



**THE EXTENT TO WHICH AMERICA'S SUPPORT FOR KURDISH
GROUPS THAT THREATEN THE TURKISH BORDERS
AFFECTED THE U.S.-TURKISH RELATIONS**

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CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Kurds in Turkey

Ethnic Kurds residing in Turkey form approximately eighteen percent of the Turkish population. A high percentage of Kurds live in the South East region of Turkey, mostly in impoverished areas (Zanotti & Clayton, 2021). The Kurdish people are reluctant to recognize the state authority of Turkey which has resulted in tension. According to Zeyno (2005), since the 1980s, Kurdish movements have had political activities fighting for civil rights of the Kurds living in Turkey. In 2010, most notable Kurdish leaders were banned from politics citing their support for PKK (Visweswaran, 2013): (Wadhams, Saleha, Stephanie & Jennifer, 2019). Kurdish people protested the decision resulting in casualties. The PKK leaders were arrested and negotiations carried out. The rebel leader, Ocalan asked PKK militants to leave Turkey and cease fire as a show of peace.

The PKK announced their decision to move to northern Iraq and relinquish its power within Turkey, a move which brought instantaneous peace in Turkey. Despite efforts to be independent, the Kurdish people have not been able to enjoy equal freedom and rights as the rest of Turkish residents. Iraq, Iran and Syria are neighbouring countries which face a similar issue with Kurdish people just as the Turkish people. The Turkish military has been fighting off an insurgency by PKK since 1984 (Heper & Keyman, 1998). The PKK which was founded by Abdullah Ocalan is an outfit which most recently demanded for political and cultural autonomy for the Kurds. The PKK initially demanded for secession but increased their demands.

The Turkish military which has been keen in neutralizing the outfit has received immense criticism from human rights organizations and governments in the West terming their activities as excessively cruel on Kurds. The military has imprisoned thousands of people involved in

PKK's activities and its sympathizers leaving tens of thousands of this population displaced due to the unrest (Zanotti & Clayton, 2021). The AKP Turkish government covers a huge constituency in the areas inhabited by Kurds in Turkey and promotes traditional values. The AKP government acknowledges that integrating Kurds into Turkey requires a change in development approaches in the cultural, political, economic and security sense.

Government leaders such as Erdogan appeal to the government to acknowledge the various ethnic groups residing in Turkey by using Islam identities and teachings. Efforts geared at giving Kurds and their leaders more rights and status have been sabotaged by attacks orchestrated by PKK (Wadhams, Saleha, Stephanie & Jennifer, 2019). However, the Turkish government has allowed the widespread use of the Kurdish language in election campaigns, media and in institutions of learning, a significant step towards integrating the Kurds in Turkey.

The national leaders of the Kurds have demand that future changes in the Turkish constitution incorporate the linguistic and ethnic identity of the Kurds. The Kurdish leaders additionally seek to change the electoral law to increase the participation of Kurds in national politics within Turkey (Romano, 2005). The leaders seek to lower the vote threshold from the current ten percent for political parties to increase nationalist participation of Kurds in politics (Amanda, 2019). Just as the balance of power theory predicts, rapid changes in international power and status in Turkey has provoked counterbalancing actions. The Western countries have been on the forefront supporting Kurdish groups, which seek to be independent. The U.S. was supporting Turkey when it was regarded as a soft power, hence a real democracy. However, to some extent, the U.S. went against the balance of power theory by not supporting Turkey's interests of safeguarding their borders despite the two countries having a strong alliance.

The United States of America and Turkey's Dealings

The U.S. and Turkish governments have enjoyed conducting trading environments for decades. The Domino theory can easily explain the initial relationship between the U.S. and Turkey. According to this theory, nations within the developing world often fall victims to political, economic and military pressure from the more superior nations such as those in the West. As such, the West supplies political, economic and military support to these nations. The U.S. has been offering support economically, militarily and politically. Successive U.S. administrations acknowledge the need and importance of enhanced trade with Turkey. During Obama's governance, the U.S. government reiterated the importance of the bilateral trade by illustrating the U.S. government's vision in promoting a multifaceted bilateral relationship with the Turkish government. The U.S.-Turkey trade volume can be estimated at twenty billion dollars in 2011, a forty-five percent increase compared to the previous year (Zanotti & Clayton, 2021).

The study also showed a significant growth in Turkish exports to the United States compared to its exports to the rest of the world. Turkey is ranked at the 26th position and 47th position in exporting and importing of merchandise from U.S. respectively (Wadhams, Saleha, Stephanie & Jennifer, 2019). The U.S. is the fourth largest trading partner to Turkey, pointing towards significant strategic relationships for the two countries. Both the U.S. and Turkish leaders desire to improve investment ties and trade relations to benefit their countries. The two governments signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement in 1999, a step which propagated trading relations between Turkey and the U.S..

In 2010, annual meetings for the Turkey- U.S. Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation commenced, promoting cabinet level meetings (Economic Outlook, ISPAT, 2011). The framework seeks to enhance bilateral economic relationships for the two

countries which promotes their economic growth. The Near Zero Zone project located in Izmir aims at creating incentives to enhance the efficiency and capacity of Turkey's energy companies (Orhan, 2016). The project is a public private partnership funded and supported by the U.S. government, which further enhances the relationship between the two countries. The U.S. government categorized Turkey as a priority market for its merchandise, expanding its bilateral trade relations.

The U.S. and Turkish dealings advocate for enhanced bilateral relations through business contact groups and delegations to increase information campaigns and grow the private sector contacts. Important contact groups are concentrated in sectors like system management, energy, marketing, construction, high technology and engineering, medical supplies and property development (Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, 2010). However, efforts to have preferential trade between the U.S. and Turkey have been unsuccessful. Turkey's consumer demand has skyrocketed in the recent past, making the country a valuable target market, import source and investment hub for the U.S..

As such, the Turkish Ministry of Economy identified states in the U.S. which are important in promoting bilateral trade between the two nations. The six states: California, New York, Georgia, Florida, Illinois and Texas, are recognized globally, they are competitive and appreciate superior quality of products and services hence most significant trading players for Turkey (Goldstone, 2011).

Post-Cold War Dynamics

Several developments have influenced the relationship between the USA and Turkey since early 1990s, which marked the end of the cold war. The per Capita income for the Turkish people has experienced immense growth, tripling in less than the last two decades. Turkey hold a

high geopolitical importance resulting in the experienced economic dynamism (Goldstone, 2011). The country straddles central Asia, Europe and the middle east which has made it have enhanced global and regional importance. Despite Turkey's dependence on the west, the country is slowly gaining leverage over the western countries. Besides depending on the U.S. and other allies of NATO for strategic, economic and political support, Turkey is strengthening its military ties and diversifying its economy to enhance its relations with non NATO countries (Nachmani, 2009): (Tocci, 2017). The rise of AKP and a decline in the military capacity of the country has resulted in external and internal changes within Turkey. The Complex Interdependence Theory which was developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye illustrates the complex and interdependent relationship between states and societies. According to this theory, economic relationships increase with a decline in military power. Despite the economic relations increasing and military intervention decreasing, power and military force balancing is important. Research shows that a decline in militarization and an increase in economic collaboration results in a spontaneous surge in cooperation between nations. Therefore, the U.S. and Turkey stand to benefit from the reduced military independence for Turkey. The Turkish government is seeking alternative suppliers for its fire arms which could boost its economic relations with the U.S. and ultimately lead to enhanced cooperation.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founding father of the Turkish republic in 1923 and other officials defined Turkey as a secular state. The state leaders unconsciously set up the country to depend on the West in the military, economic, social, political and legal sense (Coulombis, 1998): (Karaosmanoglu, 2000). The old order was based on Islamic roots and was frowned upon by most state officials (Palmer et al., 2011). By changing the old order, political freedom is being enjoyed. The military ultimately protected the Kemalist way which promoted the control of

religion by the state (Smit, 2012). The Kemalist order discouraged the use Arabic and promoted Latin alphabets, promoted literacy, employment for all genders and classes of people, promoted education for people from all backgrounds and discouraged the usage of Islamic dress codes.

The AKP which had enjoyed political support respects Islamic roots. Elements within the military, opposition of the republican people's Party and some members within the Turkish secular elite group sought to fight for some vital issues (Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, 2010). The outfits fighting for changes faced challenges from domestic Turkish people who wanted some changes. However, the AKP has received victories due to the unsuccessful overthrowing of the government, the attempt to dissolve the AKP and the election of an AKP official as the Turkish president in the 2007 national elections.

The resignation of the Turkish general staff, Isik Kosaner pointed to the shift of power from the government to the civilians. The resignation occurred a day before the meeting to discuss the Turkish supreme military promotions and retirements (Tocci, 2017). Kosaner pointed out that he was not happy with government detentions and overlooking high ranking officials in promotions. His replacement with Necdet Ozel undermined the AKP by hatching plans to overthrow the government. In 2012, the Turkish authorities arrested former Turkish general staff, Chief Ilker, due to a hatched plan to overthrow the government. Arresting senior generals illustrated the start of a democratic age within Turkey (Amanda, 2019). Changes in the order of things did not offer suddenly because of AKP. The changes show long term dynamics within the Turkish politics and societal environments.

The European Union Deal and Refugee Challenge

The Turkish government used the country's demographic profile to support its candidature as a potential EU member. The government argued that it could bring a dynamic and

youthful population into the EU which would positively influence the much aging EU population resulting in enhanced EU influence among Islamic nations. Turkey offered to work hand in hand with the European Economic Community from late 1950s and became part of the association a few years later (Nicolei, 2002; Ozbudun, 1996). The accession talks started in 2005 but have stalled because of opposition from France and Germany. These two European countries strongly oppose the move to give Turkey full membership to be part of the EU states.

Countries which oppose the move to make Turkey part of the EU cite empirical rationales for their decisions. However, most political analysts argue that the move to oppose the membership of Turkey is based on the fear of losing out on the power to influence policy agenda (Palmer et al., 2011). The members of EU fear that the large Muslim population of Turkey could influence culture and character of members of the EU hence greatly reducing the influence of the founding countries in policies that affect these founding western countries.

Turkey has been having full customs union with the EU since mid-1990s. Just like Russia, the Turkish government is a member of the council of Europe. These non EU states that are members of the council of Europe can be affected by the jurisdiction of the European council of human rights (Keyman & Ozkirimli, 2013): (Watts, 1999). The inadequate support for the complete accession to the EU has resulted in declined expectations especially amongst Turkish officials. The arising concerns about the political and economic soundness of the EU have made the Turkish leaders wonder whether they need the EU (Sali, 2021). The Eurozone crisis has resulted in a non-conducive environment for politics and economic prosperity which has made leaders such as Erdogan proclaim that the EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the EU which has further stalled the accretion process.

The Turkish population is not keen to relate with Cyprus, a member country for the EU, further obstructing the process. The candidature of Turkey in the EU has faced challenges because of how the state treats Kurds, women, media personnel and other minor religious groups (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2007; Hale, 2012). The way the Turkish government treats women and its transparency has been challenged as it affects the country's legal system and democracy (Schenkkan, 2014). Countries which are keen in becoming part of the EU need to be democratic and support human rights and freedoms.

Regardless of the above listed obstacles, the EU gives Turkey over one billion dollars to assist the country in preparing the accession. The annual pre accession technical and financial aid seeks to harmonize the political, economic, societal and bureaucracy of Turkey with those of EU member states. Turkey is home to millions of refugees making the country a safe hub for people seeking peace in different countries (Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, 2010).

Recent Terrorist Attacks in Turkey

Terrorism has been a major thorn for Turkish authorities with the Southeastern and Eastern provinces being most affected. Istanbul and Ankara, major cities in Turkey have faced acts of terror which has devastated Turkish citizens. A bombing which occurred in 2016 killed over 35 people and left hundreds injured was conducted by Kurdistan Freedom Hawks, a militant group living in Turkey (Tocci, 2017). Another airport attack occurred months later leaving over 45 people dead and 230 injured. This attack was claimed by ISIL, a terrorist group that harasses Turkish people. The Dokumacilar is an Islamic terrorist group which has militants from ISIL. The Dokumacilar group bombed Suruc in 2015 resulting in over 30 deaths (Stanton, 2016).

The Istanbul nightclub shooting which occurred in 2017 was orchestrated by ISIL. In 2021, the Turkish military and security forces bragged of preventing over one hundred terrorist

attacks planned to take place in Turkey. 97 of the terrorist attacks had been planned by PKK while the others had been orchestrated by ISIL. The huge number of terrorist attack plans point to the vulnerability of Turkey to outside forces.

Turkey has built high quality aerial vehicles to conduct accurate target acquisitions and attack armed enemies. The major use of the drone aircraft is to attack PKK and its related militia in Syria, Iraq and the South Eastern side of Turkey (Hisarciklioglu, 2010). Despite the risks involved in using drones to combat violence, Turkish officials argue that drones are effective in locating enemies. The use of drone aircraft is not necessarily illegal. However, it increases the casualties among civilians which goes against the rule of law and human rights (Özkan, 2011).

Turkey domestically manufactures the drones after failing to acquire MQ 9 reapers in 2010. Turkey was not able to purchase the reapers because of opposition from the U.S. congress and the poor quality drones delivered by Israel (Leezenberg, 2015): (Dorian, 2018). When Israel delivered underperforming drones into turkey, Kale group, Baykar Technologies and the Turkish Aerospace Industries companies partnered to produce high quality drones. Turkey, under the guidance of Selcuk Bayraktar, seeks to produce both small and huge drones hence dominance of weapons. Whereas these Turkish companies assembled drones, they used key components from western countries such as Canada.

Canada stopped exporting optical sensors and cameras to Turkey because of the country's use of the parts. Bayraktar TB2, a drone used I Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, was downed and after investigations, found to contain parts made in Canada, prompting Canadians to halt export permits to Turkey (Sali, 2021). Canada cited the inconsistent use of the parts which was against foreign policy. Another Austrian based Canadian company suspended the deliveries of engines to Turkey. The company cited unclear usage of the parts as the reason for the suspension of the

deliveries (Wadhams, Saleha, Stephanie & Jennifer, 2019). Most recently, Turkey has been reported to integrate locally made cameras and engines in the country's drones technology as a means of achieving sustainability. The superior quality for domestically manufactured drones has opened new export markets for the country: Asian countries, countries in EU and African countries. Ukraine has gone ahead and tried to co-produce the drones alongside Turkey, a request that is still under consideration.

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