

Turkish Foreign Policy towards Syria during Erdogan Era

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ABSTRACT

In order to comprehend Turkish foreign policy toward Syria during the Arab Spring, the paper made an argument. The purpose of the study is to investigate how Turkiye's foreign policy towards Syria affects Middle Eastern security. Will security in the Middle East be affected by Turkiye's change in foreign policy? How has Turkiye's foreign policy been impacted by Kurds' demands for independence during the Arab Spring? The study will examine Turkish foreign policy's interests in the Middle East's longest-running conflict, the Syrian civil war. Kurds seem to be more demanding of the state these days since the Arab Spring also gave them hope for independence. Kurds are requesting an autonomous region in Northern Syria, similar to the Syrian civil war. The study also offers a profound understanding of the security transformation that has occurred during the Erdogan era, particularly during the Arab Spring. The study will examine the Turkish foreign policy decisions made during the Arab Spring in relation to its neighbors and the impact of the Arab Spring on the demands of the Kurds in the Middle East. It will investigate the potential implications of changing Turkish foreign policy choices for Middle Eastern security. The study is designed to address the research questions and will aid in the comprehension of the current Middle East.

Keywords: Turkiye, AKP, PKK, SDF, YPG, Ethnicity, Kurds in Middle East

Introduction

Turkish policy was altered following the civil war eruption in Syria, as it demanded democratic norms from its neighbor, which was not accepted. The Kurds captured the Syrian Northwestern region, which is concerning for Turkey. The policy was altered as a result of a confrontation between the two militaries. Russian involvement in the Syrian crisis altered the balance of power and played a significant role in the suppression of ISIS. The Arab Spring provided the Democratic Union Party (PYD) with the opportunity to strengthen and establish an independent state in Syria, which poses a threat to Turkey's integrity. The demands of the Kurds

for an independent state during the Arab Spring and their subsequent impact on Turkish foreign policy. In the context of the Arab Spring, the impact of the change in Turkish foreign policy on the security of the Middle East was observed.

One of the long-standing and unresolved prevailing crises in the Middle East is the Kurdish issue. The Kurdish population has expanded to Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, making it challenging to draw a clear border. The Kurdish region was not acknowledged as a distinct ethnic group or geographical area by Syria or Turkey. The estimated number of Kurds in the northern Middle East is close to 40 million. Outside of the Kurdish area, there is a Kurdish community in Khorasan, Guilan province, Sistan and Baluchistan province (Iran), and Kalbajar, Lachin (Azarbaijan). The Treaty of Sevres offered Kurdish people an autonomous Kurdistan where they could live on their own after World War One. Kurds are still separated between four states Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkiye and are being denied territory. Abdullah Ocalan established the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. Since its founding, Turkiye has seen ethnic warfare. However, Kurds were denied their cultural and political rights. The Kurds were later assisted by radio and TV stations once the AKP (Justice and Development Party) entered the government. Istanbul, which has a western culture, connects the two continents of Europe and Western Asia, where Turkiye is situated. Due to Kurds' demands for their political and cultural rights, Turkiye is experiencing internal strife. Due to accusations made against Turkiye by humanitarian groups and the European Union, Kurds are receiving assistance from throughout the world. The ethnic conflict in Turkiye's homeland raises concerns for the country's EU membership. Turkiye was awarded the requirements to become an EU member. Turkiye is still unable to get full EU membership despite the AKP government's positive actions toward the Kurdish people, which have been acknowledged globally.

The conflict in Syria will be divided into two phases. In the first phase, which lasted from 2011 to 2016, Turkey sought to overthrow Assad's government; but, after 2016, the world has witnessed a shift in policy whereby Turkey forbade Kurds from establishing a homeland in Syria. Due of hostility between two NATO partners, US help to Turkey was limited. Turkiye see the Kurds' aspirations as a danger to its territorial integrity. The Kurdish identity issue is a major concern that is harming Turkey's reputation both domestically and internationally. The Kurdish identity question has been the foundation of Turkish foreign strategy for the past century. The situation worsened following the Kobani incident, where ISIS took the stage, and the Kurds once more rebelled against Turkiye. However, Turkiye encouraged peace negotiations, to which PKK leaders submitted. According to Turkiye, the Kobani incident was a turning point toward the creation of an independent Kurdish state.

Turkey Inception and status of Ethnicity in Kemalism

Mustafa Kemal outlined his six goals for modern Turkey as follows: 1) Republicanism; 2) Nationalism; 3) Populism; 4) Reformism; 5) Statism; and 6) Secularism. Together, these goals were dubbed Kemalism. The Islamists, fearing for their independence, have criticized the secularism concept. The Kurdish community was troubled by nationalism, which undermined their aspirations for an independent Kurdish state (S. Sorenson, 2014). To include the Kurdish population, the Turkish government created the Eastern Regions Reform Plan. under order to

implement the strategic plan to Turkify the Kurdish domain under Turkish nationalism, the government established an Inspectorate-General in Eastern Anatolia. With only 15% of the population being Kurds and Alevis and 85% being Turks, Turkiye has a diverse ethnic makeup. However, there was no ethnic categorization in the constitution to accommodate them. Kurds were able to rebel against the government because of the socioeconomic disparities.

Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)

In this sense, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) was founded in Ankara in 1973 as a consequence of a revolutionary segment of the Kurdish society coming together on the idea of self-awareness. The PKK campaign targeted Southeast Turkey, where the Kurdish community associated with the student union discreetly created their laws, rules, and regulations. Kurdish youth enrolled in large numbers between 1975 and 1978, indicating an increase in mobility. On November 27, 1978, the PKK officially began operations in Diyarbakir Lice under the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan. Kurd then set out to create an autonomous state for all of the Kurds in the Middle East. The Marxist-Leninist doctrine of PKK was revealed (Unal, 2014).

Since Kurdish people were weak, the first step would safeguard their community. The initial phase must conclude by 1995. In order to balance the power between 1995 and 2000, the second stage was expected to boost its logistic power. The last phase of the Strategic Attack envisioned a large-scale uprising and full-scale war in the Southeast. The first phase was fierce and targeted educators and educational institutions. In the early 1990s, the second phase began. The Kurdish dispute gained prominence in Turkish politics, the quasi-state in Iraq encouraged the Kurdish population in Turkey to achieve similar goals, and ultimately the Kurdish issue attracted worldwide attention, which prompted the Turkish government to treat the Kurdish people fairly. (O. Bengio, 2011)

Turkish Relation with Syria in the context of Kurds

The Kurdish question has an impact on Turkish-Syrian ties. Up to the 1990s, Syria supported the Kurdish population and used the Kurdish factor to influence negotiations with Turkey on other matters, such as the water issue. However, Turkiye is unwilling to engage in dialogue until the Kurdish issue is settled. The Syrian government has helped the Kurds organize many gatherings. Although Turkiye was unable to drive Kurds out of Syria, Syria cannot engage in negotiations on other issues until this one is settled. As the Water Crisis worsened in this scenario, Syria was able to handle the interdependence problem because of Turkiye's unwillingness to speak without showing them assistance.(O.Bengio, 2011)

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The goal of the study is to assess Turkey's foreign policy decisions during the Arab Spring with its neighbors and how the Arab Spring influences the demands of the Kurds in the Middle East. Therefore, the process of gathering data is crucial to assessing the true causes. In order to investigate the precise circumstances, the researcher has employed the theoretical data gathering approach (secondary data). In order to obtain answers to the research questions, the researcher

used a qualitative technique and gathered all pertinent material from secondary sources. The researcher has gathered information from online e-libraries, publications from the World Bank, WHO, UNESCO, and renowned journals and newspapers, government diaries and reports, social media, remarks and analyses of politicians, economists, TV anchors, and more.

This article applies realism to Turkish foreign policy toward Syria under Erdogan because there are numerous fundamental ideas in international relations. Since the AKP came to power, the article details the relationship between Syria and Turkiye. Since the 1980s, Turkey has had a proactive approach to Syria. However, during the first ten years of the twenty-first century, Turkiye and Syria maintained a friendly relationship, cooperating in trade, business, and many other areas. Prior to the Arab Spring, the AKP maintained liberal relations. However, as the Arab Spring gained momentum, the foreign policy perspectives of both Turkiye and Syria diverged.

Syria's civil war began as a result of the Arab Spring movement, and it has been going on for ten years. The war-torn nation supported Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria, endangering Turkish security. Due to the Kurdish Autonomous Region (Rojava), Turkey launched a number of military actions in Syria in an effort to stop terrorism coming from its borders. The military activities were referred to as an offensive move against Syria and Kurds by regional and international powers. Turkiye is referred to as an aggressive state in the area and on the international scene. Turkiye asserts that the presence of terrorist groups near its borders jeopardizes national security. Turkiye asserted that its military actions were defensive in order to preserve its sovereignty and border security. Thus, both attacking and defensive threads of reality apply to Turkiye's.

Erdogan's Foreign Policy; First Decade in New Millennium

The expert claimed that the Copenhagen Summit was just as important as the 1999 Helsinki Summit, which granted Turkiye permission to join the EU. Up until October 3, 2005, the AKP made every effort to raise Turkiye's democratic standards in order to gain EU membership. The AKP became revolutionary in changing the judicial and political systems, which call for a 90-degree departure from the authoritarian Kemalist Principle.(Yavuz, 2020). The two goals of Turkish foreign policy from 2002 to 2010 were to become a member of the European Union and to have no issues with its neighbors. This strategy, which was developed by the AKP (Justice and Development Party), would increase business prospects and boost the Turkish economy. When Tayyip Erdogan assumed power in 2002, it was viewed with suspicion because of his pro-Islamic tendencies. Alongside his pro-Islamic rhetoric, Erdogan worked with the liberal populace to build a plan for joining the European Union. Turkish admission was the most talked-about topic at the 2002 Copenhagen Summit, which became Turkiye's Summit. The meeting was decided by Turkiye's desire for an EU membership date. When Tayyip Erdogan assumed power in 2002, it was viewed with suspicion because of his pro-Islamic tendencies. Alongside his pro-Islamic rhetoric, Erdogan worked with the liberal populace to build a plan for joining the European Union. Turkish admission was the most talked-about topic at the 2002 Copenhagen Summit, which became Turkiye's Summit. The meeting was decided by Turkiye's desire for an EU membership date. "We discovered that we have a lot of common interests," stated Bashar Assad. We are strengthening our relationships much more quickly as a result. It has altered the

terrain, including in Lebanon. Regional projects are necessary for all the major projects—oil, transportation, gas, railroads, and roads—between the Caspian, Red Sea, Black Sea, Gulf, and Mediterranean. Without regular regional political contacts, they are not feasible. The economy improves as a result of this kind of reconciliation.

Erdogan's Foreign Policy regarding Kurds

Fifteen percent of Turkiye's 72 million inhabitants are Kurds. Kemalist ideas are blended into a secular nation state, although Turkiye has failed to resolve the long-standing Kurdish issue through official strategy. "Everything for Turkey" became the AKP's catchphrase as they began their 2002 election campaign. The AKP's approach to the Kurdish people allowed them to develop culturally within the framework of democracy. In order to support the application for EU membership, this step was required. Regarding their administrative control over their home area and cultural acceptability, the Kurdish group makes various claims (Marlies Casier, 2011).

Energy Politics during Erdogan Era

"The pipelines will boost prosperity in the region," stated Erdogan. Through Turkiye, the Silk Road will also develop into an energy corridor that connects the east and west. (Editorial, 2007) Turkiye is endowed with the best topography, which offers a crossroads between many regions in the east and west. Turkiye can also serve as a business center. However, Turkiye was denied a transport tariff that would have accelerated economic growth. The goal of Turkiye's foreign policy officials is to develop into a transit center. Economic worries are supported by Turkey's current energy plan.

Ankara and Erbil have energy connections from 2011 to 2016. An energy-rich state is more likely to experience civil instability. The Kurdish minority in Iraq and the Baghdad government have been at odds over oil. Before this patch up, Kurds in Turkiye and Iraq had revolted against their governments. The pipeline project brought the two governments together on a single platform. The land was all Kurdish, and although they produced and supplied the oil, they did not profit from it. Iraq started importing Turkish products in 2010. The KRG and Turkiye will see more prosperity if a pipeline is operated well. Turkiye is an excellent transit nation that aspires to establish Anatolia as a "corridor of energy." Geopolitics limits the pipelines, and oil pipelines are quite expensive. Although they reduce transportation costs, pipelines that link Turkiye to KRI are safer routes for Turkiye. Oil is a commodity that provides Turkiye with strategic and economic ties to Arab nations, particularly Iraq. Turks and Kurds are among the ethnic groups who are moving closer to the energy resources (Bowlus, 2017).

Erdogan's Foreign Policy towards Syrian Crisis during Arab Spring

In his journal paper, American scholar Marc Lynch coined the phrase Arab Spring." The Arab Spring is the civil conflict and uprising began in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. The entire Arab world was affected by this unrest like wildfire (Afzal, 2017) On December 17, Mohamed Bouazizi, a street seller in Tunisia, set himself on fire in protest at police abuse. He passed away on January 4th of that year, but his actions sparked a large-scale uprising against Zain El Abidine

ben Ali's autocratic government. A few young people in southern Syria wrote the words "Your turn, doctor" on the walls. The children were subjected to torture for their actions, which escalated the unrest in Syria (Aljazeera, 2020). The Arab Spring brought about a change in the region's autocratic systems. The Arab Spring brought about a wave of revolution that would transform the region's governments from authoritarian to liberal. Social internet made their demands well known. The Arab Spring revealed the Middle Eastern public's dissatisfaction with the authoritarian regime.

The crackdown by the Bashar al Assad administration was less violent than that of his father's mass repression in Hama. The steady increase approach was employed by the Bashar administration for both executions and injuries. The number of deaths rose from 200 in 2012, prompting protesters to take to the streets, saying, "No matter what you do, we will not stray from our course." We'll put you on trial in Free Syria. During the civil conflict, Syria lost half of its military forces. However, the Kobane event is a major factor in the PYD's prominence. Kobane, which lasted for five months, gave PYD American backing. The 2015 ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish government was also made possible by the USA. As a result of US support for the Kurdish people, relations between the United States and Turkey were strained. The occupation ended on January 26, 2015. Turkish Kurds from the PKK, who formed the YPG, were amenable to training, indoctrination, and aid from the western arsenal. According to the statistics, 785 Turkish nationals lost their lives fighting ISIL between 2014 and 2016. But the successful defense at Kobane revitalized Kurdish politics in Syria. The Kurdish population in Syria did not start an uprising as they did in Iraq, Turkiye, and Iran, but this triumph revealed prospects for the Syrian Kurds. Turkiye and Syria had cordial relations before to the Arab Spring. They developed their relationship through foreign direct investments and collaborated in the areas of business and trade. Since the states enjoy friendly connections and Erdogan has a relationship with the president of Syria, Turkey's response to the revolt is encouraging. Turkish officials were sure they would convince Assad that the reforms requested by the demonstrators were necessary. Ahmet Davutoglu traveled to Syria in order to persuade them to reiterate their support. Additionally, he suggested repealing the 1963 emergency statute. In August 2011, the 14 elements of the reform agenda were agreed upon by the governments of Syria and Turkiye. However, the Syrian government did not continue with the reform initiative. The population is still being subjected to horrors even after the emergency law was repealed. Turkey realized that their efforts were unsuccessful. Homes reported casualties when the Syrian government sent soldiers to Hama. When Erdogan said over an Iftar dinner in August, "Until today, we have been very patient, wondering many times whether we can solve this, whether words translated into actions," Turkish policy underwent a sea change. However, we are now nearing the end of our patience. (Nakamura, 2019) Following uprisings in the area in early 2011, coordinated protests marked the beginning of the Arab Spring on March 15, 2011.

Kurdish Corridor along Borderline

The Syrian Kurdish community is more powerful than the Turkish one. With the help of PKK, a Turkish ethnic Kurdish group, they established the PYD. PYD's women's and military wings address communal issues. After seizing control of the northern regions, the party established an autonomous Kurdish province. The Turkish government has advised them to cease their

territorial expansion. The United States and Turkey have different opinions about the Kurds in Syria. While Turkiye saw PYD as the Syrian arm of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Washington, D.C. saw the Kurdish group as a close ally in the fight against terrorism. Turkiye's army stopped the conflict with PKK 30 years ago. The United States and the European Union designated the PKK as a terrorist group, but PYD did not. Russia has been supporting the organization in achieving this. The PYD strives to expel the non-Kurdish ethnic people from places with little or no Kurdish presence. Syrians may only be able to breathe in Aleppo. People are able to continue living in this important city because to a humanitarian corridor [from Turkiye to Aleppo]. These [PKK] terrorists have started to infiltrate Syria and engage in combat there as a result of Turkey's attack on PKK targets within the nation. Through the Syrian-Turkiye border, they are attempting to establish a corridor. This clearly puts our nation's security at danger.(U, 2016)

Border Security Wall

Turkiye chose to build a wall along the Syrian-Turkish border because it felt threatened by the Kurdish autonomous entity in northern Syria. We have seen barriers in international politics before, such as the Berlin Wall built in Germany during the Cold War. The border wall between Turkiye and Syria is hardly the first example. The globe has seen 70 border walls to stop the flow of cash, people, ideas, and things in an effort to lessen the broader effects of globalization and mobilization. As dictated by Turkey's foreign policy toward Syria and additional motivation for border restrictions, the border wall between Turkiye and Syria is crisscrossed. The construction of a wall would be motivated by the state's sovereignty and integrity, and border control would be a response to the large influx of refugees, but these are perceptions rather than facts. The province of Hatay has a 280-kilometer boundary wall. Two of the six major cities that the border wall passed through featured camps for migrants. The wall is composed of concrete slabs with razor blade wires and measures two meters in width and three meters in height. There are several gates, patrolling towers, and controlling towers on the wall. The high-tech monitoring, patrolling teams, lighting system, barbed wires, and electrical groundwork were all well controlled. Although this wall is currently under construction, it was estimated to be finished in 2018 (Arslan, 2020).

Turkey's Strategic Shift in Foreign Policy towards Assad Regime

Regarding the Kurdish population, Turkiye is bringing forward a peace process at home while keeping cordial ties with the Syrian PYD. Salih Muslim, the leader of PYD, has made many documented visits to Turkiye. PYD and PKK were regarded as terrorist organizations once the peace process came to an end. Turkiye has failed to meet the insurgents' demands. The Turkish state's tastes changed. Because to the increase of PYD near the border, Turkish establishment security worries were changing. Turkiye made a highly incorrect prediction about Syrian politics, believing that international pressure will soon bring down the Syrian government. Similar to Iran and Russia, Turkiye has limited options for meeting its energy needs. For military technology, Turkiye was depending increasingly on NATO. Furthermore, Turkiye has been dealing with up to 4 million Syrian refugees. Turkey's attempts to gain autonomy for Aleppo in 2016 demonstrated the country's change in foreign policy toward Syria from overthrowing Assad's

government to dismantling the Kurdish Autonomous Region in order to stop the spread of nationalistic sentiment. Turkiye switched to a Kurdish expansionist agenda after failing to overthrow the Assad regime. Ankara was calmed by the ongoing peace negotiations with Russia, which presented a chance to take decisive action to drive out the PYD (Kosebalaban, 2020). Despite its passionate commentary, President Erdogan has acknowledged that his country maintains "low level" relations with the Syrian regime through its surveillance (Aljazeera, Erdogan: Turkey in contact with Damascus through its spy agency, 2019)

Turkish Military Operations in Syria

In northern Syria, the Kurds were preparing to establish an independent Kurdish state. yet present Turkiye with an existential threat. On August 24, 2016, Turkiye launched Euphrates Shield Operation because to the threat of an unlawful Kurdish state in Syria. Turkiye began its deployment to Syria on August 1, 2016. Operation's goal has been to divide the Kurdish region and combat terrorist organizations like the YPG and ISIS. ISIL had completely evacuated the surrounding area by September 2017. Turkey's military forces and the Syrian Army blocked access to the two Kurdish territories. (Antonopoulos, 2018).

Operation Olive Branch: Afrin

In 2018, Turkish President R. T. Erdogan declared that another military operation in Syria's east of the Euphrates River will begin in the coming "few days." Due to the US military's presence in Kurdish-administered territory, this statement and the military operation's promotion will ruin the already strained ties between the US and Turkiye. "We will begin the operation to clear the east of the Euphrates from separatist terrorists in a few days," he said. US soldiers are never our goal. He went on to say that he believed that effective cooperation will always lead to a solution. In order to drive out Kurdish forces from the Afrin province of Syria, Turkiye and its allies FSA launched Operation Euphrates Shield in January 2018(Aljazeera, Turkey expanding military operation in northern Syria: Erdogan, , 2018).

The Astana Process

In 2017, Turkiye, Russia, and Iran began peace talks known as Astana Talks, which took place in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. Astana discusses creating three "de-escalation zones." The United States was present as an observer but did not participate in the negotiations. Since the Astana peace process was thought to be a successor for the Geneva negotiations, Russia plays a major role in it. The US contested the possibility of an Astana process that would supersede the Geneva negotiations. The US and Russian presidents jointly said in November 2017 that a political solution to the Syrian issue must be reached through the Geneva negotiations in accordance with UNSCR 2254. "We have begun to see signs that the Russians and the regime wanted to move the political process away from Geneva to a format that might be easier for the regime to manipulate," stated US officials. This However, the joint release revealed that Geneva and UNSCR 2254 remained a special platform for political solutions. In accordance with UNSCR 2254, all members of the "Syrian people's Congress," whom Russia summoned to Sochi in January 2018, agreed to create a constitutional committee that would include commissioners

from both the government and the rebels in order to "draft a constitutional reform." The rebels' commission interrupted the Sochi conference. Following the Geneva procedure, the notification regarding the rules of operation and the selection of delegates will be made.

Conclusion

Kurds were still searching for a region in the southeast of Turkiye to establish an independent state when the state of Turkiye was formally established in 1923. Instead of supporting Turkish nationalism, Mustafa Kemal was an ardent opponent of nationalism. The 1920s, 1930s, and 1980s saw several Kurdish uprisings. In the 1980s, Kurds' demands for a territory to preserve their right to self-determination caused Turkiye's relations with Syria, a neighboring country, to collapse. After gaining power, the Justice and Development Party demonstrated its willingness to have friendly relations with Syria, which serves as a gateway to the Middle East. Syria and Turkiye made trade and commercial agreements. By opening their borders without visa restrictions and providing duty-free items for the markets in Syria and Turkiye, they facilitate commerce and business. These two nations shared opposition to the US invasion of Iraq. The security and integrity of the border between Turkiye and Syria are jeopardized since the United States was helping the Kurdish struggle in Iraq. KRG will fuel the aspirations of the Middle East's repressed Kurdish populations. Although Turkiye approached KRG for commercial agreements, it did not formally acknowledge KRG.

Every image has two sides, and this one is no exception. Turkiye wanted to play a bigger role in the area, either as a transportation hub or as a mediator. Turkiye's importance is increased by its highly advantageous position, which offers access to various areas. Gas and oil are transported to Europe via pipelines. These pipelines link to the EU and extend from the Caspian area to the Middle East. In the interest of the country, the Turkish government ignored the Kurdish issue and began a pipeline with KRG. Turkey's economy has the chance to flourish in the first ten years of this millennium. Turkey's energy policy reduces heavy traffic from Istanbul in addition to imposing trade tariffs. The Turkish government has been moving away from the west since the AKP took office in 2002. Many Middle Eastern regimes have fallen as a result of the Arab Spring. The world's longest-running conflict is the civil war in Syria. Both local and foreign parties were active in the civil war. The parties involved are supported by a complicated web.

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