

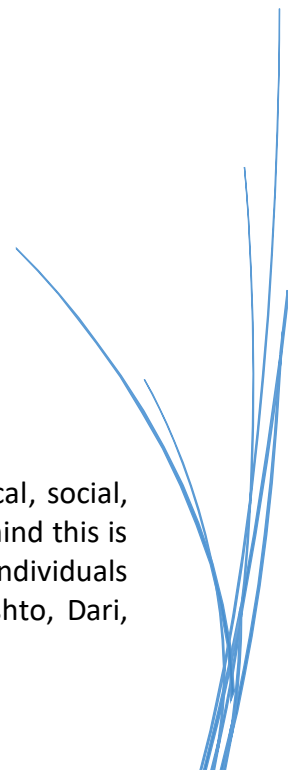
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

Issue Number – 460
(January 10-15, 2025)

THE ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF TURKEY IN RECENT MIDDLE EASTERN DEVELOPMENTS



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



In this issue:

- The Role and Objectives of Turkey in Recent Middle Eastern Developments..... 3
- Turkey's Efforts to Expand Influence in the Middle East 5
- Turkey's Role in the Middle East..... 6
- Turkey's Goals in the Middle East..... 7
- Challenges Facing Turkey in the Middle East..... 8
- Conclusion 9
- References:..... 11

Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



THE ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF TURKEY IN RECENT MIDDLE EASTERN DEVELOPMENTS

Introduction

Modern-day Turkey is the successor to the Ottoman Caliphate, a historical empire that ruled vast territories across three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. However, during World War I, the Ottoman Empire allied with Germany and ultimately faced defeat. In the aftermath, Allied powers seized control of large parts of Ottoman lands, and on March 3, 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate was officially abolished, giving rise to the modern Republic of Turkey.

The Republic was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who initiated sweeping reforms to secularize and modernize the nation. Islamic laws were abolished, the Arabic language was banned, the Turkish script was converted from Arabic to Latin, veiling for women was prohibited, and Turkey distanced itself from its historical roots. A shift toward Europeanization became the national aspiration. From its establishment until 1938, Turkey was governed under the single-party leadership of Atatürk and his Republican People's Party.

After Atatürk's era, political diversity began to emerge. Some members of his party broke away to establish the Democratic Party, which won the 1950 elections, bringing Adnan Menderes to power. Menderes introduced significant reforms, including reinstating the Arabic call to prayer, encouraging the study of Arabic and religious texts, and opening religious schools under the name *Imam Hatip*. These reforms alarmed Turkey's secular military, which viewed them as a threat to the country's secular framework. This culminated in a military coup in 1960, leading to Menderes' execution and a series of subsequent military interventions in Turkish politics.

In addition to Menderes, two other significant figures in Turkey's modern history challenged secularism: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876–1960) and Professor Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011). Said Nursi initially supported Atatürk but turned against him when Atatürk adopted a path of Westernization and secularism. Through his writings, religious schools, and connection to the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Nursi worked to reconnect Turks with their Islamic heritage.



Similarly, Professor Necmettin Erbakan dedicated his life to reintegrating Islam into Turkey's political and social spheres. Despite immense challenges, he pursued his mission with wisdom, patience, and unwavering determination. Erbakan sought to free Turkey from political, economic, and cultural dependency on the West, advocating for self-reliance and renewed ties with the Islamic world. He established the *Developing-8 (D8)* organization, a coalition of eight developing Muslim-majority countries, to promote scientific, economic, and political cooperation and foster collective strength.

Erbakan's political and reformist efforts eventually led to his appointment as Prime Minister in 1996. However, his vision for elevating the Islamic world alarmed Western powers, who pressured Turkey's military to oust him. Under mounting pressure, Erbakan resigned on February 28, 1997, in what became known as the "soft coup."

Following the 2002 elections, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power, marking a significant turning point in Turkey's modern history. Erdoğan's leadership ignited hopes among Turks for a revival of the Ottoman Caliphate in a modern form. Over the past two decades, he has undertaken monumental efforts to elevate Turkey, aspiring to place the nation among the top ten global powers in economic, political, and military domains.

Under Erdoğan's administration, Turkey has demonstrated a dynamic foreign policy and expanded its international relations significantly. The number of Turkish embassies worldwide has increased to 144, with 183 consulates, reflecting the country's active global engagement. Economically, Erdoğan transformed Turkey into a robust and growing economy. On the military front, his leadership has dramatically enhanced Turkey's self-reliance. Before Erdoğan, Turkey's domestic military production accounted for only 20% of its needs; today, that figure has risen to 80%. Moreover, Turkey has become a major exporter of military equipment, including Bayraktar TB2 drones, naval ships, and other advanced technologies.

According to a 2025 report, Turkey now ranks ninth among the world's most powerful militaries, highlighting its emergence as a formidable global force under Erdoğan's leadership.



TURKEY'S EFFORTS TO EXPAND INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East, comprising nearly 17 countries—including Iran, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, and the 12 nations of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon)—is a region of great strategic importance to Turkey. Turkey aspires to play a leading role as a major regional power and has been working to strengthen its political and strategic influence in the area.

When the Arab Spring uprisings began in 2011, Turkey openly supported the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, framing them as the people's legitimate right to establish their desired governments. Turkey backed Egypt's then-president, Mohamed Morsi, seeing his rise to power as beneficial for Egypt, Turkey, and the broader region. Similarly, Turkey supported Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) both politically and militarily and continues to do so. It also provided strong and comprehensive support to the opposition forces in Syria.

However, Turkey's regional ambitions faced setbacks in 2013, following the military coup led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi that overthrew Morsi in Egypt. This event soured Turkey's relations with Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, which began opposing Turkey's efforts across the region. For instance, these countries backed General Khalifa Haftar in Libya to counter the GNA and prevent the establishment of a strong central government, indirectly challenging Turkey's influence without direct confrontation.

Qatar, one of Turkey's closest allies, also played a significant role in supporting these uprisings, particularly Morsi's government in Egypt. In response, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia imposed a political, economic, and diplomatic blockade on Qatar on June 5, 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism—allegations Qatar denied. The blockade included cutting off land, sea, and air links, which created serious economic and political challenges for Qatar.

Despite these pressures, Qatar managed to navigate the crisis with Turkey's support. Turkey provided crucial assistance, helping Qatar overcome the blockade's impact. Eventually, on January 5, 2021, the Al-Ula Agreement normalized relations between Saudi Arabia and its allies with Qatar,



bringing an end to the blockade. Qatar emerged from the crisis successfully, with Turkey playing a key role in its resilience.

In recent Middle Eastern developments, Turkey has positioned itself as an active and influential player. Its actions, goals, and challenges reflect its ambitions to reshape its role in the region and assert itself as a key regional power.

TURKEY'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Turkey has played a significant role in the Middle East across various areas. Here are some key aspects of its involvement:

1. **Constructive Diplomacy:** Turkey has actively engaged in mediating and resolving conflicts in the Middle East. It has played a key role in issues related to Syria, Libya, Qatar, and Palestine, often positioning itself as a mediator to address regional challenges.
2. **Military Presence:** Turkey has expanded its military footprint in the region. It has established bases in Qatar, Iraq, and various parts of Syria while conducting counter-terrorism operations against groups like the Kurdish militias (YPG/PKK) and ISIS.
3. **Economic Influence:** Turkey aims to become a major player in the energy sector and has worked to strengthen its trade relations with Middle Eastern countries, positioning itself as an important economic partner in the region.
4. **Cultural and Religious Impact:** Drawing from its Ottoman heritage, Turkey seeks to revive its cultural and religious influence in the region, promoting its historical ties and fostering connections based on shared values.
5. **The Syrian Crisis:** Turkey has been directly involved in the Syrian conflict from the beginning. It has supported opposition forces against Bashar al-Assad through financial, military, and logistical means. Turkey's primary objectives include curbing the influence of Kurdish military groups like the YPG/PKK and facilitating the return of Syrian refugees currently living in Turkey to their homeland.



Through these efforts, Turkey has positioned itself as a proactive and influential player in the Middle East, balancing diplomacy, military strategy, economic partnerships, and cultural outreach to enhance its regional presence.

TURKEY'S GOALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Based on Turkey's political, economic, and social actions in the Middle East, its objectives in the region can be summarized as follows:

1. **Emerging as a Regional Power:** Turkey aims to establish itself as a strong and influential regional power with significant political, economic, and military influence in the Middle East.
2. **Becoming an Energy Hub:** Turkey seeks to become a key transit point for Middle Eastern energy resources, such as oil and natural gas, to Europe, positioning itself as an essential link in the global energy supply chain.
3. **Curbing Kurdish Armed Groups:** A major priority for Turkey is to prevent the activities of Kurdish separatist armed groups, which it sees as a threat to its national security. These groups, allegedly supported by major regional powers and Israel, aim to establish an independent "Greater Kurdistan," a prospect Turkey considers unacceptable. To counter this, Turkey conducts military operations against Kurdish groups and pressures the new Syrian government to either integrate them into its forces or disarm them.
4. **Strengthening the Economy:** Turkey is focused on expanding its trade relationships with Middle Eastern markets and enhancing regional cooperation to boost its own economy.
5. **Leading the Islamic World:** Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey aspires to lead the Islamic world by supporting Palestine, promoting Islamic solidarity, and reviving the cultural and political influence of the Ottoman Caliphate era.

Through these goals, Turkey aims to solidify its presence as a dynamic and influential actor in the Middle East while advancing its strategic and national interests.



CHALLENGES FACING TURKEY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Turkey faces several significant challenges in its efforts to strengthen its influence in the Middle East. These challenges include:

Regional Rivals:

Turkey's ambitions in the Middle East are complicated by competition with regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Iran, in particular, supports Shia groups in the region and has taken actions that Turkey views as detrimental to Sunni populations. For example, in Syria—where the majority of the population is Sunni—Iran's backing of Bashar al-Assad's regime has contributed to widespread suffering among Sunni communities.

Iran's influence remains a challenge even with the changing dynamics in Syria. Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, have made statements about shaping Syria's future, with claims of training 130,000 youth in Iran to defend its interests. This complicates Turkey's plans for the region.

Similarly, the failure of the Arab Spring in Egypt, marked by the military coup led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi against President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, has added another layer of complexity. The current Egyptian government is unlikely to support the success of pro-democracy movements in Syria, which could hinder Turkey's objectives.

How Turkey and the new Syrian government navigate these challenges will shape the region's future.

International Pressures:

Turkey's strained relations with Western countries and the United States pose another challenge. For instance, the U.S. continues to support Kurdish armed groups in Syria, which Turkey views as a threat to its national security. This ongoing support from the West complicates Turkey's efforts to eliminate these groups and secure its borders.

Economic Challenges:



Turkey is grappling with economic difficulties, including the devaluation of its currency, largely driven by Western sanctions. Although the Turkish lira has stabilized somewhat in recent months, the economic pressures remain a significant obstacle to Turkey's regional ambitions.

Domestic Issues:

Internally, Turkey faces security threats from Kurdish separatist groups, which occasionally carry out attacks within its borders, undermining national stability. Additionally, the presence of nearly four million Syrian refugees in Turkey has become a contentious political issue. Opposition parties frequently criticize President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government over this matter, using it as a tool to apply political pressure.

Despite these challenges, Turkey remains a key player in the Middle East. However, addressing these internal and external obstacles will be critical for achieving its goals in the region.

CONCLUSION

Turkey is making significant efforts to achieve its goals in Middle Eastern politics, striving to establish itself as a leading regional power. This ambition has led Turkish leaders to refer to the current era as the "Turkish Century." Turkey is working to strengthen its influence across various fields, particularly in science, technology, economics, and diplomacy. To overcome regional and global challenges, Turkey alternates between aligning with Western nations and collaborating with coalitions led by Russia and China, such as BRICS.

To successfully achieve its objectives, Turkey must focus on several key areas:

1. Wise Engagement with the Syrian Issue:

Before the Syrian uprising, Bashar al-Assad's regime enjoyed strong support from Iran, which aligned itself with a government known for its oppressive actions against its people. This support has led to widespread resentment of Iran among the Syrian population. Now, with Turkey playing a pivotal role in Syria's future, it has an opportunity to build trust with the



Syrian people. If Turkey approaches the Syrian issue wisely and ensures its actions align with the interests of the Syrian population, it can significantly strengthen its position and influence in the region.

2. **Strategic Relations with Western Countries, Particularly the United States:**

The United States holds considerable influence in the Middle East. For Turkey to maintain stability and avoid unnecessary conflicts, it must manage its relationship with Western nations, especially the U.S., with care. Constructive engagement with the West will enhance Turkey's position both regionally and globally.

3. **Building Stronger Ties with Key Arab States:**

Turkey's relations with influential Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates are vital for its regional strategy. Positive and effective relationships with these nations can not only strengthen Syria's stability but also bolster Turkey's standing in the Middle East.

4. **Playing a Constructive Role in the Palestinian Issue:**

As Turkey aspires to lead the Islamic world, it must take an active and meaningful role in addressing the major issues facing the Muslim community. Among these, the Palestinian cause is one of the most pressing and symbolic. Many young Muslims around the world criticize Turkey for not doing enough to address the plight of Palestinians. While Turkey has raised its voice against Western and Israeli actions through diplomatic channels, it must adopt a more proactive and impactful approach to earn the moral leadership of the Islamic world.

By addressing these priorities with care and determination, Turkey can position itself as a leading and respected power in the Middle East.



REFERENCES:

1. **Ali Ghafoori**, *The Fall of the Ottoman Empire*, 2016 (Persian calendar year 1395), Access link: Rasekhoon.net
2. **Professor Khurshid Ahmad**, *Professor Najmuddin Erbakan: A Historic Figure*, *Tarjuman-ul-Quran Monthly*, 2011, Access link: Tarjuman-ul-Quran.org
3. Overview of Turkey's diplomatic missions: Turkey operates 144 embassies abroad and hosts 114 foreign embassies. Access link: EmbassyPages.com
4. Turkey's military strength: Access link: Global Firepower
5. **Wikipedia**, *Qatar Diplomatic Crisis: Demands on Qatar and responses*. Access link: Wikipedia

The Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) is an independent, non-profit, and non-governmental research organization established in July 2009 in Kabul. CSRS is committed to promoting policy-oriented research through conducting authentic and unbiased research concerning Afghanistan and the region.

Contact Us:Email: info@csrsaf.orgWebsite: www.csrsaf.org

Phone & WhatsApp: +93780618000

