a Patriot missile defense system to Ankara.

On January 29th, 2020, Trump and the visiting Israeli Prime Minister jointly announced the Mideast Peace Plan. Palestine rejected the plan and said that it violated the UN resolution and those of the AU and was trampling on the rights of the Palestinian people. The Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the plan was "an annexation plan aiming to destroy the two-state solution and seize Palestinian territories."

As the US strategic focus gradually shifting to the Asia-Pacific region, the country decides to retain limited force in the Middle East and keep the region in a general balance with help from US allies and partners. As a result, the US will reexamine Turkey's value and consider it as a Middle Eastern ally. But given the long-term tendency of Iraqi issues, the Kurdish problem will also continue influencing the US-Turkish relationship and a complete normalization between the two countries has its challenges.

6. Turkey's Relations with the EU

There are major differences between the EU and the US Middle Eastern policies. While Europeans countries would like America to retain power in the Middle East, they don't want America to react excessively resistant against Iran. Also, both sides cannot agree on issues regarding Israel. The conflicts between the EU and America give Turkey additional possibilities in diplomatic maneuvering. EU membership is Turkey's long-term national goal. Though there have domestic voices suggesting relegating this ambition, it's unlikely for Turkey to end accession process. In October 2018, president Erdogan said he was considering a referendum on membership to the bloc.

6.1 Turkey's EU Accession and Domestic Reforms

For AKP, the EU accession is not only a policymaking goal, but also functions as a strong impetus to mobilize Turkish people and push forward reforms. Especially when it comes to with the military reforms. Without the strong public will and the strict EU regulations on military tutelage, any attempt to challenge the position of Turkish army, take power away from the military court, or reorganize the National Security Commission would arouse alert and rejection of Turkish military groups who have long been directing the society and politics.

Membership negotiations pushed the AKP to proceed with every obstacle on its way to reform. Turkey started to address the Kurdish problem and changed Turkey's traditional identity of a single-nation state. Results included the Kurdish Initiative and the "Oslo process". The government also took up the Alevi issue and launched the "Alevi Opening" process, admitting various identity groups and embracing the freedom of faith.

Reforms on the judicial system and common law made Turkish economy and trade in line with international standards, which enabled Turkey to integrate into the world trading system. The prosperous economy enhanced AKP's political legitimacy and won the party additional public support to further their reforms.

In 1987, Turkey applied to join the European Community, which is the predecessor of the EU, and became an official EU candidate in 1999. In 2004, when responding to the broad resistance to Turkish membership of the EU, Erdogan said, "When Turkey is the case; some circles in the EU prefer to see the glass often half empty. Turkey has gone through a comprehensive reform process that has been frequently referred to by many EU leaders as a 'silent revolution.' The EU with its motto 'unity in diversity' has the aim of embracing all countries willing to join the Union with the condition that it fills the necessary criteria. Turkey is just one of those countries aiming to become a full-fledged member."

Accession talks began in 2005 and continued with frustrations throughout the years. In February

2019, The Foreign Affairs Committee called on the European Commission and member states to formally suspend EU accession negotiations with Turkey.

6.2 Turkey's Relationship with Germany and France

Germany is one of Turkey's biggest trading partners. In 2019, the bilateral trade was at \$30.362 billion, accounting for 8.92% of Turkish total imports and exports. In 2018, the number was \$26.610 billion and took up 9.36%. There are estimated 3.5 million German residents of Turkish descent and 1.3 million of them are empowered to vote in Turkish elections (the total number of overseas voters is about 1.39 million).

In June 2016, German Parliament voted to recognize the killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks in 1915 a genocide. In response, Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Germany. Since then, the relationship between the two countries remained in deep freeze. In September 2017, German chancellor Angela Merkel said that "there cannot be a Turkish accession to the EU". She also suggested blocking talks on expanding Turkey's existing customs union agreement with the EU and imposes a stricter travel ban on Turkey.

The Turkish-French relationship is also going through a difficult stage. In October 2019, Turkish artillery attacked French troops in Syria and France returned fire. In November, French president Emmanuel Macron expressed dissatisfaction with the Turkish invasion of northern Syria. In January 2020, tensions rose in Libya and Macron accused Turkey of breaching an agreement to halt foreign interference in Libya after Turkey involved in Libyan conflict.

Turkey's relationships with Germany and France, the core countries in the EU, are far from harmonious.

6.3 The Refugee Problem

In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring, European countries encountered a massive influx of Middle Eastern refugees driven by war and civil unrest. This not only caused serious economic challenges and political problems within individual EU countries, but also emerged as a critical threat to the immigration rules of the bloc.

In 2016, Turkey signed a joint refugee plan with the EU to stop the inflow of refugees to Europe in exchange for a 6-billion-euro fund allocated to help Turkey deal with the millions of refugees it hosts. By the end of 2019, there had been close to 5 million refugees in Turkey, including 3.7 million Syrians and nearly 400,000 asylum seekers and refugees of other nationalities such as Iranians and Afghans.

In the Fountain of Peace operation, Turkey intended to create a "safe zone" in order to return millions of refugees to Syrian soil and relieve the mounting domestic pressure on the refugee issue. The European Commission urged Turkey to show restraint and stop its military operation and rejected the plan. It also warned that "Turkey is distancing itself from the EU." Turkey ignored the warning and threatened to open gates for Syria refugees to go west.

Because of its special geographic location, Turkey is the first barrier to block Syrian refugees from entering Europe. The impressive influx of refugees incurred high costs and administrative expenses and was also a great obstacle on Turkey's way to EU membership.

The EU is planning to come up with a new immigration and refugee deal in 2020, fully reforming the Dublin Agreement. The refugee problem is a burden for Turkey, but it is also an important leverage over the EU because Europe cannot bear the consequences once Turkey stops holding the refugees back. The refugee problem gives rise to factional division and internal conflicts within the bloc and the members often fail to decide and act collectively.

To make the situation worse, Erdogan declared its firm support for Libya's government of GNA and warned the Europe of greater outflow of refugees if crises in Libya are not brought under control. For European countries, this is not a good sign. Erdogan's tough posturing in Libya will gain greater leverage in its engagement with the EU, given the bloc's concerns about new refugee flows from North Africa. It's highly unlikely to see a detente between Turkey and the Europe in the

short term.

7. Turkey's Relationship with Russia

The expansion of Russian Empire abounded with clashes with the Ottoman Empire: 12 bloody wars from the 17th century throughout the 20th, which left a wide gap between the them. Turkey was at the forefront of the opposition against the Soviet Union during the Cold War and their relationship remains complicated after that period.

7.1 Turkish-Russian Relationship and the Black Sea

Ankara holds the key to the Black Sea. In the Cold War period, Turkey was a NATO gatekeeper of the Black Sea region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, European countries relegate Turkey's role from a military ally to an economic partner; but for Russia, Turkey under the AKP rule shifts from a follower of the West to a strategic regional player and possesses increasing importance: it's a target market, an energy channel, the weak link of the NATO, and a major variable affecting America's Mideast policies.

Unlike its oil-producing neighbors, Turkey's energy heavily relies on international imports, especially from Russia, who is Turkey's largest energy supplier. Turkey's mass demand for Russian resources and its minimal exports cause the balance of trade the two countries to fall heavily in Russia's favor.

Turkey is cautious when adjusting relations with Russia in order to guarantee Energy supply and cope with regional changes. Turkey adopted a neutral attitude when Russia was facing Western sanctions after its military intervention in Ukraine; however, when Russia involved in the conflicts in Syria in the name of anti-terrorism, making the situation more in favor of the Syrian government, Turkey shut down the Russian aircraft on Turkish-Syrian border in 2015 despite warnings from NATO countries who chose to remain neutral.

A failed coup against Erdogan took place in July 2016. The bombing campaign by NATO-commanded Turkish fighter jets aroused Erdogan's suspicion and distanced Turkey from its western allies. On the contrary, the relationship between Turkey and Russia turned for the better. The reason for such a positive trend is that Russia reportedly offered information to Erdogan about such a political design in advance and that Turkish military operation in northern Syria indirectly relieved the tension between Syria and Russia.

Regardless of pressure from America, Turkey insisted on buying the Russian-made S400 missile system and would establish its own air defenses independent from the NATO, which greatly boosted its relationship with Russia. This military purchase is not only a realistic consideration in the new environment where America is adjusting its global policy, but also a deliberate diplomacy to end Turkey's subordinate status and dependency on the NATO.

7.2 Turkey's Relationship with Russia for Common Interest

When it comes to Syria, Russia backs the Syrian government in order to maintain its naval base and cement Russia's Mediterranean foothold; Turkey wants to establish buffer zones to exert influence on northern Syria, isolate and crack down Kurdish forces, and return a large number of Syrian refugees. Without cooperation and compromise, neither of them can achieve their goals.

The two countries established a "terror-free safe zone" in northern Syria, clear of the Kurdish YPG militia. Troops from both sides patrolled the area to assure the security of borders, preventing any terrorist agenda from re-emerging. Implementing the Sochi Agreement is one of the two countries' common interests.

The Kurdish question is a major concern in Turkey. The US established multiple alliances with the Kurds in fight against terrorism and also abandoned them for multiple times. The once-powerful Iraqi Kurds pushed forward independence referendum in September 2017 but was cracked down by Iraqi government army due to infighting. Under military pressure from Turkey, Syrian Kurds worked with local government, seeking for protection. Tensions escalated between the Turkish-

backed anti-government forces and the Syrian government army and Turkish army has involved in this conflict. The common interest between Turkey and Russia makes coordination possible and hopefully will prevent the conflict from evolving into an all-out Turkish-Syrian war.

When it comes to Iran and the Caucasus countries, Turkey has to coordinate with Russia as well. Due to ethnic and historical reasons, both of them want to maintain influence over countries surrounding the Black Sea and Caspian Sea and at the same time stop the infiltration of foreign powers like the US, Iran, and China. Being a popular regional existence, Iran establishes close ties with traditional Shiite countries like Syria and Iraq and also gives supports to other Shiite forces like the Houthi in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine. Conflicts between Iran and the US continue affecting the Middle Eastern situation, and since both Russia and Turkey have positive relations with Iran and share converging interests with the US, supporting Iran will be a beneficial choice for both of them.

Now that the US is retreating from the Middle East due to its strategic adjustment, its waning influence may be insufficient to maintain regional stability. Under this circumstance, Turkey hopes to facilitate cooperation with Russia to a moderate degree, without becoming fully dependent.

7.3 Energy Relations

Oil and gas resources abound in Caspian countries. In November 2019, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed a deal on the construction of a natural gas pipeline that will connect Azerbaijan to Europe via Turkey. It is part of the Southern Gas Corridor project to bring natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe without passing through Russian soil, which will significantly change the European energy supply pattern. Earlier in November 2018, the sea section of the TurkStream natural gas pipeline was completed. These two projects link energy importers and exporters, strengthening Turkey's strategic position as an energy hub. In addition, Turkey can reduce its dependency on the Russia for energy imports, which shakes the economic bonds between the two countries.

8. Risks and Challenges in Turkey Foreign Policymaking

In recent years, Turkish economy turned from rapid growth to consistent negative, the inflation rate rose back to double-digit again, and unemployment rate remains high. As a result, the AKP begins losing domestic support. Though its ruling position hasn't been challenged, the electoral results were far from encouraging.

In the past five elections, the seats AKP won in the parliament were the following: 363 out of the total 550 in 2002, 341 in 2007, 327 in 2011, 258 in 2015, and 295 out of the total 600 in 2018.

Albeit Erdogan won 52.59% of the vote in the 2018 presidential election and was successfully reelected to power, his party lost Ankara, the capital; Istanbul, the country's cultural and commercial center; and Izmir, the third largest city, along with other cities in the 2019 local election.

The US is the most important consideration in Turkey's policymaking. Maintaining partnership and communication with the US and adjusting to the shift in US policy in the Middle East are the crucial for Turkey to fulfill its aspirations.

Problems such as Cyprus and Armenia remain an obstacle to US-Turkish relationship, and the Kurdish question also becomes a fundamental issue after the Kurds become an US ally in fight terrorism. This change in strategic position results not only from the end of the Cold War, but more importantly, from the slow yet systematic trend of Islamization in Turkey, which the AKP keeps denying.

The EU is Turkey's major trading partner and the biggest source of imports and investments. For the government, Turkey's EU membership is desirable, but it is not necessarily considered Turkey's strategic orientation. Yet considering the strong desire from both domestic and European Turks, the AKP will still treat the EU membership as a crucial goal, instead of one of its strategic options. However, the tough attitude Erdogan displays towards the Aegean Sea disputes causes tensions between Turkey and Greece and will have negative impact on Turkey-EU relationship. If the long-

lasting problem is not properly resolved, the AKP itself will become an obstacle on Turkey's accession to the EU and may eventually be discredited by its voters.

If the large numbers of refugees are considered a potential threat to European countries, they add realistic burdens to Turkey. Not to mention the poor economy and a rise in nationalism Turkey is now experiencing, the country can't afford any regional conflicts caused by exclusive movements.

Turkey has to work with Russia on the Syrian problem because of the US's presence. Yet the Syrian forces' campaign against the Turkey-backed anti-government groups in Idlib led to Turkey's military intervention in February 2020, which means that fundamental disagreements that Russia and Turkey have over Syria have yet to be overcome and will increase the possibility of direct confrontation.

According to reports published by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Turkey's military expenditure reached \$19 billion in 2018 with an increase of 24%, the largest annual increase among the 15 countries with the most military spending. Now that tensions escalate in Syria and Turkey has decided to dispatch troops to Libya, it's predictable that the Turkish military spending will remain high in 2020. (At the same time, according to the International Debt Statistics, Turkey's total external debt stock was \$456.174 billion in 2017 and \$445.139 billion in 2018, ranking high in the list of world's top 10 loan borrowers.)

Turkey backed the GNA and engaged in the proxy war in Libya against Saudi Arabia, Russia and other countries, who supported the Libyan National Army (LNA). Now that the GNA has fallen into difficult circumstances, Turkey is also at risk since it cannot afford the consequences of a failure. For Erdogan and his party, this military engagement is a bold political bet.

9. Conclusion

In the first nine-year period of Erdogan's government, his policymaking focused more on domestic affairs. As a result, the "zero problems with neighbor" policy played an important part because the country needed external stability in order to implement domestic reforms.

From 2003 throughout 2011, Erdogan and his party brought Turkey with steady economic growth, stable and democratic politics, open and inclusive administration, and continued and effective reforms. They also set out to establish a new regional order in the Middle East and resolve disputes with neighboring countries, winning support and friendship in the Muslim world. Turkey turned into a regional power that reaches out proactively on international platform, opens gate for communication, and becomes a model reformer in the Muslim world. Erdogan and the AKP's confidence, determination, and optimism was evident when they ambitiously announced the "2023 Vision".

However, potential risks hid behind the promising success. The adjustment of US policy disrupted the Middle Eastern political situation and the "zero problems" policy was left stranded. At the same time, NATO countries, especially the US, were critical and alert of the Islamist tendency hidden behind AKP's conservative democratic regime, calling it "democracy retrogression".

During the second nine-year period, AKP consolidated its ruling position. Yet at the same time, the Syrian war and anti-terrorist wars broke out; domestic reforms entered a "deep-water" zone, which meant that certain goals had been achieved but breakthrough was yet to be made in addressing some deep-seated issues; conflicts between the AKP and Gulen Movement went public and international; domestic military reforms faced strong resistance; the Kurdish problem went international. Diplomatic and military methods became the key to solving these issues. As an Islamic leader, Erdogan firmly backed the Palestinians, the Brotherhood, and Qatar; as Turkey's president, he actively sought to strike a balance among major powers and manage relations with the US, the EU and Russia; as a politician, he cracked down on coup attempts, cleared political opponents, and fought against the Kurdish independence forces.

Turkey's economy continued to slide since 2013, with alarming inflation rate, debt, and unemployment rate. Turkey cannot sustain the cost of long-term military operations in Syria and

Libya without financial support from the US and Europe. The broad public criticism on AKP's regime and Turkey's democracy retrogression in Western countries will influence their governments' policymaking and relations with Turkey. The US's decision to withdraw forces from the Middle East and the "America First" policy has left many US allies in the Middle East including Turkey surprised and prompted the AKP to make its diplomacy more independent.

Energy security and relations with Israel are the US's major concerns in the Middle East, the EU focuses on refugee problem and energy supply, and Russia on geopolitics and energy prices. As a result, Turkey is at the intersection point of their demands: a "pivot state" enlisted by all sides and is simultaneously the focus of various contradictions. Erdogan and the AKP adopt an independent and proactive policy commensurate to Turkey's historic and geographic depth. Yet it suffers from limitations which might undermine its successful implementation since maintaining a balance among foreign superpowers is no easy task. Fortunately, Turkey still has its leverage.

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