

Turkish Foreign Policy after April 16

UFUK ULUTAŞ, KEMAL İNAT, KILIÇ BUĞRA KANAT

- What are the decisive factors in Turkey's relations with various regions and partners?
- What policy should Turkey adopt to enhance or establish amicable relations and sustain existing ones?
 - What is the place of the "increasing friends" policy in the near future of Turkish foreign policy?

INTRODUCTION

The presidential system for Turkey, approved on April 16th by referendum, has the potential to start a new era not only in terms of domestic policy but also in foreign policy. This new era is a period in which the need for substantial updates in the methods and tools used in Turkish foreign policy should be fulfilled at a time when civil wars, economic crises, occupation and

non-state actors are decisive elements in international relations; and traditional alliances are open to discussion. Short and long term investments are crucial in ensuring that the needed updates are carried out in order to reevaluate the current methods and tools, the strict bureaucratic structure of the foreign policy, synchronization and coordination among institutions as well as the interaction between foreign policy and

Ufuk ULUTAŞ

Ufuk Ulutas is the Director of the Foreign Policy Studies at SETA Foundation. He received his BA in Political Science from Bilkent University, his MA in Middle Eastern History at the Ohio State University, and he is currently a PhD candidate at OSU. He studied Hebrew and Middle Eastern politics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and lectured at OSU between 2004 and 2009. He worked as a research assistant at Merhshon Center for International Security Studies. He served as Samuel M. Melton and George M. & Renée K. Levine fellow at Melton Center for Jewish Studies. Ulutas also worked as the Middle East Program coordinator at SETA Washington DC. He authored many academic and policy-oriented articles and reports on Middle Eastern history and politics, Israel and Jewish history, Turkish foreign policy and US policy in the Middle East. His articles, comments and op-ed pieces appeared on both Turkish and international media outlets, including Haaretz, Jerusalem Post, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, Al-Ahram and Foreign Policy, and he has been a frequent commentator on both Turkish and international TV channels such as CNN International, Russia Today, Al-Jazeera, BBC, France 24 and CCTV. He is a columnist at Akşam Daily and currently hosting a foreign policy centered TV program at TRT Türk channel. He also serves at the executive board of a Somali-based think-tank, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies.

Kemal İNAT

He graduated from Ankara University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Sciences in 1992 and received his Ph.D. from Siegen University upon completion of his doctoral thesis titled "Turkey's Middle East Policy in the Inception of 21st Century" in 2000. Inat's articles have appeared in several national and international books as *Dünya Çatışmaları* and peer-reviewed journals such as *Blaetter für Deutsche und international Politik*, *Bilgi*, *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* including editing *Middle East Yearbook* which has been published since 2005 and *Turkish Foreign Policy Yearbook* that has been published since 2009. An active professor at Sakarya University International Relations Department and Middle East Institute, Inat lectures on issues in the Middle East, Turkey's Middle East policy and EU-Middle East affairs alongside the Directorship of Middle East Institute.

Kılıç Buğra KANAT

Kılıç Buğra Kanat is the Research Director at the SETA Foundation at Washington DC. He is also an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Penn State University, Erie. Dr. Kanat received his PhD in Political Science from Syracuse University; a Master's degree in Political Science from Syracuse University; and a Master's in International Affairs from Marquette University. He was awarded the Outstanding Research Award and Council of Fellows Faculty Research Award at Penn State, Erie in 2015. He previously participated in the Future Leaders program of Foreign Policy Initiative. Dr. Kanat's writings have appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *Insight Turkey*, *The Diplomat*, *Middle East Policy*, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, and *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. He is a columnist at Daily Sabah. He is the author of *A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama's Syria Policy*. He is also co-editor of edited volumes *History, Politics and Foreign Policy in Turkey*, *Change and Adaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy*, and *Politics and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*.

domestic policy together with security, and in order to build potent human resources.

Turkey is a country that needs to synchronously manage a plenitude of foreign policy files. Despite the centuries-old tradition of diplomacy, the country has serious shortcomings in specialization, institutionalization and creation of foreign policy tools. While these shortcomings generate hardships for Turkey in foreign policy management, they also result in Turkey not being able to fully realize its potential in the international arena. Considering the strong relationship in today's world between hard power and soft power, the inability to fully use this potential does not merely originate from the shortcomings of our foreign policy institutions. Although it is a necessity that diplomacy should at times be supported by hard power as necessary while the global crisis continues, problems in institutions, which are responsible to project hard power, are naturally reflected on foreign policy making. Dexterously preserving the balance between soft and hard power by analyzing the relationships between the two will significantly increase the diplomatic effectiveness of Turkey, which has in the last decade come into prominence with its soft power in international relations. As a matter of fact, soft power not supported by hard power in adjacent regions similar to Turkey at times of crises loses its impact. Therefore, Turkey needs to design a foreign policy approach that aims for the golden ratio between hard and soft power with an approach that aims to increase institutionalization and quality of human resources in foreign policy and ensure synchronization among institutions

The Presidential System of Turkey is significant since it allows the aforementioned restructuring to be carried out by a single authority and it makes long term planning possible. President's role as both the commander-in-chief and the top foreign policy maker will positively contribute to finding and conserving the balance mentioned above. In addition, a wide array of foreign policy files ranging from relations with the USA to EU, from Iraq and Syria crises that seek urgent solutions in the Middle East to Cyprus and from

relations with Russia to the threat of rising non-state armed actors will keep Turkey's foreign policy agenda busy in the aftermath of April 16. These files embody crises as well as opportunities.

A CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH: INCREASING THE NUMBER OF FRIENDS

Since the 2000's, Turkish Foreign Policy has followed a course aiming to deepen relations with neighbors, using historical or geopolitical references often in foreign policy making, extending its activities beyond the scope of traditional areas of interests and diversifying its foreign policy institutions. This soft power centered approach that proceeded without problems until the beginning of the Arab Spring has been faced with serious challenges since 2011 due to two main reasons. The first reason was related to the fact that the tools effectively used since the beginning of the 2000's became unfashionable when the neighboring regions went into a downward spiral of instability and armed conflicts. The second reason was related to a series of plots, coup attempts and terror attacks that were put into practice inside the country. These two interconnected developments complicated and obstructed the maintenance of Turkish foreign policy with existing tools and approaches. As a matter of fact, aforementioned developments in and outside the country have reshaped Turkey's relationships with the outer world. Global and regional polarizations, civil wars and increasing terror events and ultra-right and Islamophobic movements that are on the rise have narrowed Turkey's elbow room in foreign policy. Domestically, terror attacks carried out in succession by FETÖ, PKK and DEASH have restricted the country's ability to generate alternatives to the existing way of thinking in foreign policy.

At this point, carrying out the required updates and calibrations in foreign policy is directly related to consolidation in domestic politics and reestablishing the security architecture. This is essential for Turkey to reshape its foreign relations and establish

a foreign policy in line with the spirit of the new era. The approach that was previously summarized as “increasing the number of friends” can be regarded as a method for the interim period. The success of this method does not of course depend solely on Turkey; because as the saying goes “only one side is needed for war, but two for peace”. In order to increase the success of this approach, Turkey should take institutional and diplomatic steps that will back up the approach previously called “proactive diplomacy”. While the multitude of crises in neighboring regions, the depth of global and regional polarization, domestic problems and institutional shortcomings cause Turkish foreign policy to stay reactive, Turkey should define diplomatic priorities in the new era based on national interests, emphasize international norms rather than becoming a party to global polarizations, be prepared to project its hard power when necessary. As previously emphasized, diplomacy is not the only way to increase the number of friends; international cooperation in the field of security and deterrence increased as a result of a number of preventive and limited projection of hard power will expand the diplomatic alternatives of Turkey. Potential crises as well as opportunities for Turkey to develop its relations with EU, USA, Russia and Middle Eastern neighbors based on common interests will prevail in the upcoming period.

FUTURE OF RELATIONS WITH EU

As a long standing member of NATO that has developed membership-directed relations with the EU, Turkey’s achieving of its 2023 vision will be closely linked to the future course of its relations with Europe. Having a conflict oriented relationship with Europe, its partner in about half of its foreign trade, will make it more difficult for Ankara to attain these goals. In this sense, it is crucial for Turkey to carry out relations with Europe based on mutual interest and cooperation. At this point; it must be asked why Turkey-Europe relations are turbulent. It should be emphasized that Turkey, aiming

to develop a foreign policy on the principle of “increasing the number of friends” is not sufficiently reciprocated by Europe and that disappointments experienced in this regard have pushed Ankara to direct a harsher discourse against Europe. There are always two sides to the development of friendly relations. It will not be sufficient for only Turkey or only the European Union to aspire to have cooperation based relationships and work to achieve this goal. It is imperative that both sides opt for this outcome and avoid provocative policies.

Although it has historical roots, the ever increasing anti-Turkey climate in Europe has been a determining factor in the course of mutual relations. Re-activating the passive support provided to the PKK and promoting FETÖ against Turkey following the coup attempt on July 15th have undoubtedly risked EU-Ankara relations. The EU has demonstrated its strong opposition against the counter terrorism steps taken by Turkey through threats to suspend or terminate membership negotiations with Turkey. Ultimately, while some European countries have banned Turkish politicians’ campaigning in favor of the “yes” vote, a serious crisis was caused between Ankara and the Netherlands, which itself was in the midst of its own electoral process. In addition, the recent decision by the Council of Europe to put Turkey under monitoring, has been met with fiery rhetoric from the Turkish side, denouncing the move as politically motivated and encouragement to terror groups.

All these disputes demonstrate the fact that relations between Turkey and the European Union are currently faced with an immense confrontation. Turkey has made a decision to review its relations with the EU after the referendum as a result of the hostile and interventionist policies of some countries in Europe. It is possible for the question of Turkey’s EU membership goal to be held to referendum. Also, termination of the refugee agreement concluded with Brussels in March 2016 may also be on the table.

Maintaining relations in this negative atmosphere and failing to find solutions to current problems

would be damaging to both Turkey and Europe. There are certain required steps to be taken, especially on the part of the European Union in order to return to the positive relations of the early 2000's such as: providing support expected by Ankara in fighting against terrorist groups like the PKK, FETÖ and DHKP-C which constitute serious threat risks to Turkey; resisting pressure by marginal leftist and far-right lobbies, some of which have strong ties with these terror organizations, in shaping policies on Turkey; gravitating towards compensatory policies in relation to previous attitudes apathetic towards democracy after the 15th July coup attempt; ensuring respect for elected leaders and refraining from discourses and attitudes that interfere with the internal affairs of Turkey.

Post-April 16th, Turkey needs to make it a foreign policy priority to deepen its rational relations with reasonable groups within the EU. Turkish-European relations should be freed of the constraints of Islamophobic, ultra-right and populist politics prevalent in Europe. At this point, Turkey should prioritize developing its ties with reasonable European actors within the framework of national sovereignty on a new platform by both keeping its expectations low, and avoiding artificial agendas. It is especially necessary to transform dependencies in areas such as trade and security to foreign policy initiatives. Normalization in Turkish-European relations will increase Turkey's maneuvering capacity in its foreign policy during this period of ongoing global crisis.

If the aforementioned steps are taken, Ankara's European policy will no doubt soften and a cooperative atmosphere will predominate. The fact that Turkey had neither canceled the refugee agreement with Europe nor unilaterally terminated the accession process, even when the crises with Holland, Germany, and Austria were at their most severe level in the context of the referendum can be regarded as an evidence of Turkey's desire to sustain its relations with Europe on a rational basis. However, this relationship can only be done with mutual respect for sovereignty and sensitivities.

TURNING THE CRISIS WITH USA INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

The US presidential elections held in November have generated a sense of optimism in Turkish-US relations, succeeding a prior three year period that had been underlined by crisis. The perception created during the Obama administration that ties would not undergo positive change culminated in the larger part of 2016 to be accentuated with crisis management. The end of the Obama administration following the November elections and the outcome of the referendum in Turkey put an end to the uncertainty felt by latter and may herald a positive period in terms of relations between the two countries. The timely congratulations offered by both leaders to the other, first from Erdoğan to Trump following the latter's election and then vice versa after the April 16th referendum, cultivated this optimism. President Erdoğan's expected trip to Washington in May can further strengthen this positive atmosphere. This represents a significant opportunity to repair the damaged confidence between the two countries, especially when considered in the backdrop of the negative statements made by Obama and the Obama administration about the Turkish government and its leaders during its final months. Based on the fact that, historically, stability in the relations between the two countries have largely depended on the communication between their leaders, it can be argued that the continuation of the current atmosphere is likely to generate a favorable outcome.

Apart from this perspective on leaders, there are also important areas in which Turkey and U.S. can find common ground. One of these is the possibility for a new regional momentum to be achieved in the fight against ISIL. Although the matter of the YPG is still one of the most serious areas of crisis, it is hoped that the new U.S. administration will act with awareness on the danger that this problem poses for Turkish national security and the future of ethnic relations in the region. Turkey can make significant contributions to the campaign against ISIL, both with regard to the active use of the Incirlik Air Base

and that of the Free Syrian Army, especially in the context of the Raqqa operation.

Additionally, the existence of destabilizing groups in the region, especially those which are affiliated with Iran, has become a problem which nearly all countries protest. In particular, foreign fighters brought into Syria from various regions and the massacres carried out by such fighters are now a significant factor to be considered. In the future, Turkey and U.S., together along with other regional players, may be able to find common ground to ensure regional stability related to this issue.

Of course, the regime's latest chemical attack in the Idlib region seems to have created a rather risky situation both in regional terms and in terms of international security. Before the US carried out the airstrike, Turkey had confirmed its readiness to cooperate with US to prevent a possible chemical attack. Trump did not neglect to thank Turkey on this issue in his last phone call. At this point, important steps can be taken by both countries to prevent the chemical threat in Syria from escalating and spreading.

Lastly, there are significant opportunities to develop Turkish-US relations not only in the Middle East but also in the Eastern Mediterranean in a broader sense. Diversifying the sources of energy particularly in Turkey and in various European countries will be crucial for both energy security of those concerned as well as the regional stability. Despite the arguments in the US during the electoral process about the future of NATO, it is observed that the new administration seems resolute in rendering NATO into a more active and participative alliance. In this sense, the fact that Turkey has one of the largest armies in NATO as well as its increasing significance in overall European security will draw the two countries together.

A BALANCED RELATION WITH RUSSIA

One of the most difficult challenges for Turkey is the upholding of balanced relations with Russia, with whom it has strong commercial ties, despite political differences. This difficulty has been clearly observed

in recent years, especially during the 2015 jet crisis. By their nature, relations with Russia depends on the preservation of a delicate balance. Russian can at times be somewhat unpredictable, with a high threshold for political flexibility. Nonetheless, the determinative role of Putin in Russian foreign policy and the personal relationship between President Erdoğan and Putin are reflected in Turkish-Russian relations. As long as these relations continue, channels between the two countries will remain open and the common ground generated by mutual interdependence due to commercial relationships will continue to exist. It would be beneficial for both countries to reinforce areas such as trade, energy, and tourism and separate different areas of relations despite the geopolitical competition and political differentiation between the two countries.

Substantial differences and disputes exist between Turkey and Russia on the issues of Syria, Ukraine, and Nagorno-Karabagh, making crises in third countries inevitable. While Syria is the leading country on this list, it also offers a number of opportunities. Most recently, it had been observed during the Astana Talks that the Syrian Civil War can have the potential to produce opportunities to deepen the relations between the two countries. However, the Syrian crisis has dimensions that go beyond the influence of both countries and Russia continues to invest in political deadlock. Maintaining support for the Assad regime following the chemical attack, failing to put sufficient pressure on the regime to abide by the ceasefire agreement, and refusing, despite of the Astana Process, to take steps to promote a paradigm shift to achieve a political solution are among Russia's most significant dilemmas in Syria. Reevaluating its commitment to provide air protection to the Assad regime, supporting the establishment of a national army in Syria to ensure stability in its transition period, ceasing its attacks on civilians and opposition fighters that abide by the ceasefire, and prioritizing anti-DAESH operations are all steps that Russia can take that would reflect positively both on the Syria crisis and on Turkey-Russia relations.

For Turkey, Russia and the U.S. represent two very different states that cannot be alternatives to each other, which implies that strengthening relations with Russia does not reflect a Cold War-style bipolar policy, and therefore does not present an alternative to Turkey's deep military engagements with the U.S. and NATO. The position of Turkey with regard to the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine in which Russia and the U.S. oppose each other, is closer to that of the U.S. rather than Russia. Still, Turkey must pursue an asymmetric balance in its relations with the U.S. and Russia. It should be kept in mind that in the case of a shift in U.S. policy on Syria against the Assad regime and Turkish conjunction with the U.S. may negatively reflect on Turkey's relations with Russia. Nevertheless, considering the fact that changes in the military conditions in the field against Assad will expedite negotiations, it is crucial for Turkey to increase the density of contact with Russia regarding political negotiations.

MIDDLE EASTERN NEIGHBORS

In recent years, one of the most challenging issues of Turkish foreign policy has been the management of its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. Maintenance of normal relationships has not been possible with such neighbors in which occupation, civil war, mass killings, and sectarian conflict have become prevalent. The degree to which Turkey's policy of "increasing friends" will be in effect with relation to its Middle Eastern relations in the current conditions is a major question mark. It is the extremities of political, humanitarian and security circumstances that prevent a return to normalcy in relations.

The introduction of a just resolution to the Syrian crisis has the potential to generate a butterfly effect in positive terms in the region. The U.S.A.'s Syrian policy, which has given the signals of change following the Shayrat Airbase attack, can help establish political negotiations on a more sustainable ground even without a large scale U.S. military engagement in Syria. Turkey's combined use of soft and hard power in Syria, its rebuilding of deterrence through apt maneuvers,

its effectiveness in mobilizing the Syrian opposition and tribal groups who are, though disorganized, have high potential in fighting terrorist organizations in traditional and asymmetric methods, can usher in a new equation in the north of Syria. At the same time, it is crucial to establish a Syrian political body on the territory liberated from DAESH with Turkish support, strengthen this body's hand in political negotiations and simultaneously pursue a diplomatic process along with military endeavors.

It can be argued that the post-DAESH period in Iraq will be relatively turbulent, and that the conflicts likely to arise in even the post-DAESH period will threaten the stability of the country. Issues of sovereignty in disputed areas, the independence referendum of the KRG, DAESH sleeper cells, the fate of numerous Shia militias within the body of Al-Hashed al-Sha'bi and under Iran's authority, as well as sectarian conflicts increase concerns for the future of Iraq. Under these conditions, Turkey will continue to emphasize the territorial integrity of Iraq, avoid becoming a party to sectarian conflict, and aim to maintain good relationships with the KRG. Fighting against the PKK and DAESH together with the KRG and the Baghdad government, encouraging fair Sunni participation in political processes, increasing the contacts formed with the Shia community in previous years, and deepening commercial and cultural dialogue will make the relations between the two countries stronger. The most significant disrupting factor towards amiable bilateral relations will continue to be Iran.

Strained relations with Iran resulting from the Syrian crisis are still not on a constructive path due to Iran's regional expansionism-oriented policies. Iran's policies on Syria and Iraq conflict with those of Turkey, and is advancing a geopolitical and theopolitical rivalry to which Turkey is not a party. Nevertheless, both countries have compartmentalized their relations and sustained their close commercial ties. Iran will be one of the countries where Turkey's policy of "increasing friends" will be most difficult

to achieve. In addition to existing strains, the new American administration has adopted an approach which is also espoused by the Gulf countries and Israel, targeting Iran's regional influence. Although Turkey's attitude towards Iran differs from those of these countries, Iran's regional expansionism and armed proxies also represent geopolitical threats for Turkey. Hence, Turkish-Iranian relations will also be affected by the anti-Iran wave rising in the region and the most efficient way to eliminate this will be for Iran to reformulate its Syrian policy and return to its own national borders. The political aspect of Turkey-Iran relations is full of unknowns when considered against the backdrop of the approaching Iranian presidential election.

Diplomatic normalization with Israel continues with a low profile. Potential for cooperation on the issue of energy as well as overlapping security sensitivities build the groundwork for dialog. Despite all complications, the transfer of Eastern Mediterranean energy sources continues to be the engine of relations. It is necessary to use the discovered energy sources to establish peace in Eastern Mediterranean Basin rather than using them as elements of competition. It would be helpful to continue this process through respect for national sovereignty rights as well as Palestinian rights over these energy sources. In the same breath, various articulations of conceptions regarding the issue of Syria and the regional influence of Iran do not go unnoticed. In addition, common ground may be found between Turkey and Israel in relation to the fight against armed non-state actors (PKK, DAESH, al-Qaida, pro-Iran militia, Shabihis etc.) whose impact is ever increasing in the region. On the other hand, the matter of Palestine and the continually deepening occupation remains to be the most significant structural problem facing the bilateral relations. The Peace Process in general and Turkish aid efforts to Gaza in particular should be regarded as opportunities to normalize the relations. Turkey can make contributions to the peace process that cannot be offered by any other country

in the region. Hence, it should be noted here that Turkey's position to support Palestine is not an obstacle to the process but an opportunity.

There is no indication of amelioration in Turkish-Egyptian relations which had soured after the coup. The most important reason for this is the fact that coup conditions are still in force in Egypt and that the coup administration identify the Muslim Brotherhood with Turkey. The Sisi administration expects Turkey to take unrealistic steps such as recognizing the coup, implying its legitimacy and acknowledging the Muslim Brotherhood as an illegal organization. On the other hand, Turkey expects the Sisi government to go to the polls and release thousands of political detainees beginning with the elected President Muhammed Mursi. Despite some efforts, the huge gap between the demands of both countries still exists. It would be wrong to expect normalization as a result of a number of low profile informal contacts that could be established in the near future.

The biggest problem between Turkey and the Gulf Countries, other than Qatar, is the lack of sustainability and institutionalization. Strategic partnerships and long term cooperation have not been established despite positions that overlap on various regional matters. Turkish-Saudi Arabian relations, which had increased in extensiveness towards the end of the Obama administration, have come to a standstill in the current Trump period. This situation can change with intensified commercial relationships, via partnerships in the defense industry as well as common action in overlapping regional matters. The Gulf countries should try to free their relations with Turkey from ideological limitations. The irrational anti-Turkey trend, especially in United Arab Emirates, does not only affect Turkey-UAE relations but also overshadows Turkey's relations with many countries from Egypt to Libya. At a strategic level, Turkey should deepen its relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council where it has an observer status and seek ways to find common ground in regional matters.

CONCLUSION

Management of such a varied and complex foreign policy is a challenging task. Such difficulty intensifies to a greater extent when combined with domestic consolidation efforts and the restructuring of security architecture. With the Presidential System, Turkey now has the opportunity to update both the approach and institutions of its foreign policy. The challenges to the approach of “increasing the number of friends” suggest that it should be admitted that this approach is rather ambitious under existing global and regional conditions. Even so the answer to the question concerning

the extent to which global and regional opportunities are to be utilized will determine the performance of Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, increasing both institutional and human resource capacities of foreign policy institutions, reevaluating their inner workings, ensuring coordination among institutions, and managing them in line with the priorities and political approaches prevalent in Turkey will be crucial. In any case, Turkey should undertake necessary preparations with the awareness that hard power may have to be used in foreign policy in the case of necessity as an effective factor in addition to soft power.