
Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan: 2009-2010

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Abstract

One of the most critical foreign policy issues for Turkey in 2009 and 2010 was the US expectation that Turkey would contribute more troops to Afghanistan within the framework of the AfPak Strategy. The US requested Turkey to send troops to combat missions in Afghanistan and expand the mandate of the Kabul Central Command southward to an area where conflicts had intensified. In effect, Turkey was asked to review its policy of not taking part in armed conflicts in Afghanistan. As a response to American requests, Turkey increased its diplomatic efforts to establish peace and stability in the region in 2009 and 2010, including tripartite summits between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This article examines Turkish foreign policy towards Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010 in light of basic principles formulated within the general framework of its initial reactions since 2001: supporting international cooperation, not taking part in armed conflicts, protecting civilians and acting in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions.

Key Words

Turkey, Afghanistan, AfPak Strategy, ISAF, American Operation.

Introduction

The Afghanistan crisis, which has been one of the turning points of the international system of the post-Cold War era, has played a very significant role in identifying newly-emerging perceptions of security, threat and interest in Turkish foreign policy. Since Turkey is a country located in a geographical position adjacent to the areas of conflict in the post-Cold War era, its historical and cultural ties have made it an important player in these conflicts. However, since Turkey mostly took part in international peacekeeping activities rather than political and diplomatic processes in the beginning of the post-Cold War era, Ankara is considered to be a significant military actor in regional politics. From this perspective, the immediate reaction of Turkey just after American operations in Afghanistan constituted an answer to this question: Will Turkey remain a country which is seen as an important

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player only in terms of its military potential and capacities?

After the attacks of September 11, almost all states concentrated mainly on the question of how they would respond to the new international atmosphere rather than the question of who was behind these attacks. The answer to this question was more important for Turkey than for any other state. Turkey became a very significant actor in the post-September 11 international atmosphere, because of the following factors: Turkey was the only Muslim country in NATO; Ankara's long-term experience in fighting terrorism; and the possible demand of the US to use Turkey's air space and the Incirlik air base.

The September 11 attacks and the American operation in Afghanistan that started on 7 October 2001 shaped the formulation of the basic principles of Turkish foreign policy towards Afghanistan. In this article, Turkish foreign policy towards Afghanistan between 2009 and 2010 will be evaluated in light of Turkey's initial reactions to and policies towards the new international atmosphere in 2001.

The American Operation in Afghanistan and Turkish Foreign Policy

Immediate official statements of Turkey after the September 11 condemned

the terrorist attacks against the US and international terrorism in general.¹ In these statements, the emphasis was on Turkey's long-standing struggle against terrorism.² The initial reactions of Turkey were very deliberate and responsible regarding the discussions on Islam and terror.³ In those days, Turkey benefitted from the situation by expressing its view on terror to Europe and to the world. Turkey also reminded others that, for several years, it has been defending the necessity to make Article 5 of the NATO Charter operational against terrorist attacks, but Western countries had not responded to these requests. However, appreciating the NATO decision to operate under Article 5, Turkey declared through official statements made by the president, the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs that it would fulfill its obligations arising from this Article.⁴ In this framework, referring to the strategic partnership between Turkey and the US, it was also stated that Turkey supported the international cooperation in the fight against terrorism and, in case of necessity, Ankara would be open to American requests for the use of Turkish airspace and airports by American transport aircraft.⁵ However, in order to understand Turkey's Afghanistan policy, we should highlight an important point. Although in the beginning Turkey had a positive attitude towards the American demands for the use of Turkey's airspace and airports, it was reluctant to provide troops for a possible military operation. Turkey stated that if a military operation were to happen, instead of providing troops, it would provide military

education and intelligence aid to the Northern Alliance forces.⁶

When the US launched an operation in Afghanistan with the UK on 7 October 2001, as a first reaction, Turkey declared that it would act under the framework of NATO and support international cooperation. Turkey also expressed its concerns about the protection of civilians during the operation.⁷ The Turkish official view stated by the Presidency, the Prime Ministry and the General Staff between 11 September and 7 October was that Turkey's contribution to the operation would be within the framework of Article 5 of the NATO Charter, but after a very short period of time the government asked the permission of the Turkish Parliament to send troops abroad. The Turkish Parliament approved the request to send troops abroad on 10 October 2001. In addition to this development, on October 31, Turkey showed a positive attitude towards the American requests to send Turkish troops by deciding to dispatch a special operations team of 60 soldiers.⁸ This team would perform their duties in the northern region of Afghanistan under the control of Northern Alliance forces. If necessary, the team would take part in armed conflicts. In fact, this decision contradicted the principle of not entering into any armed conflict that had been formulated at the beginning of the crisis.

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After the fall of Taliban-controlled cities and regions, the issue of deploying an international military force to Afghanistan came to the international agenda in November 2001. After this development, instead of sending a limited number of troops, Turkey started to discuss the possibility of leading an international peacekeeping force with a large military contribution. During these discussions, Turkey's main concerns concentrated on the questions of the size and length of its contribution and the region, where Turkish troops would be deployed. Turkey's willingness to deploy its troops only in the Kabul region was emphasized by official statements at different levels.⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 1386,¹⁰ adopted on 20 December 2001, was very significant for Turkish foreign policy as well as for the future of Afghanistan. With this resolution, the Security Council authorized the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) consisting of 4,500 troops, for the maintenance of security in Kabul and surrounding areas under the command of the UK, with forces and assets from 18 other countries. At the initial stage, Turkey declared its support of ISAF with its willingness to contribute 267 troops.

In accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1413 adopted in May 2002, Turkey started to lead ISAF

II and its command continued until February 2003. From 20 June 2002 until 10 February 2003, Turkey's contribution increased to a battalion-sized task force with approximately 1,300 troops. Turkey ran the Kabul International Airport and the Multinational Headquarters under the mandate of the ISAF, which was composed of 4,800 personnel from 22 countries. From February 2003 to August 2004, Turkey contributed around 300 personnel to ISAF operations.

After NATO took over the command and coordination of ISAF on 11 August 2003 and the ISAF mission was expanded beyond Kabul to throughout Afghanistan, the task of the Senior High Civil Representative of Afghanistan was given to Turkey in January 2004. Turkey's contribution to peacekeeping activities in Afghanistan and being the only Muslim country in NATO were determining factors behind this decision.

From 13 February 2005 until 4 August 2005, Turkey led ISAF for the second time. During its command, Turkey provided the single largest contingent in ISAF, with 1,700 troops in the force.¹¹ Turkey assumed the leadership of the Regional Command Capital for 8 months from 6 April 2007 to 6 December 2007 when it contributed 780 personnel to ISAF. Turkey established a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the district center of Meydan Sehir in Wardak Province in November 2006. Civilian and military personnel work together in the Wardak PRT, whose

mission includes: “[d]evelopment of the administrative and judiciary system; training of the Afghan Police Force and increasing their capabilities; conducting activities aimed to improve and support infrastructure, and public works and social support to raise the life quality of local population.[sic]”¹²

The perspective of international law was very strong in Turkey's foreign policy towards Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks.

As indicated above, the perspective of international law was very strong in Turkey's foreign policy towards Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks and the US/UK-led operation. The basic principles of insistence to operate in accordance with Article 5 of NATO, supporting international cooperation, not taking part in armed conflicts, protection of civilians and acting in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions have been clearly emphasized by Turkey since the launch of the operation. It should be stressed that, from time to time, Turkey came to a position contrary to the parameters of international law. After the US/UK-led operation that was not authorized by UN resolutions, Turkey has come to take part in this military intervention by passing decisions in the Turkish Parliament to send troops abroad. However, since the US/UK-led operation lasted for only a short time, in which Turkey did not take part, the

immediate formation of ISAF based on UN Security Council Resolution 1386 enabled Turkey to act in accordance with international law.¹³

Tough Years for Afghanistan (2009-2010): The AfPak Strategy of Obama and Afghanistan in Turkish Foreign Policy

In order to concentrate on the occupation of Iraq, the US handed over the command of ISAF to NATO in August 2003. In this way, many states, including Turkey, deployed troops to Afghanistan within the framework of NATO once again. However, handing over the command of ISAF to NATO was not sufficient to ensure security and stability in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Afghanistan increasingly has been mentioned as a second Vietnam for the US. The Taliban forces which withdrew to the eastern and southern parts of the country after the US/UK-led operation in 2001 increased their ability to inflict dramatic damage on NATO forces with the support of secure areas provided by its borders with Pakistan.¹⁴ The heavy casualties of English, Canadian and French forces, as well as those of the US in 2008, compelled the incoming American President Barak Obama to rethink the American policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are located at the center of the fight against terrorism.

The AfPak Strategy of President Obama, as declared by his National Security Advisor James Jones on 27 March 2009, can be considered as a response to the increasing number of American casualties in Afghanistan in 2008. The statement of Obama affirming his decision to send 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in February 2009 confirmed this strategy. The US wanted to send a message that, with this strategy, the US would focus on Pakistan, along with Afghanistan, in fighting against terrorism in the new era. It was stated in the strategy that the US would be cooperating with these two important regional players, Pakistan and Afghanistan, on many fields but specifically in intelligence sharing, military cooperation at borders, trade, energy, and economic development.¹⁵ With the AfPak Strategy, these two countries became the focal point of Obama's foreign policy and this strategy aimed at cracking the resistance of the Taliban. In this context, this strategy also aimed at increasing military and economic aid to Pakistan, cooperation for border security and intensification of diplomatic relations with Russia and India along with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The most significant element of the new American strategy was the decision confirming the deployment of 30,000 more troops in Afghanistan. At the time, there were almost 110,000 allied troops there, 70,000 of which were American soldiers. The commander of NATO in

Afghanistan recommended expanding the number of troops to 150,000. Thereafter Obama declared that the US would send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan and he called on allied forces to support this new initiative. As a response to this call, NATO's Secretary General declared that allied forces would contribute 5,000-7,000 more troops to support the new American strategy.

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The American request to send more troops to Afghanistan, was conveyed to Turkey during the NATO Summit held in April 2009, as well as during Obama's visit to Turkey. This development illustrated that Turkey was asked to take part in armed conflict under the framework of this new American strategy. It was reported that NATO demanded 5,000 more troops from all NATO member countries and 1,000 of them were asked from Turkey.¹⁶ However, Turkey reiterated its previous position after this demand and emphasized that 1,750 Turkish troops were already deployed in Afghanistan and Turkey was determined not to send combat troops. Turkey's contribution to Afghanistan was mainly focused on training of the security forces and improvement of social and economic conditions of the people and it has also given importance to civil support projects in Afghanistan. Since Turkey has a very positive image in

the eyes of Afghan people, Ankara was reluctant to send combat troops to take part in armed conflict.

Turkey supports the basic elements of the AfPak strategy of the Obama administration, except for sending combat forces to Afghanistan. Turkey agrees with the American government on the basic issues like protecting security and stability, holding democratic elections, increasing economic development, preventing civil casualties, and reconstruction. Moreover, the demand to increase the number of American and NATO troops was not welcomed, not only by Turkey but also by other NATO member countries. For example, Germany refused to send troops to the southern regions in which the conflicts are concentrated. Meanwhile, Canada declared its plan to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 2011. American and European public opinion also increasingly demanded their countries to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan.

The confidential report prepared by the commander of NATO forces in 2009, which depicted an extremely negative picture about the security situation of Afghanistan, was seized by the *Washington Post*. The McChrystal Report¹⁷ maintained that if the number of troops in Afghanistan is not increased, the US would lose the war and the Afghan government would be endangered. The report also emphasized the necessity to protect the Afghan government rather than to crack down on the resistance.

The Turkish government had concerns about the possible losses of Turkish troops in a conflict.

This report clearly shows the failure of the US and the security vulnerability in Afghanistan. In addition, the impact of corruption in the Afghan government on the resistance and the increasing sympathy for al-Qaeda because of ill-treatment and torture in prisons were also indicated in the report. The report revealed that the US and NATO forces could not prevent financial and logistical assistance from going to al-Qaeda and they experienced serious intelligence weaknesses.¹⁸

The Turkish government had concerns about the possible losses of Turkish troops in a conflict, since taking part in armed conflicts could result in Turkey losing the sympathy of the Afghan people and undermining its humanitarian activities. The visits of Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, to Pakistan and Afghanistan, on 9-13 June 2009 were significant because these visits showed that no change would occur in Turkish foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Davutoğlu's visit in May to the Şah Mansur refugee camp, in which 4 million Pakistani refugees live because they had been displaced as a result of operations launched by the Pakistani army against the Taliban,¹⁹ showed that Turkey was concerned about the humanitarian dimension of the issue. After his visit to Pakistan, Davutoğlu

went to Afghanistan and visited shrines, mosques, hospitals and schools in some provinces, before arriving in Kabul. He referred to the peace messages of Mevlana during his visit to Mezar-ı Sherif, the center of Belh province, which is the homeland of Bahaeddin Veled, the father of Mevlana. He gave the message that “we have not forgotten Afghanistan” by coming together with Hashim Zari, the Governor of Shibirgan, and promised to build a mosque, a school and a hospital there. Davutoğlu's visit to the Afghanistan-Turkey Friendship Children's Hospital and Habibe Kadiri School for Girls in the town of Akca²⁰ also showed that Turkey placed much emphasis on the civilian dimension of the Afghanistan problem.

One of the crucial events of 2009 in Afghanistan was the controversial elections which were held on 20 August. It was controversial because it was impossible to have legitimate and fair elections in a country that was experiencing the highest level of security problems in the world. The fighting between the Taliban and the NATO forces in the eastern and southern regions prevented millions of Afghan people from casting their votes. The operations of the US/UK against the Taliban in the Helmand region before the elections that were designed to create a secure environment, there were not successful at all. The general elections that were held in Afghanistan for the second time after the American intervention, witnessed the race among President Hamid Karzai, Abdullah

Abdullah – the former foreign minister who was an important name from Rabbani’s group-, Ramazan Besherdost– the former planning minister who was educated in French schools and was known as a defender of human rights-, and Ashraf Gani– finance minister of the Karzai government who had top positions in the World Bank and UN missions.²¹

Karzai was reelected as president for the second time as a result of these controversial elections. Although in recent years, Karzai has been seriously criticized by the Western media for corruption and nepotism, but he was still an indispensable name for the coalition forces.²² Karzai began his second term with a swearing-in ceremony held in the capital, Kabul, where he said that the priority in the country was to put an end to the violence. Karzai promised that Afghan forces would take the control of the country’s security within five years with NATO’s assistance and he would fight seriously against corruption,²³ because he has lost the confidence of the Afghan people as well as that of international actors due to the allegations of corruption. Therefore, he became the president again in order to meet several conditions of the coalition forces, especially the US. The primary conditions were: the Afghan government and security forces would take more responsibility in ensuring the security in

the country and they will cooperate with Pakistan in different areas, fight against corruption, prevent drug trafficking and provide representation of all groups in the new Afghan government. However, it was difficult for Karzai to meet all of these conditions given his first term’s legacy since he is not supported by all ethnic groups in the country, particularly the Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and Turkmens. During his first term he was mostly the supported by the Pashtuns and carried out policies that satisfied mainly them.²⁴

Davutoğlu was among the high-level attendees of Karzai’s inauguration ceremony. Along with many states, especially the US, UK, France and Pakistan, Turkey also believed that Karzai should fulfill these conditions

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because the security vacuum created by the Taliban forces was a major source of concern for Turkey. It seemed that the American and NATO troops newly dispatched to Afghanistan would not be able to overcome this security problem. Ensuring security and stability in Afghanistan very much depends on an international coalition taking into account the demands of local actors. From the beginning, Turkey defended this principle and preferred to stand at an equal distance from different members of the international coalition. The visit by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 27 October 2009 can be considered

Turkey does not perceive Afghanistan as a question to be resolved only within the borders of Afghanistan, but believes that a regional approach must be developed.

as an important turning point in terms of Turkey-Pakistan relations in the context of Afghanistan.²⁵ Historic ties between the peoples of Pakistan and Turkey enable these two countries to play an important role in ensuring stability and peace in Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan, by supporting the Pashtun resistance movement Hizb-ul Islami and its leader Gulbeddin Hikmetyar during the Soviet occupation, had played a significant role in the rise of the Taliban movement after 1994. Pakistan is arguably the power that ensured the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in a very short time. Pakistan, by using the Islamic resistance groups in Afghanistan against India in the Kashmir problem, has provided training for the Kashmiri insurgents in many parts of Afghanistan under the control of Taliban.²⁶ With the AfPak strategy, the US has sent a message that Pakistan should change its policy in Afghanistan and the region. Otherwise, Pakistan will continue to be named as a bastion of terrorism, which is expressed by the US and UK frequently. Indeed, these two states, on the one hand, request Pakistan to continue its goodwill towards the AfPak strategy, but on the other hand, they continue to pressure Pakistan by playing the India card.²⁷

In 2009 and 2010, Turkey increased its diplomatic efforts to establish peace and stability in the region. The “Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan Tripartite Summit” held on January 25, 2010 was the fourth summit of the process initiated in 2007. At the Summit in which President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai, President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari and President of Turkey Abdullah Gül participated, the mechanisms to improve cooperation between the Afghani and Pakistani governments were discussed. Issues related to military training in Afghanistan were also discussed through negotiations of the General Staffs and the security services. The training of soldiers and police forces in Afghanistan in quarterly periods and increasing the cooperation with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism were also agreed in the negotiations under the framework of the summit between Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and President Hamid Karzai. The tripartite declaration also included the opening of 68 schools by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, built by the TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency). Additionally, these three countries agreed to increase their cooperation in the field of education.²⁸

The “Friendship and Cooperation Summit in the Heart of Asia”, held on 26 January 2010 in Istanbul, was another indicator of the approach that intense diplomacy should be used. In the declaration issued at the end of the summit attended by countries

neighboring Afghanistan, the main directions of Turkey's foreign policy were highlighted once again and the importance of regional cooperation was emphasized. The following expressions were also included in the declaration: "A safe, secure and prosperous Afghanistan is a vital element of regional peace and stability, the risks and problems are common and all forms of terrorism and illegal drug trafficking affect all countries in the region."²⁹ These summits have indicated that Turkey does not perceive Afghanistan as a question to be resolved only within the borders of Afghanistan, but believes that a regional approach must be developed for the solution of the problem. One of the most important elements of the regional approach is to increase cooperation with Pakistan, since Pakistan is a major party to the problem.

The successful tripartite summits were led by Turkey in order to thaw relations between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

According to Turkey, increasing high-level relationships and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan is vital for peace and stability in the region. The successful tripartite summits were led by Turkey in order to thaw relations between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. As a result of these tripartite summits, the "Summit of the Neighboring Countries of Afghanistan"

was also held under the leadership of Ankara. Along with Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, high-level representatives from Iran, China, Russia, UK, US, Japan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, UAE, OIC, UN, NATO and the EU also participated at the Summit, so that it had extensive international participation.

Another summit on Afghanistan with extensive international participation was held in London on 28 January 2010. "The London Conference," attended by foreign ministers and high-level representatives from around 70 countries, was the eighth of a series of such conferences done since 2001. Previously, the series of conferences were held in Bonn and Berlin in 2001, London in 2006, Rome in 2007, Paris in 2008, and Moscow in 2009 for the reconstruction and future of Afghanistan. What made the London Conference different from earlier conferences was that it showed that the integration of moderate elements of the Taliban into the Afghan political structure was possible by getting them to accept the constitution and lay down their arms under the framework of a compromise with Karzai.³⁰ In addition, transfer of the responsibilities of international forces to local units was also on the agenda of the Conference. It was decided that in order to enable the Taliban militants to participate in the political process, a fund of \$140 million will be created by the participant countries. Afghan President Karzai promised to fight against corruption effectively. It was also decided that the

international forces will withdraw from Afghanistan after the Afghan soldiers reach the ability to ensure stability in the country.³¹

In the years 2009 and 2010, NATO and US troops took serious casualties in Afghanistan. As a result, European and American public opinion have increased calls for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The requirement for 30,000 to 35,000 additional troops in order to put the AfPak strategy in practice clearly indicated the failure of the US and NATO in Afghanistan.

The above-mentioned warnings of General McChrystal, the ISAF Commander, expressed in his report invited the ire of the Obama administration and the general was removed from his office in June 2010 because of his criticisms in an article published in *Rolling Stone* magazine; General David Petraeus replaced him. It has been known that General McChrystal openly criticized Obama's policy towards Afghanistan. Considering that the biggest losses since 2001 occurred in 2008 and 2009 it seems that there is no reason to say that the US policy has been successful in Afghanistan. Obama declared that the Afghanistan strategy would not change with General David Petraeus. Obama also stated that the withdrawal will begin from July 2011 but would continue for a few years.

One of the most critical foreign policy questions for Turkey in 2009

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and 2010 was the US expectation that Turkey would contribute more troops to Afghanistan within the framework of the AfPak Strategy. The US demanded Turkey to send troops to combat in Afghanistan and expand the mandate of the Kabul Central Command southward to an area where conflicts had intensified. In short, Turkey was asked to review its policy of not taking part in armed conflicts. These requests, which had come to the agenda several times before 2009, were clearly stated for the first time. Turkey has undertaken the command of ISAF twice so far. By undertaking the Kabul Central Command of ISAF for the second time in November 2009, Turkey ensured the security of the region, provided logistical support, and gave support for infrastructure. In addition, it continued the military training activities in Afghanistan.³² Turkish trainers and consultants are serving in military high schools. Turkey also continued its activities in the fields of health and education. It has contributed to the building or restoration of 27 primary and elementary schools since 2001. As a result, 38,000 students had the opportunity to study with the support of Turkey. Turkey has also pioneered the opening of a high school for girls and a women's development center. According

to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “in Afghanistan, Turkey has implemented the most comprehensive development assistance program in the history of the Turkish Republic.”³³

Conclusion

The varied contributions of Turkey are often covered and praised by international media. Turkey increased the number of troops from 800 to 1,750 after undertaking the Kabul Central Command of ISAF. It has also assumed the duty of forming and organizing the

Military Academy. Despite its increased support in all these fields, Turkey has not supported the idea of sending combat troops to Afghanistan. Except for sending troops to combat in the operation and making concessions on the definition of its task area, Turkey has responded positively to the new strategy for Afghanistan. In order to increase the capacity of Afghan security forces, which is one of the basic preconditions for the withdrawal, it is expected that Turkey would provide more contributions in terms of training and organization for the Afghan forces.³⁴

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