

# Post-Ottoman Legacy in the Middle East: A Compendium of 100 Years of Turkish Foreign Policy

**ALİ BAKIR**

Qatar University, Qatar

ORCID No: 0000-0003-3098-5771

**ABSTRACT** *The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire set the stage for Türkiye's evolving foreign policy in the Middle East, a region deeply intertwined with its historical legacy. From the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 to the rise of the AK Party in the early 2000s, Türkiye's approach has been marked by pragmatism, adaptability, and a keen understanding of regional dynamics. The nation's foreign policy has oscillated between neutrality, revisionism, proactivity, reactivity, assertiveness, autonomy, and diplomacy, reflecting both its historical ties and strategic imperatives. As Türkiye continues to navigate the complexities of the Middle East, its foreign policy remains a testament to its enduring resilience and strategic acumen. By tracing its roots and evolution, the article sheds light on the myriad factors that have shaped its course, offering insights into the evolving nature of Türkiye's multifaceted and adaptive foreign policy and role in the Middle East over the last 100 years (1923-2023).*

**Keywords:** Türkiye's Centennial, Türkiye's Foreign Policy, Middle East, Autonomy, Pragmatism, Revisionism

**Insight Turkey 2023**

Vol. 25 / No. 3 / pp. 37-50

Received Date: 1/9/2023 • Accepted Date: 20/9/2023 • DOI: 10.25253/99.2023253.3

## Introduction

**T**ürkiye's foreign policy, spanning over a century, offers a fascinating lens through which one can examine the nation's journey from its Ottoman legacy to its current stance in international relations. The current article looks into Türkiye's diplomatic initiatives and foreign policy conduct towards the Middle East region during the last 100 years based on the historical account of events. It aims to introduce a comprehensive yet compact understanding of Turkish diplomacy and foreign policy conduct towards this region. By tracing its roots and evolution, the article sheds light on the myriad factors that have shaped its course, offering insights into the evolving trajectory of Türkiye's multifaceted and adaptive foreign policy and role in the Middle East.

## Formulation and Conduct

Since its establishment as a republic in 1923, Türkiye has navigated the intricate waters of international relations, crafting a foreign policy that is both multifaceted and adaptive. A centenary of diplomacy informs us that Türkiye's foreign policy is a dynamic entity, constantly evolving<sup>1</sup> to meet the challenges and opportunities of the global stage and regional theater. At its core, it remains a pragmatic endeavor with the overarching aim of safeguarding and promoting Türkiye's national interests.

The formulation and conduct of Türkiye's foreign policy is not a straight-

forward endeavor; it involves a complex interplay of various primary determinants. Firstly, geography plays a pivotal role. Straddling the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Türkiye's unique position has historically made it a nexus of geopolitical interests. This geographical centrality has often thrust Türkiye into the heart of major regional and global events, necessitating a foreign policy that is both responsive and proactive.

Internal dynamics, including political, economic, and social factors, have also significantly influenced Türkiye's foreign policy formation and decisions. The vision set forth by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the republic's early years, emphasizing modernization and secularism, laid the foundation for Türkiye's initial westward orientation. However, as the nation evolved, so did its internal priorities, which in turn shaped its external engagements.

Regional and international dynamics further complicate the foreign policy matrix. Türkiye's interactions with neighboring countries, its role in regional organizations, and its alliances with major global powers have all been instrumental in shaping its foreign policy trajectory. The Cold War era, for instance, saw Türkiye firmly aligning with the Western bloc, primarily driven by security concerns posed by the Soviet Union.

Yet, it is essential to recognize that foreign policy decisions are not solely the product of impersonal forces. The personal traits and characteristics of

decision-makers, especially leaders, play a crucial role. Their worldviews, experiences, and even personal approaches and sets of beliefs can significantly influence a nation's foreign policy direction and conduct. Atatürk and President Erdoğan are prime examples.<sup>2</sup>

Economic interests, security needs and concerns, and threat perceptions have consistently been at the forefront of Türkiye's foreign policy considerations. Whether it's securing energy routes, fostering trade partnerships, or addressing security threats, Türkiye's foreign policy has often been pragmatic, prioritizing tangible national interests over ideological pursuits.

All these factors have profoundly impacted Türkiye's position and foreign policy towards the Middle East too. This pragmatism is evident in the various transformations Türkiye's foreign policy has undergone over the last century.

### **Middle East Foreign Policy of the Nascent Republic**

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War marked a significant turning point in the geopolitics of the Middle East. The empire, which had lasted for over six centuries, left behind a complex legacy that has continued to shape the region's political landscape. The end of the Ottoman Empire ushered in a new era for Türkiye, one that required a recalibration of its foreign policy. As the successor state of the Ottoman

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Empire, Türkiye has played a pivotal role in navigating this legacy. Over the past century, Türkiye's approach to the Middle East has evolved, reflecting both its historical legacy and its aspirations as a regional power.

The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 was a cornerstone event that defined the borders of the new Turkish Republic and recognized its sovereignty. This was a transformative moment, not just for Türkiye but for the entire Middle East. This treaty had far-reaching implications for Türkiye's relations with its neighbors, as it signaled a clear break from the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Ottoman past and a move towards a more homogeneous nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

The newly established Turkish Republic, under the rule of Atatürk, prioritized nation-building, internal reforms, and social engineering. Therefore, Türkiye largely ignored its neighbors in the Middle East. The efforts to secularize Türkiye and distance it from its Ottoman heritage, however, had a dual effect on Türkiye's relations with Middle Eastern

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countries. On the one hand, Türkiye's secular identity made it an outlier in a predominantly Muslim region. On the other hand, the shared history and cultural ties could not be entirely erased, and they continued to influence Türkiye's ties with the region.

Paradoxically, the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, opted to adopt the Kemalist regime as its model, especially when it comes to Atatürk's "social engineering" efforts.<sup>4</sup> While the focus was inward, Türkiye's policy towards its neighbors in the Middle East was characterized by non-interference and a desire to establish cordial relations. For instance, in 1937, Türkiye played a leading role in the Treaty of Saadabad, a treaty of friendship and non-aggression between Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

The Second World War was another defining event. Türkiye managed to maintain a policy of neutrality for most of the war, a decision that was emblematic of its broader foreign policy approach: pragmatic and cautious. Türkiye's late entry into the war on the side of the Allies in 1945 was a calculated move aimed at securing

a favorable position in the post-war order. This decision also marked a significant shift in Türkiye's foreign policy orientation, pushing it closer to the Western bloc as the Cold War loomed on the horizon.

On March 22, 1945, the Arab League, comprising eight members was established. Türkiye welcomed this initiative, and the secretary general of the Arab League made statements stressing the importance of Turkish-Arab friendship.<sup>6</sup> In 1946, the Turkish-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship was signed. This step had a positive impact on Türkiye's relations with its Arab neighbors, especially Syria and Lebanon. In 1947, a treaty of friendship and good neighborliness was signed with Jordan during the visit of King Abdullah to Ankara.<sup>7</sup> When Palestine became an international matter, Türkiye favored the Arab stance. Just like the Arab countries, Türkiye voted against the partitioning of Palestine in the UN on November 30, 1947. The Arabs appreciated Türkiye's position, which was contrary to the positions of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The President of Syria, Shukri al-Kuwatly, sent a special telegram to thank Ankara.<sup>8</sup>

### The Cold War Dynamics

The onset of the Cold War further solidified Türkiye's Western alignment. The Truman Doctrine in 1947, which promised American military and economic assistance to Türkiye, was a pivotal moment. It did not only provide Türkiye with much-needed

aid but also firmly anchored it within the Western camp, culminating in its NATO membership in 1952. This alignment was primarily driven by the perceived threat from the Soviet Union, but it had negative implications for Türkiye's role in the Middle East.

In 1949, Türkiye recognized Israel. This step has drawn a lot of criticism from Arab and Muslim countries. Soon after (1950-1955), Türkiye would be involved in military pacts to contain the Soviet Union in the Middle East region, such as the "Middle East Command Project" and the "Baghdad Pact," comprised of Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and the UK. At the time, the Middle East witnessed the rise of Arab nationalism. As a result, Middle Eastern countries were primarily divided between two blocs:<sup>9</sup> the monarchies were mainly pro-West, and the republics were mainly pro-Soviet Union. The Western bloc was led by the U.S., and the Eastern bloc was led by the Soviet Union.

As a NATO member, Türkiye was often seen as a Western outpost, which complicated its relations with Arab nationalist movements, the liberation movements, and the rising tide of anti-Western sentiment in the region, led by Egypt. Given this fact, Ankara faced several challenges in navigating its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. However, this policy underwent heavy adjustments soon after and was recalibrated to correct previous mistakes in some Middle Eastern countries. Although Türkiye's interests were mostly with the West,

its cultural and historic ties remained a strong reminder of its identity.

For example, Türkiye's stance on Algeria's quest for independence from France was notably ambivalent. In the United Nations General Assembly sessions of 1955, Türkiye voted against Algerian independence. Subsequent years, specifically 1957, 1958, and 1959, saw Türkiye abstain from the vote. This abstention was perceived by the Algerian independence movement as a tacit endorsement of French colonial rule. However, Türkiye's position was primarily influenced by its commitment to its NATO allies rather than a direct opposition to Algerian independence.<sup>10</sup>

By 1960, a shift in Türkiye's government led to a change in its stance, resulting in a vote supporting Algerian independence. Notably, even before this official endorsement in 1960, Türkiye had been extending support to Algerian nationalists. Reflecting on this period in 1985, then Prime Minister Turgut Özal expressed regret for Türkiye's earlier inclination towards France during the 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

The 1960s were Türkiye's "Third Worldism" moment, during which Ankara sought to adjust its foreign policy, especially towards the Middle East and North Africa. Three primary factors played an instrumental role in this decision, including U.S. negligence of Turkish interests, especially vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (Jupiter missiles case); failure to gain support from fellow Arab and Muslim countries on the Cyprus issue; and inter-



Within the scope of his visit to Iraq, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Fidan showed an example of inclusive diplomacy by meeting with: (Clockwise from top left) KRG Deputy PM Talabani, National Wisdom Movement Leader Hekimi, Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Hussein and Kurdistan Democratic Party President Barzani.

MURAT GÖK / MUSTAFA AYGÜN / MURTADHA AL-SUDANI / AA

nal economic, political, and social dynamics. All these factors prompted Ankara to reconsider its foreign policy conduct and seek partnerships with the non-aligned world, especially the Arab Muslim countries.

In May 1967, Ankara reformulated its foreign policy towards the Middle East and its Arab neighbors in particular. It sought to establish close relations with them according to three principles: developing relations in all fields, refraining from interfering in inter-Arab quarrels, and refraining from joining pacts designed to target Arabs.<sup>12</sup> This recalibration in Türkiye's foreign policy, along with the adoption of a multi-faceted approach to international relations, paid off during the 1967 Cyprus crisis and the inter-

ventions in 1971, and 1974 as some Arab countries decided to support Türkiye in the intentional forums.

In the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Türkiye supported the Palestinian cause. On the one hand, it made it clear that it would not allow the U.S. to utilize the İncirlik base to deliver support to Israel. On the other hand, Ankara allowed the Soviet Union to use Turkish airspace to help the Arabs.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, Ankara supported the adopted UN General Assembly Resolution that declared Zionism a form of racism.<sup>14</sup> The rise of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit later contributed to Türkiye's new approach. Ecevit argued that Türkiye should not act on behalf of the West and the U.S. in the Middle East. Furthermore, he argued

that arrangements such as the Baghdad Pact undermined Türkiye's interests. Finally, the decision to intervene in Cyprus with his coalition partner, Necmettin Erbakan, was a game changer in Turkish foreign policy.<sup>15</sup>

### Parameters of the Bipolar Era

Parallel to these changes in Türkiye's foreign policy, the year 1978 witnessed the declaration of the National Defense and Foreign Policy Doctrine, which aspired to relatively independent foreign and defense policies and a region-based foreign policy strategy to establish closer relations with neighboring countries and enhance Türkiye's security.<sup>16</sup> The next decade (1980-1990) witnessed several new internal, regional, and international challenges to Türkiye's foreign policy. On the internal level, Türkiye witnessed a military coup in 1980. On the regional level, an Islamic Revolution erupted in Iran in 1979 and ultimately triggered a war with Iraq that lasted almost a decade. On the international level, the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan pushed for a Second Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister and then President Turgut Özal played a critical role in shaping Türkiye's foreign policy during that period. Özal opted to maintain Türkiye's connections with the West, but he opened up his country to new regional frontiers mainly due to his export-growth policy and prioritizing Türkiye's economic interests.<sup>17</sup> This approach was incor-

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porated into Türkiye's foreign policy dynamics. The military tacitly approved this policy because it served its interests and was utilized as a bulwark against left-wing ideologies and ethnic nationalism.

Türkiye next refused to join the U.S. economic embargo on Iran imposed after the embassy takeover and seizure of American diplomats as hostages in Tehran. The Turkish government condemned the Iranian behavior but also rejected U.S. demands for the use of the İncirlik basis in case of a military intervention inside Iran. This decision was seen as a response to the 1974-1978 American arms embargo on Türkiye over Cyprus.<sup>18</sup>

During the Iran-Iraq war, Türkiye adopted a neutral stance, which boosted its economy, as both Iran and Iraq had to depend on Ankara for trade. The aim was to gain as much as possible economically and financially while keeping a check on both sides.

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Neutrality vis-à-vis Iran discouraged Tehran from using the Kurdish card, just as it did against Iraq, and dissuaded it from completely siding with the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> Supporting Iraq's unity and territorial integrity during the war reflected self-interest and was seen as a strong message against Iran. At the time, Turkish-Gulf relations grew noticeably compared to the previous periods on political, economic, and military levels, especially with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Unipolar World Order Moment**

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 offered new opportunities for Türkiye, it also introduced new realities and challenges. The end of the Cold War meant that Türkiye became less important to the West. While the West enjoyed the disappearance of the Soviet threat, Türkiye found it-

self in the middle of a host of security challenges and threats, including civil wars and terrorism. Furthermore, Türkiye's surroundings witnessed several vicious wars, including the Gulf War, the Balkan Wars, and the Caucasus War. Relations with countries such as Syria and Iraq worsened as a result of hosting the leader of a terrorist organization, the PKK, among other reasons.

These challenges necessitated that Türkiye improve its security and military forces while at the same time reaching out politically and economically to new regions and frontiers in which Türkiye has mostly historic connections of cultural, ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic origins. In other words, realities on the ground as well as Türkiye's interests necessitated the introduction of a regional and multi-dimensional vector to its traditional foreign policy. As a result, Türkiye's diplomatic initiatives targeted the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This step paved the way for a broader engagement in the following decade with the Middle East region.

Moreover, Türkiye opposed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, demanded Iraq withdraw its forces, implement UN sanctions against Baghdad, and open its bases for the U.S. Türkiye aspired to stronger relations with the Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Iran were uneasy about Iraq gaining strength in the Gulf, so they came closer to Türkiye.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the 1990s, Türkiye dealt a huge blow to PKK terrorism when National Intel-

ligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) managed to capture Abdullah Öcalan in Kenya and transfer him to Türkiye in a unique special operation.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Rise of the AK Party**<sup>23</sup>

In the early 2000s, Türkiye's position on a regional level, especially in relation to the Middle East, was largely perceived as an extension of Western interests. This perception was rooted in historical alliances and geopolitical strategies that aligned Türkiye closely with the West, particularly the U.S. Its special security relations with Israel at the time, especially during the 1990s, contributed to creating this perception as well. However, the rise of the AK Party in 2002 marked the beginning of a significant paradigm shift in Türkiye's foreign policy approach, including its approach towards its immediate geographic surroundings and especially towards the Middle East and North Africa region.

The AK Party's ascendancy heralded a departure from a primarily Western-oriented, defensive stance. Instead, Türkiye began to adopt a more exploratory, multi-dimensional, and proactive approach to its foreign relations. This shift was not merely cosmetic; it was rooted in a broader vision of Türkiye's status as a rising power and mainly reflected in the AK Party's grand vision of 'Century of Türkiye's 2023. On the regional level, the AK Party sought to reposition Türkiye as a central player in regional politics, not only leveraging its unique

position as a bridge between the East and West but also actively employing its historic, cultural, and religious ties with the Middle East. The aim was to boast its opening up to its geographical surroundings, or what was coined as its "strategic depth." The vision of the new elites had a tremendous impact on Ankara's relations with Middle Eastern countries. Consequently, Türkiye's foreign policy during the AK Party era evolved in different ways.

Adapting to global shifts, Türkiye's foreign policy during the AK Party era has oscillated between different postures. This era is particularly illustrative of this adaptability. It commenced with a phase of revisionism, where Türkiye aimed to redefine its role in the world. This was followed by a proactive stance, where Türkiye aimed to shape regional outcomes actively. However, as challenges mounted, there were periods where Türkiye's foreign policy became more reactive, responding to immediate threats and challenges. In recent years, an assertive and autonomous approach has emerged before it adapts again to a new situation in the period between 2021 and 2023, with Türkiye prioritizing its national interests and seeking to carve out an independent path in a rapidly changing regional and global landscape.

#### ***Revisionist Vision (2002-2011)***

One of the most defining moments of this period was Türkiye's response to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In a surprising move, Ankara chose to oppose the U.S. This decision was not without its challenges, but it

marked a clear departure from past policies and set the tone for Türkiye's future engagements in the region. As Türkiye navigated the complexities of Middle Eastern politics, it began to play a pivotal role in mediating between nations historically at odds, such as Syria and Israel. Türkiye's efforts to strengthen ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council further solidified its position as a regional power. Moreover, Türkiye's active participation in the Arab-Israeli conflict showcased its commitment to regional peace and stability.

By the late 2000s, Türkiye's foreign policy had evolved to become even more visionary and proactive. Five principles underpin this approach: balancing security with democracy, fostering good relations with neighbors, expanding regional ties, adhering to a multi-dimensional approach, and practicing rhythmic diplomacy. Each of these principles was carefully chosen to reflect Türkiye's broader vision for its role in the region and the world.

This proactive stance led to several groundbreaking initiatives towards the Middle East and the regional countries, mainly the Arab countries. Türkiye championed economic integration, advocated for open borders, and promoted mediation diplomacy.<sup>24</sup> Regional powers like Israel and Iran viewed Türkiye's rising influence with suspicion. However, Türkiye positioned itself as a balancing power in the region, navigating the delicate balance of power with skill and diplomacy and improving its eco-

nomic and political relations with its surroundings like never before in the history of modern Turkish diplomacy.

The 2008-2009 Israeli war on Ghaza, along with the lawless Israeli assault on *Mavi Marmara* in 2010, were another defining moment for Turkish foreign policy in this decade. Furthermore, Obama's Administration's decision to withdraw American troops from Iraq and approach Iran empowered Tehran and raised concerns in the Arab world, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. These events led to two primary things. First, they granted Ankara sweeping support from the public as well as from the Arab governments in the Middle East, which ultimately prompted Türkiye to accelerate its strategy in the region. Second, Türkiye was seen by several different actors as a rising, capable regional power that could play a balancer role against both Israel and Iran.

As a result, the Arab Gulf states courted Türkiye on the one hand, and so did Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan on the other. In 2010, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia awarded Türkiye's Prime Minister at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the "King Faisal International Award." Türkiye and Syria, along with Jordan and Lebanon, established the Quadripartite High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council<sup>25</sup> to create a zone of free movement of goods and persons. The "Shamgen" area project was also supported by a similar financial mechanism between the central banks of the member states.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Assertive and Autonomous Turn (2011-2020)***

The Arab Uprisings in 2011, however, disturbed the previous dynamics and created unprecedented challenges for Türkiye. These uprisings, which caught the world by surprise, led to significant geopolitical shifts. Although the Turkish dual experience of democracy and Islam inspired the uprisings in the Arab world, it was not enough to empower Türkiye to lead the regional change. With the rise of counter-revolutionary forces, Türkiye, with its previous proactive and visionary foreign policy, found itself in uncharted waters. For a few years, Türkiye's foreign policy shifted to a tactical-reactive mode to cope with the implications of the Arab Uprisings on its interests and national security.

The uprisings led to the emergence of several conflicting regional axes with varying stances and interests (Türkiye-Qatar-popular uprisings; Iran-Iraq-Syria-Shiite militias; Saudi Arabia-UAE-Egypt and counterrevolutionary forces),<sup>27</sup> leading to heightened regional rivalry, increased foreign military interventions (mainly Iranian, Russian, and American interventions), and the rise of radicalism and terrorism (ISIS and PKK/YPG, among others).

The Arab Uprisings undermined Türkiye's relations with several governments in the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> By 2016, in response to these challenges and emerging regional threats, Türkiye's foreign policy had taken an assertive turn. This assertiveness was shaped

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by various factors, including the rise of the pro-Assad regime axis in Syria (comprised of Russia, Iran, and the Shiite militias), the U.S.' empowerment of the YPG/PKK, and the formation of anti-Türkiye alliances (in the Levant, North Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean). Türkiye's policy became more realistic, focusing on regional power dynamics and emerging threat perceptions.

This period also saw significant internal developments that influenced the conduct of Türkiye's foreign policy. The rise of Türkiye's homegrown defense industry, the failed coup attempt of 2016, and changes in regional conflicts further solidified its assertive approach. Türkiye's forward defense strategy, military activism, and diplomatic achievements during this period showcased its newfound assertiveness and autonomy on the global stage.<sup>29</sup> Türkiye achieved notable successes in its foreign policy across various regional theaters.

In 2017, Ankara adeptly managed the Gulf crisis using a blend of soft and hard diplomatic tactics and prevented the militarization of the crisis.

## Türkiye's pragmatic approach to safeguarding its national interests has been particularly evident in its dealings with Middle Eastern nations

Similarly, the same autonomous and assertive foreign policy prevented Iraq's potential disintegration by intervening in the Kurdistan Regional Government's divisive referendum. A significant triumph in 2019 was Türkiye's maritime boundary agreements with Libya, which reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean and ensured Türkiye's rights in the region. In 2020, Ankara's autonomous foreign policy and assertiveness deterred the Assad regime, particularly by stabilizing areas like Idlib and addressing the refugee issue. During this time frame, Türkiye significantly bolstered its presence and influence in various regions. In 2017, it expanded its reach into areas like the Gulf and the Horn of Africa, specifically Somalia. Then, in 2020, Türkiye further solidified its regional standing by extending its influence into North Africa, notably Libya, and the Caucasus, particularly Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, while Türkiye adopted a more assertive stance, it simultaneously cultivated a unique soft power in the Middle East.

Türkiye's foreign policy during this period sent decisive and firm mes-

sages to foes, rivals, and partners in the Middle East and beyond. To foes, the message was that Ankara would not hesitate to use its hard power to defend itself and its vital interests. To rivals, the message was that Ankara can't be marginalized, sidelined, or ignored. To friends and allies, the message was that Türkiye is a committed, credible, capable, and reliable partner and ally and that they can always depend on it.

### *The Golden Moment (2021-2023)*

Between 2021 and 2023, Türkiye's foreign policy shifted from being influenced by internal developments and non-traditional threats to being shaped by significant international and regional events. These included Donald Trump's defeat in the U.S. elections, the al-Ula declaration in January 2021 following Biden's rise to the presidency, the waning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. By the end of 2020, the Middle East experienced a notable de-escalation, with major nations, including Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and the UAE, seeking reconciliation, driven by the challenges of differing geopolitical agendas and the pandemic's economic impact.

During this period, Türkiye's foreign policy showcased adaptability, emphasizing diplomacy and economic priorities over its earlier assertive-focused approach. The change in the U.S. presidency and the al-Ula agreement facilitated Ankara's strengthened ties with Gulf nations and efforts to normalize relations

with countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. As the pandemic's effects began to diminish in 2021-2022, regional players, motivated by economic recovery, pursued rapprochement, evident in improved relations between nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Egypt and Qatar, and Türkiye and Israel. The conflict in Ukraine heightened the significance of the Eastern Mediterranean's resources, fostering a conducive environment for collaborative agreements, particularly between Türkiye, Egypt, and Israel. Meanwhile, Türkiye's relations with the countries in Africa in general and the Arab countries of North Africa in particular, such as Algeria, Morocco, and Libya, reached unprecedented levels, especially in the economic and defense realms. Likewise, Türkiye's ties with the GCC countries, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, peaked like never before, heralding the birth of a new era. During this phase, Türkiye adeptly balanced its assertiveness with diplomacy, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in its foreign policy.

## Conclusion

Over the past century, Türkiye has adeptly navigated the complex tapestry of international relations with a particular focus on the Middle East—a region historically intertwined with its Ottoman legacy. Türkiye's pragmatic approach to safeguarding its national interests has been particularly evident in its dealings with Middle Eastern nations. Its unique geographical position, acting as a

bridge between Asia and Europe, has granted it a pivotal role in the region's affairs, often finding itself at the nexus of East-West dynamics. As various Middle Eastern crises unfolded, Türkiye's foreign policy oscillated, adapted, and evolved, reflecting both its historical ties and strategic imperatives. Engagements with neighboring countries, from mediating regional disputes to fostering economic partnerships, have underlined Türkiye's commitment to stability and prosperity in the Middle East. Furthermore, Türkiye's interactions with major Middle Eastern powers, both allies and adversaries, reveal a nuanced balance of diplomacy, reflecting its deep understanding of the region's intricacies. As Türkiye continues to stand at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, its foreign policy towards the Middle East remains a testament to its enduring resilience, strategic acumen, and desire to shape a stable and prosperous regional future in the face of ever-shifting geopolitical landscapes. ■

## Endnotes

1. Some scholars argue that Türkiye's foreign policy shows an evolution of continuity even during the shifts and changes. See: Hasan Ulusoy, "100 Years of Continuity in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Constructivist Perspective," *Perceptions*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2023), pp. 2-10; Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, "The Historical Direction of Turkey's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East," *Adam Akademi*, No. 1 (2011), pp. 61-78.

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