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EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

The regions surrounding Turkey, namely the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, North Africa, the Black Sea, and the Eastern Mediterranean, continue to attract the attention of many regional and global powers. Unfortunately, these regions mostly come to the agenda of international politics for detrimental developments such as civil wars, ethnic conflicts, political instabilities, and sectarian politics. External interventions by regional and global powers generally exacerbate the problems, rather than solving them. After each external intervention, the countries of these regions find themselves in political dependency, social vulnerability, and economic deadlock. Whenever these countries attempt to get rid of the political dependency, to end social vulnerability, and to provide economic development, they are strongly punished by some external powers. It seems that it will not be easy to end the hierarchical relationship between small regional states and the more powerful countries.

However, the most recent developments show that the continuation of the traditional hierarchical relationship by regional and global powers is not cost-free. Regional and global powers have to pay high prices in order to maintain their control over these states. Sometimes it becomes too costly to maintain their presence in the crises areas and they have to withdraw their military forces and political actors from the ground. The intensified rivalry between the global powers and the quest by some regional powers to involve more into the

regional crises increases the cost of maintaining control in a region. Given the geographical location of the abovementioned regions, they attract the attention of many big powers. That is, a large number of powers involve in crises of these regions.

When we look at these regions, we see that political cards are reshuffled over many issues. For example, the tension is on the rise in the Black Sea basin. After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia and its intervention in the Ukrainian civil war, the tension between western countries, namely the NATO alliance, and the Russian Federation rose dramatically. Western countries have been trying to take military, political and economic measures against Russia in order to deter it not to extend its influence Westward. On the other hand, the Second Karabagh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia has created a new balance in the Caucasus. On the western front, the multi-ethnic nature of the Balkan states maintains the sensitivity of both domestic and regional politics in the region.

At the southern borders the Middle East region continues to experience enormous detrimental developments since the Arab insurgencies and revolutions began in 2011. Failed states and increasingly vulnerable regimes create problems not only at the national but also at the regional level. For instance, the Yemeni, Libyan, Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Iraqi crises have significant regional political, military, and economic implications.

Being at the center of all these regions and as one of the most influential actors in these regions, Turkey has recently begun to claim greater regional leadership and to take more initiatives in the regional crises. Turkey has recalibrated its national interests and drawn a new line for its national security. It abandoned its defensive posture, which requires defending its political independence and territorial integrity within the state borders, and started to take pre-emptive measures against real and potential threats emanating from these regions.

Therefore, Turkey has taken military and political initiatives in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Qatar, and Karabagh. Turkey has improved its defense capabilities and accordingly begun to use its hard power as well as soft power. Until very recently, in principle, Turkey was hesitant to use its hard power beyond its borders. However, especially after its otherization by its official allies in NATO for the last decade and the failed military coup attempt in 2016, it started to pursue a more proactive foreign policy.

Turkey has effectively been involved and played a determinative role in most of the regional crises. For instance, it carried out four military operations in the northern part of Syria in order to clear its border from ISIS and PKK/YPG threats. Later, it sent military troops to Libya and provided military support to

the Government of National Accord in Tripoli; and thus, prevented the invasion of the capital by the putschist General Haftar. Similarly, Turkey intervened in the Gulf crisis by providing economic, political, and more importantly military support to the Qatari state against the imminent threats from other Gulf states, especially the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Lastly, it supported Azerbaijan in ending the invasion of its territories by Armenia. It was the knowledge of the Turkish general staff and strategic weapons (armed unmanned aerial vehicles in particular) provided by Turkey that led to the Azerbaijani victory. As a result of all these developments and initiatives, all regional countries and most global actors have been closely watching Turkish foreign policy and considering Turkey's perspective.

Besides Turkey, Iran is another regional actor, which has a meaningful presence in many parts of the Middle East. Similar to Turkey, Iran, which has a relatively large out-reach from the Balkans to South Asia and from the Caucasus to North Africa, has been playing a determinative role in many regional crises such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon. As a matter of fact, any change in Iranian domestic politics has significant direct implications not only for the Middle East but also for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Therefore, Iranian internal developments such as general elections and economic hardships are especially closely watched by its rivals and adversaries.

Israel is also a regional power with a wide out-reach. Benefitting from the Arab insurgencies and revolutions, Israel has taken many unilateral steps towards both Palestinians and the Arab states. Israel has been enjoying the most comfortable period since its establishment as all Arab heavyweight states have lost their leverages. Today, there is no vital threat emanating from the Arab world against Israel. On the contrary, Israel has normalized and formalized its relations with several Arab states and exchanged ambassadors with some of them over the last two years. In addition, the United States continues to give unconditional support to the Israeli illegal expansionism and occupation in the Arab lands. Within this context, the U.S. government, contrary to the United Nations' decisions, has recognized a 'unified Jerusalem' as the capital of Israel and also recognized the occupation of the Golan Heights, which belong to Syria. Recently, after a large coalition came to power, Benjamin Netanyahu's long-serving ultra-nationalist government came to an end.

The summer issue of *Insight Turkey* aims to highlight the recent developments and challenges in the Middle East by taking into consideration the Palestinian-Israeli impasse, Iranian politics, and Turkey's increasing influence in the region.

As the Israeli-Palestinian question has been at the heart of Middle Eastern politics for the last 80 years, this issue includes three pieces highlighting related re-

cent developments. Berdal Aral's commentary argues that the Palestinian tragedy is not simply a matter of one nation-state suppressing another nation but also an 'international problem' granting that it has regional, international, and global dimensions which implicate the hegemonic world system. Moreover, from a human rights perspective, Ramy Abdu reviews the most prominent patterns of direct and structural violence practiced by Israel and highlights the roles of the various components of Israeli society and their effect on Palestinians. Furthermore, under the scope of the International Criminal Court decision to start a preliminary investigation into the situation of Palestine, Yücel Acer asserts that despite the uncertain future of the trials, the very fact that the crimes committed in the Palestinian territories are under criminal investigation is a major step toward fulfilling at least some requirements of justice.

Changes that occurred at the beginning of the 21st century led Iran to shift its course from revolutionary discourse toward survival efforts. Mahjoob Zweiri and Yara Nassar highlight Iran's survival strategies on an external basis including the Palestinian cause, advocating a religious discourse, and backing non-state actors. Meanwhile, in the new era, although it is expected that Raisi would prioritize the relations with neighboring countries instead of the great powers, Hakkı Uygur's commentary concludes that the relations of Tehran with these countries will, to a great extent, depend on its policies towards the U.S.

With regard to the events leading to the Gulf crisis, Ali Abo Rezeg's paper aims to review the dynamics and geopolitical interests that drove Doha to embrace a pro-change policy in the region during the Arab Spring, with a view to better understanding what has become known as the 'Qatari Oxymoron' and the ensuing dynamics that led to the Gulf crisis of 2017.

There are many debates on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted international relations. Bora Bayraktar in his article, questions if COVID-19 triggered a change in the world order? More specifically, how has Turkey been affected by this, and how did it respond to the changing situation.

Using Serbia as an example, Miloš Todorović's article explores whether TİKA projects are proof of Turkey having a 'Neo-Ottoman agenda' of reviving Ottoman culture and exerting influence over former Ottoman territories, or just a way of Turkey gaining soft power through foreign aid.

In their research article, Murat Önder, Hazan Güler Sarı, and Emrah Ayhan touch on many critical points in understanding early western media perception toward the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. The article concludes that the western media's failure to adopt a supportive stance toward Turkey's democratically elected government was disappointing in terms of the Turkish population's perceptions of the West.

In this issue's off-topic pieces, Burak Güneş and Bengü Çelenk lay out the challenges and potentially fatal conflicts inherent in the emerging attempts to respect state sovereignty while crafting progressive and truly responsive sets of approaches to a sui generis global problem like the climate crisis.

In the last piece of this issue, Ejaz Hussain aims to explain whether the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has factored into Turkey's Asia policy and to what extent the Middle Corridor Initiative (MCI) can complement the BRI. The study analyzed the existing scale of China-Turkey trade and proposed a set of opportunities offered by both the BRI and the MCI.

Through a wide range of articles and commentaries, this issue aims to provide its readers with a general framework of important events and developments related to Turkey and its surrounding regions. ■

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