

# NAVIGATING THE NEW ERA

## THE PRIORITIES OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

BİLGEHAN ÖZTÜRK, MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ

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## SUMMARY

This analysis will first address the factors that will determine the direction of Turkish foreign policy in the new era. It will then provide evaluations regarding a possible approach to its relations with the actors involved in the most important and prioritized issues of Turkish foreign policy, with a geographical perspective.

Under the presidential system, Erdogan's leadership plays a crucial role in shaping Turkish foreign policy, giving him more authority in determining and shaping foreign policy decisions. Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy and autonomous foreign policy will continue, as it has garnered public support in the elections and is necessary to protect national security concerns and vital interests. The security-foreign policy nexus is strong in Türkiye, with military and security actors playing a significant role in shaping and implementing foreign policy decisions. Normalization with various countries, such as Armenia, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Syria, is a priority for Turkey to stabilize its geopolitical gains and protect its positions without escalating conflicts. Economic concerns have become central in Türkiye's foreign policy, with the goal of attracting external economic resources. Economic cooperation and investment deals with countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia will continue to be pursued. Türkiye aims to strengthen its international role and take a more proactive and assertive stance in global affairs, driven by the need to protect national interests and the changing geopolitical landscape. The key agenda item for Turkish foreign policy is Syria, with an emphasis on successfully concluding the normalization process with Damascus, addressing the refugee issue, and working towards a comprehensive solution through the Geneva process.

## INTRODUCTION

Türkiye has left behind one of its most momentous elections regarding their implications on not only domestic but also foreign policy and strategic road maps. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling alliance, the People's Alliance (PA), will continue shaping and directing Türkiye's foreign policy path based on their longstanding vision. Erdoğan and the PA have received approval from the public for their domestic and foreign policy achievements and track record, which the opposition has been least able to criticize. With renewed trust and democratic legitimacy, Erdoğan is determined to pursue a concrete foreign policy approach, characterized by the "Axis of Türkiye" discourse, with even more persistence and self-confidence. However, this also carries the risk of Türkiye experiencing a turbulent period in its relations, especially with major powers such as the United States, who do not want to reconcile with Ankara's autonomous strategic orientation and independent foreign policy stance. Türkiye has been managing this turbulent relationship for

about a decade, resisting disruptive pressure to protect its core national interests and maintain its autonomous foreign policy, despite the costs involved. If the actors who do not accept Türkiye's autonomous foreign policy choose to continue their relations with the country on the same basis as the previous decade, Türkiye, as it has been accustomed, will know how to manage this tension-filled relationship. However, on its path to self-sufficiency and autonomy in foreign policy, the country has overcome significant and critical thresholds. This allows Türkiye to open a new page in troubled relationships and be open to cooperation in a much more confident manner. Actors like the United States, which has struggled the most to reconcile with Türkiye's autonomous foreign policy, can respond positively and constructively by adopting approaches such as opening a new page in the relationship, being cautious to prevent the emergence of new areas of tension, and avoiding actively alienating Türkiye. If they do so, Türkiye will reciprocate positively and constructively.

This analysis will first address the factors that will determine the direction of Turkish foreign policy in the new era. It will then provide evaluations regarding a possible approach to its relations with the actors involved in the most important and prioritized issues of Turkish foreign policy, with a geographical perspective.

The direction that Turkish foreign policy will take in the new era will be determined by a series of constant points. These can be listed as follows:

- Foreign Policy at the Leadership Level
- Consolidating Strategic Autonomy
- Maintaining the Security-Foreign Policy Nexus
- Normalization
- Trading State 2.0
- Strengthening Türkiye's International Role



## Foreign Policy at the Leadership Level

With the support of the presidential system, Erdoğan's leadership will continue to be not only a determining factor in shaping Türkiye's domestic politics but also an integral part of Turkish foreign policy. While the constitutional responsibility for determining foreign policy lies with the president, in practice, the role of the president in shaping foreign policy has been limited, and the Presidency has not gone beyond indicating or approving the basic principles and orientations of foreign policy under the parliamentary system. However, with the presidential system, Erdoğan has gained an institutional and legal framework to directly engage in the formulation of foreign policy, not just determining general principles.

Given that Türkiye's most vital and urgent issues in foreign policy are often strategic and security-related issues, the policy-making process has evolved into an architecture where the "multi-institutional input" is gathered and managed under Erdoğan's leadership. Additionally, Erdoğan's preference for and implementation of 'leadership diplomacy', particularly in relations with major powers and sensitive foreign policy matters, has made leadership an indispensable element of Turkish foreign policy.

The determination to continue Türkiye's long-standing autonomous and assertive foreign policy after the elections indicate that Erdoğan's leadership will remain a central factor in Turkish foreign policy. Furthermore, the systemic uncertainty, transitional period, and instability in the international system anticipate a context where tough decisions need to be made, and the pursuit of clarity is dominant, creating a suitable environment for strong and ambitious leadership to emerge.

## Consolidating Strategic Autonomy

Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy, which has crystallized over the past decade, and its autonomous foreign policy have garnered appreciation and support from the public, as reflected in the election results. This will further strengthen the determination of Erdoğan and the ruling People's Alliance, who have long invested in strategic autonomy, to continue on the current trajectory of foreign policy. The gains Türkiye has achieved in terms of strategic autonomy will also encourage decision-makers to maintain the current foreign policy line.

Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy has emerged not only as a long-term desire but also as a necessity dictated by the circumstances.

Furthermore, Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy has emerged not only as a long-term desire but also as a necessity dictated by the circumstances. Türkiye has increasingly felt that its national security concerns and vital interests are being disregarded, and in many cases, even threatened by the United States and other NATO allies. This has motivated Türkiye to seek strategic autonomy. However, there has been no significant improvement in Türkiye's relations with the United States and other NATO allies regarding its vital national interests and security concerns.

Therefore, the conditions and factors that have shaped Türkiye's pursuit of strategic autonomy and its autonomous foreign policy line require Türkiye to continue and, if possible, consolidate its current policy and strategic ori-

entation in the upcoming period. Additionally, trends such as the relative decline of the United States vis-à-vis China and its shift of strategic engagement from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region have reinforced the behavior of U.S. allies in both Europe and the Middle East to reposition themselves according to a “multipolar” world order. The strategic environment surrounding Türkiye, which is a part of both European and Middle Eastern geopolitics and security, also encourages Türkiye to strengthen its own strategic autonomy.

## **Maintaining Security-Foreign Policy Nexus**

Since 2016, Türkiye’s foreign policy has inevitably been dominated by a strategic and security perspective, to some extent implementing a “security-oriented” foreign policy. This can be attributed to the fact that the most urgent and critical areas for Türkiye have been conflict zones generating instability, and Türkiye’s responses to these areas have been predominantly military in nature. As a reflection of this period and its conditions, military actors and members of the security bureaucracy have also come to the forefront of foreign policy, as there are many intersecting areas between security and foreign policy.

In fact, when President Erdoğan makes the most strategic foreign policy decisions and formulates policies, it can be observed that he consults and involves actors that not only include the foreign minister but also security actors. This indicates that security actors not only contribute to the implementation of foreign policy and operate its instruments but also actively participate in determining and shaping foreign policy. During this period, the examples of the active role and prominence of the (former) Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar, particularly in issues such

as relations with the United States and NATO, the grain deal, Greece, the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean, relations with Russia, and normalization in Syria, demonstrate this trend. Likewise, although to a lesser visible extent due to the nature of his role, it is known that the (former) head of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), Hakan Fidan, has actively participated in both the formulation and implementation stages of Turkish foreign policy in the most important issues.

Fidan’s appointment as the minister of foreign affairs in the new Cabinet can be interpreted as an indication that the security-foreign policy nexus or the style of “security-oriented foreign policy” that has been ongoing since around 2016 will continue, albeit with some changes in nature. Here, the fact that the most crucial and vital issues in Turkish foreign policy are still not solely “soft and diplomatic” matters is also significant. Areas such as the Ukraine conflict, Syria, Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Aegean and Greece, and the Caucasus all continue to involve military or security elements in some way. The nuance here may lie in Türkiye temporarily suspending active military operations to protect its core national interests, as seen in the Karabakh War, the defense of Tripoli against Haftar, or the Spring Shield Operation in Idlib, northwestern Syria. While the Turkish military presence will be maintained in all these areas, there will be a reluctance to escalate or engage in new military confrontations or escalations in terms of geographical expansion. Instead, foreign policy will be conducted through negotiations aimed at gaining acceptance and recognition of Turkish military presence by the parties involved in these areas. The ongoing normalization processes with actors in these military and security-related areas, such as Armenia, Syria, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, etc., create a context that allows for this approach.

Fidan is likely to be a strong, high-profile, and authoritative minister of foreign affairs who is suitable for carrying the vision that has been shaping foreign policy for a long time under the leadership of President Erdoğan and with the support of the PA. He is expected to be open to cooperation but not shy away from confrontation, and to be persistent and stubborn in safeguarding national interests without making concessions.<sup>1</sup> Under his leadership, the foreign policy approach will focus on consolidating the gains in the existing fronts rather than opening new military fronts. This consolidation will be ensured through ongoing normalization processes and will also be supported by economic resource allocation to Türkiye through normalized relations.

The ongoing normalization process with Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, the signing of the “Hydrocarbon Agreement”<sup>2</sup> with Libya last year in addition to existing agreements, and the conclusion of large-scale investment and trade agreements with the UAE<sup>3</sup> and Saudi Arabia<sup>4</sup> have already demonstrated the focus of the new era in foreign policy. When we consider this process alongside the appointments of Cevdet Yılmaz and Mehmet Şimşek in the Cabinet, it becomes evident that the economy will play a central role in both domestic and foreign policy. The appointment of Yılmaz to the position of Vice Presidency, not only for his state and bureaucratic experience but also due to his expertise in economics, and the expect-

tation that Şimşek will help remove obstacles to foreign funding for Türkiye, can be seen as moves aimed at the same goal.

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Fidan’s approach to foreign policy is likely to be shaped somewhere between a diplomat and a military character. As he is not a career diplomat and his operational habits from his intelligence career may influence him, he may have less tolerance and patience for prolonged negotiations. On the other hand, he will not fully embody the characteristics of a military figure, such as being assertive, belligerent, and direct. In all the files he handles, he will strive to be results-oriented and goal-driven. His intelligence background is also likely to provide significant advantages for Fidan in dealing with his counterparts. His deep expertise and knowledge, especially in files like Syria, will place him in an advantageous position when facing foreign ministers from other countries. Moreover, as an intelligence-based foreign minister versus a generalist foreign minister, there is a possibility of establishing an information asymmetry.

## Normalization

Normalization can be seen as a period in which Türkiye needs to absorb and stabilize the geopolitical gains it has achieved after prolonged

1 “Sweden needs to take concrete steps for NATO bid: Fidan to Billstrom,” *Daily Sabah*, June 7, 2023, Sweden needs to take concrete steps for NATO bid: Fidan to Billstrom | Daily Sabah.

2 “Türkiye, Libya sign agreements on hydrocarbon, gas,” *AA*, October 3, 2022, Türkiye, Libya sign agreements on hydrocarbon, gas (aa.com.tr).

3 “Turkey, United Arab Emirates sign trade agreement,” March 3, 2023, Directorate of Communications, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (iletisim.gov.tr).

4 “Aramco Taps Turkish Firms for \$50 Billion Building Spree”, *Bloomberg*, 1 June 2023, Aramco Taps Turkish Firms for \$50 Billion Building Spree - Bloomberg.

geopolitical struggles, similar to the “absorption” phases that the European Union (EU) experienced following its enlargement waves. Through simultaneous normalization processes with various actors, Türkiye aims to cool down, freeze, and stabilize its geopolitical gains and maneuverable space. It is conducting a kind of “stability operation” in the positions it has gained through geopolitical struggles. Normalization and negotiations with previously contested actors serve to protect these positions from turning into fronts and becoming heated, creating a protective layer around these positions. The ongoing normalization process with Armenia, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Syria will continue in the coming period, and there will also be an opportunity to open a new chapter in relations with the United States and Europe. Hakan Fidan’s role in the normalization processes, particularly with the Gulf countries, Egypt, and Syria, will likely lead him to demonstrate a strong determination for the continuation of the normalization process in his new position.

## Trading State 2.0

After prolonged regional geopolitical struggles, economic concerns have begun to hold significant and central importance in Türkiye’s foreign policy. Economic concerns have served as both the cement of regional normalization and an incentivizing factor. The economic resources of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have rapidly yielded tangible outcomes, differentiating them from the normalization processes with other countries and effectively alleviating Türkiye’s economic troubles through investment and swap deals. A variation of the “trading state” has been implemented in foreign policy as part of the normalization process, prioritizing the advancement of Türkiye’s economic interests and aligning its

geopolitical footprint with economic interests. The goal of channeling external economic resources into Türkiye has transformed into practical action with the normalization process. Economic cooperation in the form of currency swaps, direct foreign investments, and contracts awarded to Turkish companies will continue to grow with the UAE<sup>5</sup> and Saudi Arabia,<sup>6</sup> and Türkiye will actively strive to add new collaborations to these partnerships. The choices made in the composition of the new Cabinet also reveal traces of the goal of attracting external economic resources to Türkiye. The appointment of Mehmet Şimşek, who possesses high credibility in international markets, as the minister of treasury and finance, as well as Cevdet Yılmaz, who has an economic background and expertise as vice president, indicate that economic goals and concerns will be the most influential factors in both domestic and foreign policies. The actors of the new era also support Türkiye’s identity as a trading state in foreign policy.

## Strengthening Türkiye’s International Role

Türkiye’s aim of becoming more prominent and visible, taking more initiative, and leading international initiatives is another process that runs in harmony with the strategic quest for autonomy mentioned above. The long-standing issue of trust with Türkiye’s traditional allies has shown that Türkiye cannot fully protect its national interests as a passive follower of the alliance to which it belongs. This has sometimes pushed Ankara to take on a more proactive and assertive role, including the occasional use of

5 “Turkey, United Arab Emirates sign trade agreement,” March 3, 2023, Directorate of Communications, Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications (iletisim.gov.tr).

6 “Aramco Taps Turkish Firms for \$50 Billion Building Spree,” *Bloomberg*, June 1, 2023, Aramco Taps Turkish Firms for \$50 Billion Building Spree - Bloomberg.

military force. In addition to this driving factor, the geopolitical void created by the competition between the United States and China also creates an environment that allows regional actors like Türkiye to have a greater presence on the international stage. Türkiye, both out of necessity and choice, aims to strengthen and elevate its position and role in the international arena. It is known that this quest is also popular among the majority of the Turkish people. The recent election results, among other factors, also support the political will to strengthen Türkiye's role in the international arena. Erdoğan's strong leadership, combined with the opportunities provided by the presidential system, are supportive elements for Türkiye to achieve the desired level of international actorship. The emphasis on "effective independence of the state in all areas," "prevalence of the national will," and "national foreign policy vision"<sup>7</sup> highlighted by Fidan during the handover ceremony strongly underlines Türkiye's approach to taking more initiatives and becoming a more effective actor on the international stage. Fidan's strong and high-profile presence aligns with the magnitude and ambition of this goal.

## POST-ELECTIONS AGENDA IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

### Syria

In the new era, the most important agenda item for Turkish foreign policy will be Syria. Syria is a matter that closely concerns Türkiye in many

aspects. Along with fighting terrorism and the return of refugees, the Syria issue has the capacity to determine relations with other actors, especially the United States. Therefore, President Erdoğan's primary priority will be to successfully conclude the ongoing normalization process with Damascus regarding the Syria issue without disrupting it. When considering the ongoing process, it appears that a certain road map has been established in a quadrilateral format at the recent foreign ministers' summit held in Moscow.<sup>8</sup> It is

Along with fighting terrorism and the return of refugees, the Syria issue has the capacity to determine relations with other actors, especially the United States.

expected that this road map will be maintained. The return of refugees, counterterrorism efforts, and achieving a comprehensive solution in Syria are among the objectives of this road map. We are witnessing that Türkiye is already taking concrete steps toward the return of refugees. The infrastructure and mass housing project<sup>9</sup> initiated for the return in northern Syria is one of the tangible outcomes of this policy. Although the parties have not reached a clear agreement on this matter, both Ankara and Damascus, from a theoretical and positional standpoint, aim to eliminate the PKK terrorist group and its Syrian wing, the YPG, in line with their own interests. However, there is no clarity on how the YPG issue will be resolved and the timeline for its progress.

7 "Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nda devir teslim töreni... Bakan Fidan: Şahsıma gösterilen güven için teşekkür ediyorum," *Hürriyet*, June 5, 2023, Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nda devir teslim töreni... Bakan Fidan: Şahsıma gösterilen güven için teşekkür ediyorum - Son Dakika Haberleri ([hurriyet.com.tr](http://hurriyet.com.tr)).

8 "Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran hold high-level talks in Moscow," *Al Jazeera*, May 10, 2023, Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran hold high-level talks in Moscow | News | *Al Jazeera*.

9 "Türkiye prepares homes in northern Syria for voluntary return of Syrian refugees," *AA*, May 26, 2023, Türkiye prepares homes in northern Syria for voluntary return of Syrian refugees ([aa.com.tr](http://aa.com.tr)).

On the other hand, it is a question of how refugees will return to areas under the Assad regime's control. It is evident that refugees do not want to return to areas controlled by Assad, as there are serious concerns for them in those regions. However, considering that the negotiations between Assad and other Arab countries in recent months also involve the return of refugees,<sup>10</sup> it is safe to say that Türkiye will be the country that will benefit the most from this in terms of alleviating the situation if it is to materialize. Therefore, synchronizing the process of refugee returns with Arab countries can ensure a healthier and more planned progression of the process.

**The growing strength and consolidation of the YPG in its region will not automatically be resolved by Ankara and Damascus finding common ground.**

Of course, the issue of Syria cannot be approached solely in the context of refugees and counterterrorism. To achieve a comprehensive solution, the Geneva process needs to be activated. This means that writing a constitution, holding elections in Syria, and designing a transition period will be necessary under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. Given all the dynamics in Syria, it is fair to say that this goal is still far from being realized. However, there is also curiosity about whether Türkiye will carry out a new military operation in northern Syria against the YPG. The recent developments on the ground indicate that the YPG is consolidating its military power with the support of the

United States. The growing strength and consolidation of the YPG in its region will not automatically be resolved by Ankara and Damascus finding common ground. The issue can only be addressed if there is a shared will between the parties to actively exert military pressure on the YPG. Considering that this issue is also a matter between Türkiye and the United States, resolving Türkiye's security concerns by solely normalizing relations with Assad will not be easy. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Syrian issue will continue to be at the center of Türkiye's foreign policy in the new era.

## War in Ukraine

Another important issue that we see in the new era where foreign policy remains crucial is the ongoing war in Ukraine. Considering Türkiye's foreign policy approach during the war, the Ukraine crisis demonstrates the significance of Türkiye's foreign policy road map moving forward. Türkiye's first priority is to maintain its current position in a stable manner. This means that Türkiye will continue to act as a mediator in the Ukraine crisis, strengthen its position in critical issues that concern both itself and the world in terms of finding a solution, and strive to prevent the escalation of the war or its spillover to other countries.<sup>11</sup>

Relations with Russia are now closely linked to the war in Ukraine. Of course, Turkish-Russian relations have a broad framework that extends beyond Ukraine. However, it is evident that Ukraine is also a determining factor now. Therefore, even by taking into account the broader framework of Turkish-Russian bilateral relations, significant changes in Turkish policy regarding Ukraine should not be expected.

10 "Arab League to implement scheme 'returning' Syrian refugees," *The New Arab*, May 19, 2023, Arab League to implement scheme 'returning' Syrian refugees (newarab.com).

11 "Erdoğan offers dam crisis mediation in calls to Putin, Zelenskyy," *Daily Sabah*, June 7, 2023, Erdoğan offers dam crisis mediation in calls to Putin, Zelenskyy | Daily Sabah.



Türkiye's bilateral relations with Russia were already sensitive and of vital importance even before the war, which is why Türkiye did not have the luxury of choosing between the two countries. Türkiye's delicate balance in its bilateral relations with Russia has now acquired new dimensions due to the war. For Türkiye, Russia is not only an energy supplier, trade and tourism partner, but also a crucial element in Ankara's relations with major powers and the West. Neither Ukraine losing a portion of its territory and falling under occupation nor Russia experiencing a major collapse and regime change are desirable outcomes for Türkiye. Therefore, Türkiye has a strong desire and interest in reducing tension, achieving a cease-fire, and initiating peace talks as soon as possible and without further destruction. In the new era, Türkiye's efforts and persuasion in this direction will strengthen.

## **TÜRKİYE, THE EU/EUROPE AND THE WEST: A NEW GEOPOLITICAL DEAL?**

Parallel to the change in the direction of the war, it is quite clear that a new relationship model needs to be developed between Türkiye and the West. Türkiye's significance for Europe and NATO is now clearly understood. On the other hand, it is important to question the sustainability of the policy of the EU and the U.S. in condemning Russia to failure in Ukraine. It is a matter that definitely needs to be analyzed regarding how much the current policies serve the interests of Europe. It is also evident that the current policy serves to prolong the war and ultimately turn the whole of Europe into an unstable dynamic. Therefore, it is not very likely that pressure will be exerted on Türkiye due to its position in the war in Ukraine. On

the contrary, in the new period, a new relationship model needs to be developed between Europe and Türkiye based on Türkiye's increasing strategic importance. In other words, it is not possible to convince Ankara to make significant behavioral changes by alienating itself, expanding anti-Türkiye positions, or forming an anti-Türkiye front. Therefore, to prevent the war in Ukraine from creating further risks, a new geopolitical consensus needs to be established between Europe and Türkiye. Ankara's position in this consensus is quite clear. Türkiye's interests and security are based on a coordinated policy with Europe, yet are capable of autonomous action when necessary. In other words, the most important motto in Türkiye-Europe relations in the new era will be "neither siding with Europe on two different fronts, nor unquestioningly adopting Europe's position against Russia."

Beyond the Ukraine war, the geopolitical consensus to be reached between Türkiye and Europe holds great importance in determining their common future. The EU must make a decision regarding Türkiye's full membership perspective, reconsider it, and send a clear message about Türkiye's place in Europe. The vision of "European Strategic Autonomy" emphasized by French President Emmanuel Macron recently, although somehow contingent upon Türkiye's integration into it, the trend in Europe, especially in France, is moving in the opposite direction. Despite all the negatives, if the attitude toward Türkiye does not change, Ankara, faced with a confused and insincere Europe, will prefer to coordinate more with the United States instead of the European bloc. Under the current conditions, the rapid formation of a Türkiye-Europe geopolitical consensus does not seem possible, and for this to happen, a new dialogue needs to be established both in Türkiye and Europe.

## TÜRKİYE AND THE U.S.

Another important aspect of the new era will be the relationship between Türkiye and the United States. It is not easy to pinpoint the presence of a smooth period in Turkish-American relations. The dynamics, common interests, and threat perceptions of Turkish-American relations have undergone a significant transformation. The main dynamics of the changing international system are now also affecting the ties. There are still some elements of continuity in areas of common interest, but there are also many issues where interests do not align. In terms of threat perceptions, there is certainly some common ground, such as the fight against terrorism. However, the YPG issue is considered more of a threat centered on the United States rather than a shared threat for Türkiye. It seems difficult to make significant progress in Turkish-American relations without resolving this issue. Of course, there are some aspects in which progress is possible in the new era. For example, there may be progress in the near future regarding the procurement of a new batch of F-16s and modernization kits. Türkiye has a strong determination to resolve the F-16 issue without allowing it to escalate tensions. Türkiye aims to treat the F-16 issue as a way to maintain the existence of bilateral relations with the United States, keep a sort of mutual interdependence, and move the relationship away from being “a collection of problems.” The risk here is that the United States tends to link the supply of F-16s to Türkiye’s approval of Sweden’s NATO membership. If the United States continues with this approach, it will inevitably strain relations with Türkiye in an environment where the PKK can still operate freely in Sweden.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “PKK/YPG supporters in Sweden hold new protests against Türkiye”, *Daily Sabah*, 5 June 2023, PKK/YPG supporters in Sweden hold new protests against Türkiye | Daily Sabah.

The economy is also obviously a priority in Turkish-American bilateral relations. Achieving a trade volume of \$100 billion is seen as a driving factor in this regard. The bilateral ties require a new strategic framework just like in Türkiye-Europe relations. Türkiye must be expected to adopt the same geopolitical framework in the new era. In other words, Türkiye will exhibit an approach that centers on its autonomy; however, this autonomy will not necessarily be pursued in an anti-American and confrontational manner. Enhancing the desire for change, Erdoğan and the PA have been maintaining a policy of autonomy in foreign affairs for a long time, strengthening their popular support and demonstrating the will to open a new page and make a fresh start. The composition of the new Cabinet also allows for a scenario of turning a new page in the relations. However, due to the long-standing trust deficit, it will not be possible to overcome it quickly. Therefore, both Türkiye and the U.S. will attempt to make progress in relations through file-based engagements, and for a long time, they will assess each other’s intentions and attitudes.

## TÜRKİYE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES (OTS)

The pandemic, China-U.S. competition, and the war in Ukraine have demonstrated how timely the partnership project on a Central Asia scale is for Türkiye and other member countries of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). The recent announcement of the Turkic Investment Fund<sup>13</sup> by the OTS adds a geo-economic depth to the

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<sup>13</sup> “Azerbaijan’s parliament approves Turkic Investment Fund,” *Daily Sabah*, May 30, 2023, Azerbaijan’s parliament approves Turkic Investment Fund | Daily Sabah.



organization. The image that emerged during President Erdoğan's greetings with each leader of the OTS member countries at the presidential inauguration ceremony shows that the contact and unity between Türkiye and the regional countries are not limited to geopolitical codes. In the new era, one of the most important priorities should be relations with the Turkic world, led by President Erdoğan and with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. The interest of the Turkic world in the great power competition is to transform the existing unity into geopolitical harmony and build the required rise on this harmony. After the elections, a dynamic period in Central Asia can be expected through the OTS in Turkish foreign policy.

The relative decrease in Moscow's influence, which has been exerting pressure on each of the Turkic states for many years, due to Russia's retreat in power as a result of the war in Ukraine, creates an opportunity for greater integration among these states. The cooperation that gained momentum with the victory in Karabakh and strengthened through defense industry products provides a suitable environment for further integration. The OTS, with Türkiye and Azerbaijan at its core, will also be of vital importance for European energy security, and Türkiye will seek problem-solving initiatives in this field together with its OTS partners.

## TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA AND ASIA

Türkiye will continue its Asia Anew Initiative and elevate its relations with Africa to a new level. In a period in which tension in the international system is on the rise and Türkiye's immediate region is normalizing, Türkiye will adopt an approach that combines these two trends, further consolidating its international status.

The Asia Anew Initiative announced with the aim of not overlooking the phenomenon of the "Rise of Asia," particularly China, will continue to maintain its importance in a trajectory where the asymmetry between the U.S. and China is gradually diminishing, and it may even gain more significance. Türkiye's integration with the OTS will be one of the pillars of the Asia Anew Initiative, and Türkiye will seek to add new pillars to the initiative through strong relations, especially in defense industry collaborations, with countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea.

Türkiye's integration with the OTS will be one of the pillars of the Asia Anew Initiative, and Türkiye will seek to add new pillars to the initiative through strong relations, especially in defense industry collaborations, with countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea.

Africa, on the other hand, will be an area where Türkiye is likely to experience the least problems and where relations based on trade, investment, development, and cultural exchange will continue to strengthen. In the sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa regions, where Türkiye has been in competition and struggled against regional countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE for many years, Türkiye may experience relative stability in these areas through the normalization process with these countries. If a clear page is not turned in Türkiye's relations with France, it is most likely that any conflict of interest or confrontation in Af-

rica would involve France as a key actor. On the other hand, Turkish defense industry products, especially UAVs, which have long attracted the interest of African countries, will continue to draw the attention of many African countries. In addition to existing partner countries, the number of countries that possess Turkish UAVs will increase in the coming period. Politically, Türkiye's highly positive image among African countries will continue to strengthen in the future. The presence of numerous African countries among the invited governments and heads of state at President Erdoğan's inauguration ceremony is a concrete indication that relations will further strengthen in the coming period.

## CONCLUSION

Türkiye's foreign policy priorities reveal several significant dimensions that will shape its international standing and regional influence. Türkiye's engagement with Europe, the United States, Central Asia, and Africa demonstrates its commitment to strategic cooperation, economic partnerships, and balanced diplomacy. The emphasis on the Turkic world, exemplified by its involvement in the OTS, signifies Türkiye's endeavor to consolidate regional unity into geopolitical harmony.

Moreover, Türkiye's launching of the Asia Anew Initiative reflects its recognition of evol-

ing global dynamics and the importance of cultivating relationships with key actors like China. This strategic approach acknowledges the shifting asymmetry between the United States and China, positioning Türkiye to navigate the changing international order.

Within Africa, Türkiye's focus on areas such as trade, investment, and cultural exchange provides opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. Its efforts to normalize relations with key Gulf and Middle Eastern countries might translate into smoother conduct in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa, alongside its positive reputation among African nations, will likely strengthen bilateral ties and facilitate continued engagement. However, challenges remain, particularly in Türkiye's relations with France and the resolution of contentious issues. Failure to initiate a constructive reset with France could potentially lead to conflicting interests in Africa. Therefore, proactive measures should be taken to foster dialogue and find common ground.

In conclusion, Türkiye's foreign policy priorities underscore its intention to assert itself as a proactive and influential player in a complex international landscape. By leveraging regional alliances, recognizing emerging global dynamics, and pursuing mutually beneficial partnerships, Türkiye aims to enhance its international stature and navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving world order.

# NAVIGATING THE NEW ERA THE PRIORITIES OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

BİLGEHAN ÖZTÜRK, MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ

## SETA | ANALYSIS

Türkiye has left behind one of its most momentous elections regarding their implications on not only domestic but also foreign policy and strategic road maps. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling alliance, the People's Alliance (PA), will continue shaping and directing Türkiye's foreign policy path based on their longstanding vision. Erdoğan and the PA have received approval from the public for their domestic and foreign policy achievements and track record, which the opposition has been least able to criticize. With renewed trust and democratic legitimacy, Erdoğan is determined to pursue a concrete foreign policy approach, characterized by the "Axis of Türkiye" discourse, with even more persistence and self-confidence. However, this also carries the risk of Türkiye experiencing a turbulent period in its relations, especially with major powers such as the United States, who do not want to reconcile with Ankara's autonomous strategic orientation and independent foreign policy stance. Türkiye has been managing this turbulent relationship for about a decade, resisting disruptive pressure to protect its core national interests and maintain its autonomous foreign policy, despite the costs involved. If the actors who do not accept Türkiye's autonomous foreign policy choose to continue their relations with the country on the same basis as the previous decade, Türkiye, as it has been accustomed, will know how to manage this tension-filled relationship. However, on its path to self-sufficiency and autonomy in foreign policy, the country has overcome significant and critical thresholds. This allows Türkiye to open a new page in troubled relationships and be open to cooperation in a much more confident manner. Actors like the United States, which has struggled the most to reconcile with Türkiye's autonomous foreign policy, can respond positively and constructively by adopting approaches such as opening a new page in the relationship, being cautious to prevent the emergence of new areas of tension, and avoiding actively alienating Türkiye. If they do so, Türkiye will reciprocate positively and constructively.

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