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Turkey and The United Nations Reform: Turkey's Case for a More Effective, Representative and Participatory United Nations

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Executive Summary

This SAM Paper explores the origins, characteristics, and implications of Turkey's call for a United Nations (UN) reform which could make the UN a more effective, representative and participatory international organization. The key highlights of the SAM Paper are as follows:

The SAM Paper claims that the existing UN system needs to be reformed due its shortcomings in responding to the security, economic and socio-cultural challenges facing the members of the UN especially in the post-Cold War period.

In addition, the increasingly ineffective, unrepresentative and exclusionary character of the existing UN system seems to be the main factor behind the current crisis of the UN system.

Moreover, although Turkey has increasingly contributed to UN activities in promoting global security, development and human rights, especially since the early 2000s, Turkey has not been represented in the decision-making processes of the UN system adequately due to the inertia of the existing UN system.

Furthermore, if supported by like-minded UN members, Turkey's vision for UN reform has strong potential to enhance the capacity of the UN system to promote a more secure and prosperous, as well as multi-cultural and multi-civilizational international system.

The SAM Paper particularly notes that it is very important to broaden the permanent membership positions of the UN Security Council (UNSC) by incorporating Turkey and other emerging powers, such as Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan into the UNSC as permanent members, since this could enhance the UNSC's capacity to respond to crisis zones and enhance peace and stability throughout the world.

Turkey and The United Nations Reform: Turkey's Case for a More Effective, Representative and Participatory United Nations

Prof. Oktay F. Tanrısever*

I. Introduction

This SAM Paper seeks to explore Turkey's UN reform agenda by examining the origins, characteristics, and implications of Turkey's approach to UN. The paper starts with an analysis of the ongoing crisis of the UN in responding to the global challenges of security, development, and socio-cultural diversity. In this part, the increasingly ineffective, unrepresentative and exclusionary character of the existing UN system is highlighted as the main factor behind the UN's failures in managing global problems. Next, the paper will explore Turkey's UN agenda and priorities in the post-Cold War period by analyzing the main aspects of Turkey's capacity to work with and within the UN system. The penultimate section of the SAM Paper will address Turkey's vision for a more effective, representative and inclusive UN system. The paper concludes by highlighting a number of key findings and policy recommendations regarding Turkey's call for reforming the existing UN system.

II. Crisis of the United Nations System in the Post-Cold War Period

The UN, which was created in the aftermath of the Second World War, reflects the dynamics of the Cold War period. In fact, it has performed crucial functions quite effectively by providing the two Cold War superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – as well as three

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other major powers – the United Kingdom, France and China – with a diplomatic platform for coping with the challenges of the Cold War in the areas of security, development and human rights.¹

Nevertheless, the UN system has felt the strain of an existential crisis since the end of Cold War in 1989 when the international system began to change considerably. In the sphere of security, the United Nations has occasionally been sidelined by the western major powers in the name of ‘humanitarian intervention’ operations in defiance of Russian and Chinese opposition. Likewise, the “War on Terror,” which started in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 led to the creation of various “coalitions of willing states” outside the UN framework. Consequently, the UN has been marginalized as the main forum for the discussion of global and regional security challenges. Moreover, it has failed to promote multiculturalism and inter-civilizational dialogue in a post-Cold War period which has been occasionally characterized by ‘a clash of civilizations.’² As the socio-economic gap between the developed and the developing world continues to widen, the developing and the least developed countries tend to find the initiatives of the UN and its affiliated bodies in the areas of socio-economic development and technical and humanitarian aid insufficient.

The current crisis of the UN system could be explained with reference to the systemic changes which took place in the post-Cold War era. Clearly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its replacement by the Russian Federation has transformed the international system as well as the balance of power upon which the UN system had been based to a large extent. In the absence of clearly defined polarities in the international system, the process of globalization has unleashed massive forces of regionalization and trans-nationalization with its strong emphasis on liberal internationalism.³

However, the liberal internationalist ideas of making the UN the key agency of globalization have largely failed due to the inertia of the UN system. The fact that the UN system was the product of the Cold War international system partly accounts for the former’s increasing inertia, which has conservatively resisted various calls for organizational reform while the need for organizational adaptation to the changing characteristics of the globalizing international system has become more visible.

To sum up, the existing UN system increasingly appears to be ineffective, unrepresentative and exclusionary for many members of the UN. In fact, UN actions tend to produce ineffective outcomes in terms

of solving various global and regional problems, such as the ongoing Syrian crisis. Moreover, with the exception of the countries that have a permanent seat the UNSC (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States), most emerging powers, such as Brazil, Germany, India, Japan and Turkey, are under-represented in the UN and its affiliated bodies. Last but not least, the weaker members of the UN (i.e. most of the developing countries in the 'global south') are not allowed to participate in important UN programs in a meaningful way. It should also be noted that even the major UN members, which are overrepresented in the organizational structures of the UN and its affiliated bodies and participate in most of the UN programs, are similarly disillusioned by the poor performance and ineffectiveness of the existing UN system.⁴

III. Turkey's UN Agenda and Priorities

Turkey's views on the UN system and the need for substantial UN reform reflect its willingness to make greater contributions to the UN system, since the UN has always been an important anchor for Turkey's multilateral policies since its establishment in 1945. Turkey has hosted various regional UN bodies over the years. As a key security provider in its neighborhoods in the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe, as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia, Turkey's geographical location at the juncture of East and West, North and South, leads Ankara to emphasize multiculturalism and civilizational dialogue as core values of East-West relations, and sustainable development as a key value in North-South relations.⁵

Turkey's UN agenda and priorities are reflected in its UN activities in the fields of security, socioeconomic development and human rights. In the security field, Turkey prioritizes the UNSC and seeks to make greater contributions to its activities. Turkey's non-permanent membership in the UNSC from 2009-10 was viewed very positively by the international community. Another priority of Turkey's UN agenda is the fight against international terrorism. Turkey has been very active, especially at the UNGA, in developing an international consensus on the fight against terrorism and controlling the financial sources of terrorist organizations in the post-9/11 era. Turkey's active participation in international security operations in Afghanistan and other countries has contributed considerably to the eradication of the root causes of international terrorism.⁶

Likewise, peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities constitute another important priority of Turkey's UN agenda. In 2010, Turkey and Finland developed the 'Mediation for Peace' initiative in order to develop the principles of mediation in the UN system. Turkey has also played an active peacebuilding role in Iraq, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan and Somalia. In addition, Ankara has contributed significantly to the dialogue among Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia, and fostered cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey has become one of the major contributors to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide by contributing more than 500 personnel.⁷

An equally important priority of Turkey's UN agenda has been its co-sponsorship, together with Spain, of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) initiative which was affiliated with the UN Secretary-General's Office. This initiative played an important role in eliminating prejudices between civilizations and challenging the 'clash of civilizations' thesis through dialogue programs in the fields of youth, migration, education, mass media and culture. Considering that the root causes of global terrorism are rooted in xenophobia and the lack of inter-civilizational tolerance, Turkey actively promotes the idea that the development of multiculturalism and inter-civilizational dialogue within the UN framework could make significant contributions to global peace and security.⁸

Last but not least, Turkey has prioritized increasing its international aid in the form of technical assistance and humanitarian aid to developing countries as a crucial part of its UN agenda. Turkey's international aid agency, TİKA, has been channeling aid to countries in the post-Soviet space, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Accordingly, during the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Turkey on May 9-13, 2011, Ankara assumed the responsibility of raising these countries' problems in international forums and contributing to the attempts to solve them by 2020. Not surprisingly, Turkey has already become one of the leading donor countries in the world.⁹

IV. Turkey's Case for UN Reform: Making the UN More Effective, Representative and Inclusive

Although Turkey has remarkably increased its contributions to UN activities in a period when the UN system has started to experience a

considerable crisis of relevance in world politics, Turkey has not been adequately represented in the decision-making processes of the UN system. In fact, the rigid organizational structure of the UN system, as well as the dominance of great power politics within the UN system, have continued to marginalize the attempts of emerging powers like Turkey to have a greater share in the decision-making processes of the UN and its affiliated bodies regarding the critical issues of global security, development and human rights.

From Turkey's perspective, the role of the UN in the ongoing Syrian conflict symbolizes its chronic problems of ineffectiveness as well as its unrepresentative and exclusionary characteristics very clearly. In order to highlight the problems of the UN system and to call for a broadening of the UNSC membership, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan criticized the dominance of the five permanent members of the UNSC as follows: "For this reason, on every occasion, I remind the international community about the reality that 'the world is bigger than five.'"¹⁰

President Erdoğan's call for a reform to the UN system stems from the observation that the gap between the challenges of world politics and the capabilities of the UN has been widening since the end of the Cold War. In this context, the ongoing crisis of the UN could be addressed better if the UN were reformed in a way that increased the role and efficacy of the emerging powers. The emerging powers, which include Turkey as well as Brazil, Germany, India and Japan among others, have great potential for contributing to the promotion of regional peace and stability as well as socio-economic development in their surrounding regions.

In this context, Turkey's vision for UN reform aims at making the UN a more effective, representative and participatory international organization. To this purpose, Ankara has supported the UN reform initiatives. As Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently stated, "Within this scope, Turkey will continue to enhance its active and effective contributions to the UN activities in every field ranging from peacekeeping to development, and from climate change to UN Security Council reform."¹¹ More importantly, Turkey emphasizes that in addition to the five permanent members with veto powers, a number of emerging regional powers, including Turkey, should be given a permanent seat, with significant decisional powers.

Reforming the UN in accordance with Turkey's vision could make the system more effective, representative and inclusive for the following

reasons. Firstly, the UN system could be more effective, since Turkey and other emerging powers could play a constructive role in the promotion of peace and stability in their neighborhoods. Second, Turkey's call for UN reform could make the UN system more representative, since Turkey and other emerging powers could represent crucial cultural and civilizational identities which are not adequately represented in the UN system. Last but not the least, such a reform could make the UN system more inclusive, as the enhanced participation of Turkey and other like-minded emerging powers in UN activities could stop the existing practice of excluding them from the key decision-making process at the UN, especially in the UNSC.

It is obvious that reforming the UNSC is central to Turkey's vision for UN reform. Clearly, broadening the number of permanent members in the UNSC by including Turkey and other like-minded emerging powers could provide the existing permanent members of the UNSC with more opportunities to use diplomacy for coping with the existing, difficult security challenges. Transforming the veto powers of the existing permanent members of the UNSC into a Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) system could also introduce more flexibility and effectiveness to the decision-making processes of the UNSC.

At the discursive level, Turkey positions its UN reform vision in terms of its willingness to make further contributions to peace, stability and development in its neighboring regions, namely the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, as well as the least-developed parts of the world such as Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, as a consolidated democratic country with strong secular institutions and a traditional role in bridging various cultures and civilizations, Turkey could play an even more constructive role in the UN peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations in these regions. Last but not least, Turkey, with its rapidly developing economy, could also contribute to efforts to increase international technical and humanitarian aid to the least-developed countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.¹²

V. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

To conclude, the inability of the UN to adapt itself to the changing international environment contributes to its chronic ineffectiveness, which could be remedied through a substantial organizational reform. In this context, Turkey, as one of the emerging powers in world politics, is promoting its own UN reform agenda, with a particular focus on

reforming the UNSC, in order to be able to make greater constructive contributions to the UN's security initiatives worldwide.

The following policy recommendations could be made in order to promote Turkey's UN reform agenda and its call for a more effective, representative and participatory UNSC:

To begin with, Turkey should formally prepare and publicize its draft document for a UN reform proposal with an emphasis on priority issue areas.

Secondly, Turkey should intensify its multilateral diplomacy efforts at the UN General Assembly and the other UN bodies in order to adamantly promote its UN reform agenda at UN platforms.

Thirdly, Turkey should raise the issue of UN reform whenever the UN and its affiliated bodies adopt ineffective policies and take weak decisions that will have no significant impact on global or regional problems.

Fourthly, Turkey should create a formal platform with the participation of other like-minded emerging powers in order to coordinate its diplomatic initiatives for reforming the UN with these powers.

Fifthly, Turkey should create a formal platform with the participation of the countries in its neighborhood and the developing world in order to gain and consolidate their support for Turkey's UN reform agenda.

Sixthly, Turkey and other like-minded emerging powers should organize second track diplomacy events with the participation of leading experts from the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council about the need for UN reform, as well as the reformulation of an internationally acceptable UN reform agenda.

Last but not least, Turkey should support academic research proposals from research institutions in Turkey and abroad in order to explore the weaknesses of the existing UN system and propose more beneficial ways of reforming the existing UN system.

Endnotes

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About SAM

Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (SAM) is a think-tank and a research center which is chartered by law and has been active since May 1995. SAM was established as a consultative body to provide Turkish Foreign Policy decision makers with scholarly and scientific assessments of relevant issues, and reviews Turkish foreign policy with a futuristic perspective.

SAM conducts research, organizes scholarly events relevant to the ever expanding spectrum of Turkish Foreign Policy in cooperation with both Turkish and foreign academicians, its counterparts from around the world as well as various universities and government agencies. SAM provides consultancy to the foreign ministry departments as well as some other state institutions in foreign policy issues while also establishing regional think-tank networks.

In addition to its role of generating up-to-date information, reliable data and insightful analysis as a think-tank, SAM functions as a forum for candid debate and discussion for anyone who is interested in both local and global foreign policy issues. Increasingly, SAM has become a center of attraction since it successfully brings scholars and policy makers together for exchange of ideas in panels, in-house meetings, seminars and training programs for young diplomats.

SAM has a widening range of publications. Along with its traditional publication, Perceptions, which is a quarterly English language journal that hosts distinguished Turkish and international scholars within its pages, SAM has initiated Vision Papers which expresses the views of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and SAM Papers that covers the current debates of foreign policy by various scholars.

With its commitment to contribution to the body of knowledge and constructive debate particularly in Turkish Foreign Policy, SAM will continue to serve as an indispensable think-tank and research center given its role promoting interaction and mutual benefits among the MFA, NGOs, other think-tanks and the broader scientific community and hence strengthen the human and intellectual capital of Turkey.