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EDITORIAL OFFICE / YAYIN İDARE ADRESİ
Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP/Çankaya, 06700 Ankara/Türkiye
Tel: +90.312.551-2100 • Fax: +90.312.551-2190
editor@insightturkey.com • www.insightturkey.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

The promise of globalization is a world more connected than ever, where denser networks blur borders and deepen interdependence. Yet in 2026, the world learned what happens when several layers of that connection fail simultaneously. After the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the passage for about a third of the world's seaborne oil exports almost stopped. Along with that the air hubs of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha shut down, more than 3,400 flights were canceled on March 1 alone. Six months on, traffic through the strait remained at about a tenth of its prewar level. In the Red Sea, where seabed cables were cut in 2024 and again in 2025, tonnage through the Suez Canal still ran about 70 percent below its 2023 average in 2025. Connectivity, long the quiet plumbing of globalization, has become its front line.

The caravan roads and sea lanes we now call the Silk Roads bound continents together, and empires rose and fell along them. The classical understanding, however, treated each mode apart. Mahan tied national power to command of the sea, Mackinder warned that railways would let continental powers erode the advantage of the sea powers, and in 1944 the Chicago Convention affirmed every state's exclusive sovereignty over its airspace, so that air routes rested on permission. The logic was the same: power belonged to whoever held the road, the rail, the strait or the sky.

What sets the 21st century apart is not that routes can be closed, for they always could, but that their layers now converge. The narrow waters that carry tankers also cover the internet's cables: an estimated 90 percent of communications between Europe and Asia pass beneath the Bab al-Mandab. New corridors are bundled by design, the Zangezur Corridor, which would link mainland Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan on Türkiye's border, is to carry rail, road, energy and digital infrastructure together. A single chokepoint can now interrupt goods, energy, people, and data at once.

Rival programs, from China's Belt and Road Initiative to the European Union's Global Gateway, now compete to finance the world's routes. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), announced at the 2023 G20 summit,

proposed a route through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel to Europe, leaving Türkiye outside its plans. President Erdoğan responded that "there can be no corridor without Türkiye," underscoring the country's central place in connectivity between Asia and Europe. Three years later, its northern leg remains stalled amid the absence of Saudi-Israeli normalization, while Türkiye continues to offer a route linking the two continents. "The World Is Bigger than Five," a principle long invoked to challenge the dominance of the UN Security Council's permanent members, applies to connectivity as well. Routes drawn by a handful of capitals cannot overlook Türkiye's position at the meeting point of continents and expect to offer lasting connectivity.

Türkiye has answered by multiplying corridors rather than wagering on one. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Railway and the Marmaray Tunnel beneath the Bosphorus have carried direct freight between China and Europe since 2019. Cargo crossing the Caspian Sea on the Middle Corridor reached 4.1 million tons in 2024, over eight times its level before 2022, and is projected to reach 11 million by 2030. In 2024 Iraq, Türkiye, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates signed a memorandum on the 1,200 km Development Road from Grand Faw Port to the Turkish border, now in advanced design. None of this replaces the sea, and the Development Road itself begins behind Hormuz. Its value lies on the fact that the more corridors meet in one country, the less any single closure can hold a region hostage.

At sea, the Montreux Convention, signed ninety years ago this July, keeps the Turkish Straits under treaty: merchant ships pass freely, and within four days of the Russia-Ukraine War, Türkiye applied it to restrict warships while commerce continued. Months later Türkiye and the United Nations brokered the grain corridor, run from İstanbul, that carried 32.9 million tons of food from the Ukrainian ports. In the air, İstanbul Airport ranked first in the world for hub connectivity in 2025, and Turkish Airlines flies to more countries than any other airline. With Iranian airspace restricted, flights between Europe and Asia now detour south over Egypt and Arabia or north over the Caucasus, where Türkiye's railways and pipelines already run. Beneath the surface, terrestrial fiber across Anatolia offers data a similar bypass.

The old question was who controlled the route. This century asks who can keep routes open when others close them, and who can earn the world's trust in doing so. By that measure, Türkiye has already shown the role she intends to play at the crossroads of continents.

Connectivity has evolved from a peripheral line in diplomatic discourse to the vital architecture of contemporary statecraft, defining how nations compete, cooperate, and safeguard their strategic interests. Physical arteries, institutional regimes, trade flows, and diplomatic conduits now delineate the contours of influence within the international system. For Türkiye, whose geo-

graphical position has historically invited the passive designation of a bridge, this systemic transformation prompts a fundamental question: is connectivity merely a static attribute of its geography, or an active strategy deliberately engineered and managed? The contributions in this volume examine this inquiry across multiple analytical vectors.

This issue of *Insight Turkey* illustrates that Türkiye's connectivity portfolio is distinctly multi-layered. Several studies evaluate concrete physical transit frameworks, specifically the Middle Corridor, the Development Road Project (DRP), and the surrounding IMEC and Belt and Road Initiative architectures, tracing how Ankara repositions its strategy through portfolio hedging, compensatory capacity against chokepoint vulnerabilities, and integrated security frameworks.

Other contributions follow the Turkish influence beyond its immediate periphery into Africa and the Sahel through interconnected defense, aviation, and development networks, as well as the evolving trade ties binding Türkiye to Gulf and Central Asian markets. A further set of analyses explores the pressures exerted when connectivity is tested under stress, whether through the weaponization of maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, the limitations of middle-power mediation in conflict zones, or the structural gap between physical presence and international recognition.

An analysis of Türkiye's connectivity strategy across physical infrastructure, institutional capacity, and human dimensions forms the core focus of a commentary by Çağrı Erhan. Challenging the passive portrayal of Türkiye as a mere geographic bridge between Europe and Asia, the commentary demonstrates how state leadership can leverage major infrastructure investments to transition into a central hub state and secure strategic autonomy in foreign policy. Erhan highlights the Middle Corridor and the Development Road Project as crucial spatial realignments that bypass active conflict zones and provide viable alternatives to competing initiatives such as IMEC. Ultimately, the piece shows how Türkiye secures advantages through poly aligned connectivity networks while balancing financial constraints, regional rivalry, and security exposures.

Türkiye's multidimensional footprint in Africa, spanning defense exports, humanitarian aid, education, diplomacy, and aviation, rivals traditional powers through deep cultural ties and a sovereignty focused approach, an overarching dynamic evaluated in a commentary by İbrahim Efe. Despite this substantial presence, major global surveys like Gallup and Afrobarometer routinely exclude Türkiye from their influence metrics. Applying Murray's framework of recognition and Lopes and Gabriel's Emerging Power Trap, Efe demonstrates that material influence does not automatically confer recognized global status, revealing how international assessment tools continue to reinforce established power hierarchies while marginalizing rising middle powers.

How Türkiye has repositioned its connectivity portfolio following its perceived exclusion from IMEC forms the core focus of an article by Oktay Küçükdeğirmenci and Abdulsait Aykut. Building on corridor hedging theory, the authors compare IMEC, the DRP, the Middle Corridor, and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They argue that while IMEC did not originate the DRP, Ankara's perceived exclusion heightened the project's political salience, accelerating Turkish support alongside its Middle Corridor alignment and selective BRI engagement. Terming this process "exclusion-triggered portfolio repositioning," the study concludes that Türkiye pursues selective multi-engagement across distinct transit frameworks to preserve its central transit relevance and strategic optionality.

Far from being mere conduits of commerce, global trade routes serve as vital strategic arenas forged by intense geopolitical rivalry, a core thesis that animates an article by Abdulkadir Nacar. Amid shifting trade dynamics between major powers like the U.S. and China, the study argues that Türkiye and Iraq must adopt innovative mechanisms to safeguard their economic interests. To this end, Nacar proposes an integrated transportation insurance and security model for the FAW-Kapıkule route, bundling insurance coverage with private security operations under a state-backed public-private monopoly inspired by Lloyd's. Designed to comply with WTO, GATS, and GATT standards, this framework unites physical protection, real-time monitoring, and crisis response with trade logistics, offering a novel approach to securing transit corridors and fostering regional stability.

The Sahel serves as a proving ground for the reconfiguration of regional security governance amidst the dismantling of the Western presence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, a central dynamic examined in an article by Zainul Abideen Jibril. The study posits that Türkiye projects power through corridors of influence, which are interconnected networks spanning defense transfers, aviation, trade, and TİKA development initiatives. Analyzing data across the three states, Jibril highlights an inherent duality, noting that while these infrastructures expand state authority into contested borderlands, they simultaneously create logistical dependencies on Ankara. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that modern geopolitical influence in limited statehood environments is no longer episodic, but structurally sustained through physical and operational networks.

How modern disruptions across maritime chokepoints like Bab al-Mandab, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Hormuz expose systemic vulnerabilities in global trade serves as the starting point for an article by Yusuf Bahadır Keskin. The study examines compensatory connectivity as a mechanism where integrated overland routes partially offset maritime chokepoint risks. Focusing on Türkiye's Middle Corridor, the Development Road, and the prospective Modern Hejaz axis, Keskin applies a structured comparison evaluating capacity, cost, operational constraints, and crisis response. The findings reveal that while

the Middle Corridor is operational, the Development Road remains incomplete and the Modern Hejaz axis prospective, demonstrating that land corridors complement rather than replace maritime transportation.

Whether Türkiye's bilateral trade with Gulf and Central Asian economies is better explained by integrating economic complexity and trade connectivity alongside traditional trade determinants forms the central inquiry of an article by Harun Türker Kara. Analyzing annual data from 2001 to 2024 using Harvard Growth Lab's Economic Complexity Index, the study finds that while economic size remains the primary driver of trade, supplemented by institutional ties in Central Asia, productive capabilities and potential connectivity significantly influence trade flows. Specifically, a wider complexity gap suppresses bilateral trade, whereas enhanced trade connectivity expands it. Ultimately, Kara demonstrates that productive capabilities and connectivity play a supporting, complementary role without replacing market size and established regional links.

Türkiye's mediation efforts during the Ukraine war, specifically its critical role in co-brokering the Black Sea Grain Initiative within a United Nations framework between July 2022 and July 2023, are analyzed in Robert Mason and Engin Koç's article. In doing so, it underscores the continuity of Türkiye's balancing role and its pursuit of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis great powers. The paper outlines Türkiye's close relations with both Russia and Ukraine and its ability to exert influence in a myriad of ways. The authors advance the literature by claiming that middle power mediation is only viable in wars that remain limited, and that it collapses once great powers escalate or intrude in other ways. Strategic autonomy in such circumstances is therefore temporary.

While not every contribution focuses explicitly on Türkiye, each illuminates the broader structural conditions under which connectivity is forged, contested, or fractured. Historical, legal, and political investigations spanning Armenia's electoral landscape, the postcolonial legacy of Sykes-Picot, the Babri Masjid dispute, and state responsibility for corporate acts in cyberspace unpack the settings where borders and networks intersect, while an examination of Türkiye's Policy Councils addresses the internal institutional machinery of the state.

Armenia's 2026 parliamentary election, widely viewed as a referendum on the country's post-Karabakh trajectory, deteriorating ties with Russia, and growing engagement with Europe, forms the core focus of Intigam Mamedov's commentary. While the vote reaffirmed support for regional peace and European integration, it failed to deliver a decisive mandate for transformative change. Instead, a strengthened opposition, social polarization, and the government's lack of a constitutional supermajority created political deadlock, exposing a society divided over its geopolitical reorientation and post-war vision.

A critical analysis of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and its enduring impact on Middle Eastern political dynamics forms the core of a commentary by Muhammed Fatheen M.K. Rejecting the notion that regional instability stems primarily from inherent sectarian divides, the text argues that arbitrary Anglo-French borders created structurally weak states. Drawing on historical sociology and postcolonial IR theory, it examines how imperial divide-and-rule tactics and the suppression of local agency fostered authoritarianism and foreign intervention, concluding that lasting stability requires genuine self-determination rather than external intervention.

The institutional shift following Türkiye's 2017 transition to the Presidential Government System forms the analytical backdrop of an article by Timur Üstün, Yusuf Pustu, and Mehmet Akif Özer. Evaluating the resulting administrative reorganization, the study focuses specifically on the newly established Policy Councils and their evolving role within the national public policy architecture. The authors examine how these advisory bodies alter policy formulation, influence existing institutional actors, and exercise their regulatory mandate. Ultimately, the article provides strategic recommendations to enhance the institutional capacity and policy effectiveness of these councils in line with their constitutional responsibilities.

That international law traditionally recognizes only the direct legal responsibility of states forms the foundational premise of an article by Mammad Ismayilov. Under the 2001 Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, state attribution requires strict direction, control, or authorization, a framework severely challenged by the borderless and anonymous nature of cyberspace. Ismayilov highlights how sovereign states exploit this opacity by utilizing big technology corporations as proxy intermediaries to achieve strategic objectives while evading legal accountability. Focusing on this regulatory deficit, the study demonstrates that where direct attribution remains legally elusive, the principle of due diligence serves as the primary actionable standard to hold states internationally accountable for harmful cyber operations conducted through private tech giants.

Through a wide range of commentaries and articles, this installment of *Insight Turkey* aims to bring to its readers a comprehensive framework on the most recent developments in connectivity issues and Türkiye's growing role in connectivity projects. We are confident that this publication will be a great contribution to the understanding of these critical issues and we hope that you will find the wide range of articles informative and interesting.



COMMENTARIES

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