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## GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

GÜROL BABA

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Since the early 2000s, almost every great, middle and even small power has developed a tendency to deepen their relations in the Asia-Pacific region. This tendency is also valid regarding international and regional organizations. In addition to state actors, non-state and even sub-state actors have assigned a certain value to this region in their strategic calculations. With such a tilt, Asia-Pacific actors have become a focal point of global politics. The increasing significance of the region has been boosted by the rising Asian powers, such as China, India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Indonesia. With all this dynamism, extra-regional actors have increased their economic, political, strategic, and cultural investments in Asia-Pacific. This rise in the region's multileveled value has led regionalism-oriented IR researchers to develop the concept of the Asian Century.

Türkiye has a peculiar position and significance in this regard combining the West and the non-West in many respects. Unlike the Cold War and early-post

Cold War times, the world, especially the Asia-Pacific “world” is not composed of only two vectors, the West and the non-West, but several spanning into a variety of directions. This multi-vectorial reality of inter-non/-state affairs fits into Türkiye’s ambitions in its foreign policy. The Cold War label of Türkiye, i.e., the staunch ally of the West, is no longer completely valid. Türkiye of today is much more than that. The Western alliance is only an aspect of Türkiye whose substance has been amalgamated by Ankara’s developing relations with other regions and sub-regions of the globe including Asia-Pacific.

Türkiye’s search for political-strategic clout in other regions has led Ankara to conceptualize and announce the most comprehensive and official foreign policy approach towards the Asia-Pacific region yet, known as the Asia Anew Initiative. This shows that Türkiye is not an exception to the above-stated powers that gave this region a central place in their strategic calculations. The initiative is predominantly multifaceted at its core, which aims to eliminate the asymmetries between Türkiye and Asian actors in both strategic and commercial terms. By increasing the engagement and cooperation with these actors, Türkiye aims to utilize its advantage in the sectors that it has considerable advantages in, such as tourism, conventional defense technology, and construction together with the ones in which it has emerging improvement, such as high-tech, finance, infrastructure, and energy transport.

Türkiye’s additional connotation regarding Asia-Pacific is in geocultural terms. Due to its historical and religious background, Türkiye has many ties with Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Korea, Muslim communities of India, and to an extent Afghanistan. This has been an important channel that Turkish state and non-state actors have experienced in deepening their relations in the region. Türkiye’s soft power and diplomacy have also utilized such cultural affinity. Links tracing back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the Ottoman era has aided Türkiye’s influence in South and Southeast Asia. A clear empirical indication of such influence is the popularity of Turkish culture/history-oriented television serials within these communities. Thus, geocultural impact not only boosts Türkiye’s visibility and weight in the region but also helps it to be relevant in the non-Western and multiple directional vectors of the Asia-Pacific politico-economic fabric.

An additional element of Türkiye’s engagement in the region is that it tries to utilize almost any type of “-lateralism.” i.e., multilateralism, minilateralism, and bilateralism. Ankara is trying to be a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and has put forward its intention to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It has also created MIKTA, a transregional partnership grouping, with its like-minded partners from the region. More importantly, it has been developing a whole range of bilateralisms with Asia-Pacific countries regardless of their power statuses.

Another very significant element of Türkiye's engagement with the region is its focus on Asia-Pacific communities. Various Turkish state institutions, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), and the Türkiye scholarships program of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) have been developing Türkiye's people-to-people links through strategic and sustainable communication and promoting the country's national brand.

Although there is an obvious increase in Türkiye's engagement with Asia-Pacific it is still early to assert its prominence in the region. However, this is not only a result of Türkiye's current capabilities but the parameters of competition that must be navigated, with the global powers competing and cooperating in the region. Türkiye in this sense would require more cooperative patterns with like-minded powers, to increase its influence and boost its partners' strength.

Asia-Pacific is not a hassle-free region and currently Türkiye has a limited impact in this challenging ecosystem. On the other hand, developing multifaceted relations, especially with culturally and historically proximate sub-regions, will increase Türkiye's visibility and impact.

With the above-stated awareness and engagements, Türkiye's visibility and economic significance in the Asia-Pacific will significantly increase over time. One very formidable catalyst for this would be its cultural and historical ties with Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, which have already been transforming into commercial and political-strategic outcomes.

The current edition of *Insight Turkey* is dedicated to the exploration of bilateral relations between Türkiye and Far Eastern countries, within the context of the Asia Anew Initiative. The winter issue features a commentary and six research articles on this subject, providing a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Moreover, the issue includes four off-topic comments and two research articles that lie outside the main theme. Among these, two articles shed light on the current Gaza genocide, ongoing since October 7.

The commentary section opens with a perceptive analysis by Nuh Yılmaz on Türkiye's foreign policy toward Asia. In his commentary, Yılmaz examines Türkiye's general perspective on the Asian continent and discusses the basic dynamics of the initiative. According to his analysis, there has been a significant shift in the global balance of power, with Atlantic Asia emerging as a rising force in, politics, military, culture, and especially in economy. This transformation of the Asian continent prompted Türkiye to launch the Asia Anew Initiative in 2019, which presents a comprehensive and systematic vision for Asia. Yılmaz delves into Türkiye's general perspective on the Asian continent and the key dynamics of this initiative.

Furthermore, the initial research article, authored by Gürol Baba as the guest editor, centers on Türkiye's strategies and its Asia Anew Initiative. Through his work, Baba endeavors to illustrate that within the Asian framework, Türkiye has the capability to not only be pragmatic but also achieve efficiency by implementing a diverse foreign policy approach. He argues that Türkiye's application of multi-vectorism to its foreign policy in Asia is more successful than multilateralism or minilateralism policies. This is because there is much more than the two traditional vectors (West and non-West) due to the current intra-regional fragmentations and deviations in Asia. Baba embodied the success of bilateral relations in Asia by giving examples from some countries.

Following Baba's outline of Türkiye's approach to its Asian policy, the second research article, penned by Mujib Alam, delves into the complex nature of Türkiye-India relations between 2000 and 2023. Alam's analysis spans diplomatic, economic, scientific, and cultural exchanges, offering a comprehensive view of their bilateral engagements. Despite different stances on issues such as Kashmir and Cyprus, Alam points out a trend towards improvement in relations, especially economic relations and cultural exchanges, driven by the foreign policy trends of the ruling parties of the two countries.

The third research article by Kohei Imai examines the bilateral relations between Türkiye and Japan, which will soon celebrate their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. Imai delves into the historical relationship between the two nations, which while positive, lacked a tangible cooperative partnership. He carefully considers the diplomatic challenges and public perspectives that Japan encounters, and identifies opportunities for both countries to pursue more practical collaborations moving forward.

In the next research article, Alaeddin Tekin and Arshad Islam focus on Malaysia, shedding light on Türkiye's relationship with another Southeast Asian country. In research articles based on primary sources, including Ottoman and Turkish archives as well as Bahasa Melayu and English materials, Tekin and Islam aim to investigate historical and current relations between Turks and Malays.

Another research article on the subject, written by Yunhee Kim, tries to examine veteran diplomacy through the example of Türkiye and draws from the different historical examples of the Korean War. Claiming that veteran diplomacy can be used as an opportunity to expand South Korea's soft power in the new public diplomacy era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Kim also argues that this diplomacy paves the way for security cooperation in the context of Türkiye-South Korea relations. Ali Akkemik, who deals with Türkiye's relations with East Asia from the economic dimension, in the next research article, states that their economic relations have undergone a significant structural change in the last

twenty years. According to Akkemik, while Japan previously dominated Türkiye's trade with East Asia and the flow of direct foreign investment from East Asia to Türkiye, recently, both South Korea and China have surpassed Japan as Türkiye's main trading partners in East Asia and have caught up with Japan in terms of foreign investments in Türkiye.

Moreover, in this issue, we address the grave humanitarian crisis stemming from the conflict in Gaza. Specifically, two commentaries focus on the tragic events unfolding since October 7. Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandelsizwe Dalibhunga Mandela offers an analysis of South Africa's response to Israel's actions against the Palestinian people, focusing on their legal recourse at the International Court of Justice. He draws comparisons between Israel's treatment of Palestinians and South Africa's apartheid era, underscoring the deep ties of solidarity between these communities and the essential role of global unity, accountability, and concerted efforts in promoting justice and equality. Additionally, Norma Hashim provides a unique perspective by focusing on the plight of prisoners and hostages in Gaza, arguing that Palestinian prisoners are central to the narrative of the genocide initiated on October 7. She delves into their importance within the Palestinian national movement and shares the personal stories of some of these prisoners, highlighting their significance in the context of the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

In other off-topic commentary, Sönmez Ateşoğlu has written a commentary as a continuation of the research article, "Economic Power and International Security," he previously published in *Insight Turkey*. While Nancy Snow has provided a commentary in which she discusses the national brand of Japan, where she lived for many years. In his previously published research article, Ateşoğlu explains in detail the impact of economic power on international security and the connection between economic and military power, but claims that the security dimension is not sufficiently addressed. Therefore, in this commentary, the author aims to explain the impact of military power on international security, especially in the context of Türkiye, and how a state can achieve its security goals by using military force. On the other hand, Nancy Snow explores the evolution of Japan's national brand, analyzing the transition from historical isolation to its current global recognition, especially under the influence of Shinzo Abe's policies.

The winter issue broadens its scope with two research articles that venture beyond the main theme. Blerim Sallahu's contribution opens this segment with an in-depth exploration of the modalities for acquiring citizenship in Kosovo. Following this, Kemal İnat and Burhanettin Duran assess the Ukrainian war's profound repercussions on the global order, scrutinizing the intricate position and consequential influence of Türkiye –situated uniquely as both a neighbor to Russia and an ally of the U.S.– within this complex geopolitical landscape.

This latest special edition of *Insight Turkey* meticulously explores the evolving dynamics of Türkiye's engagement with East Asia under the ambit of the Asia Anew Initiative. This edition is distinguished by a series of foundational articles that provide a thorough overview of the initiative, alongside in-depth analyses of Türkiye's bilateral relationships with key Asian nations. We trust that the comprehensive discussions and diverse perspectives presented in this issue will offer our readers valuable insights and deepen their understanding of the intricate geopolitical landscape. ■