

# MAKE IT OR BREAK IT: TURKEY-WEST RELATION AND ITS FUTURE

Riad Domazeti



**INSAMER**  
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Domazeti, Riad. "Make It or Break It: Turkey-West Relation and Its Future", INSAMER, 08.01.2020.

 Analysis

Turkish-West relations in history always have been complicated. Turkey is an important Muslim country. Being a member of NATO since 1952, Turkey has contributed in peace missions around the world. Turkey's contribution in many instable and insecure zones was pivotal for its Western allies. Turkey is also a European Union candidate since 1950 when Turkey signed up as a member of the Council of Europe. Historically Turkey has good economic relations with the EU and the US. For the West, Turkey's geopolitical position is important. Turkey protected the European and NATO's Southern-east boundaries from different threats. Turkey has participated for the Western bloc in the Cold War period. At the time Turkey was an integral part of Western security policies.

But it is not a walk in the park for Turkey when it comes to its relations with the West. True, Turkey's position in the West camp has its benefits, yet that does not mean that it does not come with implications. Turkey in general has its own strategic interests with the West. Aside from some issues like the 1974 Cyprus trilateral crisis, everything seemed to be fair, even under the dark shadow of the Cold War.

In 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkish relations with the West changed and agendas between Ankara, Brussels and Washington too faced some changes. The rise of liberalism and freedom after 1990's Turkish foreign policy increased in different continents. Turkey became more active in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Middle East.



**INSAMER**  
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER  
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

The New World Order has created positive conditions for Turkey's new foreign targets in economic and cultural areas. Turkey created a good economic relation with the new countries birthed by the former Soviet Union, giving way to the country's historical and cultural ties with the new actors. In this context Turkey gradually became more and more independent in its foreign policy behaviors from its Western allies.

Yet, 2011 proved to be a turning point in Turkish-Western relation. Following the 'Arab Spring' that began in December 2010, Turkey and its Western allies juxtaposed their standings in different positions. Turkey strongly supported the popular protests in the 'Arab Spring' countries. Turkey's foreign policies were all for the Arab youth's demands on justice, freedom and equal economic sharing. In this new era Turkey is now regarded as a potential role model for the transformations of the Middle East countries. Turkey's Human Rights policies and economic growth enabled it to become a regional power in the Middle East.

Political turbulence of that period and regional turmoil increased disputes among countries every day. Different crises in Syria, Egypt, Libya, Mediterranean, or issues surrounding the S-400, FETO, Iran and Palestine are just some of the issues that make the region to boil. On top of it, Brexit, EU's unpredictable future, Islamophobia, threats of embargo and the rise of nationalist populism and right extremism in Europe have pushed Turkey to find new alternatives of allies.

The 2015 Coup de etat in Egypt and the West's support of Abdulfattah al-Sisi increased Turkey's distrust and rapidly deteriorated the relationships. The West's support to a dictator and authoritarian leader such as Al Sisi seems to really disappointed Turkey,

to say the least. But still, this was not the biggest problem for the matter. What posed as the biggest and most serious problem in the relations was Turkey's military operations in Syria.

Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring in October 9 as a reaction to this created-de facto situation that threatened Turkey's geopolitics and human interests. In his statement Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that the main objectives of the operation is to clear the region from the threat of terrorism, providing a safe return for Syrian refugees in Turkey and protecting Syria's territorial integrity. The operation took place following the refugee problems in Turkey. Currently there are still more than 4 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey, and this created huge political and social problems.

Aside from the number of refugees, Turkish authorities constantly stated that Turkey would not allow the creation of a nest of terror in Northeast Syria. The YPG is a Syrian branch of the PKK, which is a terrorist organization recognized both by the EU and the US. The PKK is a Marxist organization that has been attacking Turkey for 40 years. For this reason it is unthinkable for Turkey to allow such a large geography to be dominated by a terrorist organization like the PKK or ISIS. Moreover the YPG terrorist organization was using ISIS detainees to blackmail and racketeer against many countries as it

*Turkey is expecting the solidarity and support from its allies in the fight against terrorism like FETO, ISIS and PKK/YPG.*

does against Turkey. Turkey won't let the establishment of any de facto YPG-managed zone to happen. Firstly for Turkey the YPG is a terrorist organization that bombed and organized terror attacks in different cities of Turkey. Secondly the YPG is a Marxist organization in which its roots and programs aim to threaten Turkey's territorial integrity. Despite any agreement between Damascus and the YPG, Turkey is now an actor in the region following Operation Peace Spring. The aforementioned reasons combined with Turkey's attitude show that there is no future for the YPG's occupation. For Turkey, the YPG is a terrorist organization just like ISIS. In the view of the Turkish government there is no difference between ISIS and the YPG.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Turkey's position, Western allies had strongly supported PKK Syrian branch PYD/YPG. The US supplies thousands of dollars worth of weapons and strategic arms to the group. The US and the EU do not recognize the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organization. Some Western countries have decided to impose sanctions on Turkey due to its Peace Spring Operation. As a result, this has created a big impasse in trilateral relations that would have serious consequences. Furthermore, Turkey's Western allies like the US and France failed to put any deal on the table despite the Geneva talks.

And then there is the FETO organization. Turkey believes that FETO, who was responsible for the country's coup de etat in July 2016, is still active in the US. Also, many members of FETO currently live and operate in different EU countries. Although it has been fought off inside Turkey, FETO's foreign activities contribute in destroying the already vulnerable relations between the West and Turkey.

Obviously Turkey will not change its position regarding terrorism and some of its regional geopolitics. Now Turkey is expecting the solidarity and support from its allies in the fight against terrorism like FETO, ISIS and PKK/YPG.

We should remember about the dispute regarding the Mediterranean and energy resources between Turkey and its Western partners. Israel, Greece and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC) demanded from the EU and the US their support in an agreement that would alienate Turkey. Reacting in this situation Turkey at last was able to sign an agreement with Libya's internationally recognized government denoting maritime boundaries between the two nations. Turkey's President Erdogan at the opening of TANAP gas pipeline said, 'It is not possible to carry out projects in the region by excluding a country with long maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean. We will not withdraw our ships and they will continue to operate there. Turkey-Libya east Mediterranean agreement is reshaping geopolitics in the region. After the agreement Greece and Egypt have reacted and call the EU and NATO for sanctions. Efforts to isolate Turkey in the West might not impact Turkey's aspirations in East Mediterranean sea.'

Perhaps the shift in the relations between Turkey and the West occurs due to the evolving global economy and politics, both in Turkey and in the world. Perhaps it also happens due to Erdogan's emerging openness about his protest in regards to the global powers as we know today, represented in the Veto rights of five UN member states. When Erdogan said, 'The world is greater than five', surely the West took it as a challenge for them and viewed his statement as an intention to change the West's dominant

position. And most probably this lead to Turkey fighting terrorism alone.

All the while, emerging powers such as Russia and China are aligning. With all of the complexities especially regarding Syria,

the relations with the two countries are needed in a rapidly changing world. Should the West acknowledge this, they should find a way to restore their relations with Turkey, especially those Western countries that maintain their Cold War bipolar ideology.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [https://insamer.com/en/operation-peace-spring-and-the-wests-love-of-pkk\\_2443.html](https://insamer.com/en/operation-peace-spring-and-the-wests-love-of-pkk_2443.html)