

No.23

May 2023

# The Disaster of the Century, Relief Diplomacy, and International Solidarity

SAM Papers



stratejik arařtırmalar merkezi  
center for strategic research

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışışleri Bakanlıęı  
Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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No.23  
May 2023

# SAM Papers

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# The Disaster of the Century, Relief Diplomacy, and International Solidarity

Erman AKILLI<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Two massive earthquakes hit Türkiye's southeast region along the Syrian border on February 6, 2023. The earthquakes, which both occurred in the Kahramanmaraş province, had tremendous magnitudes;<sup>1</sup> the Pazarcık quake was 7.7 and the Elbistan was 7.6 on the Richter scale. They were felt as far away as Jordan, Israel, Libya, Egypt, and Lebanon. The first earthquake occurred in Pazarcık at 04:17 am local time and lasted until 06:30 am; 42 aftershocks were recorded. The second earthquake occurred in Elbistan at 13:24 pm local time; 16.620 aftershocks followed this quake, the biggest of which was 6.6 in magnitude. The earthquakes wreaked havoc on more than ten cities—as a result of these quakes and their aftershocks, Türkiye faced the devastation of the century, with 17 major cities proclaimed disaster areas.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 232,000 buildings were damaged<sup>3</sup> and regrettably, more than 50,000 lives were lost.<sup>4</sup> This catastrophe is almost unprecedented in human history: it affected 13.5 million people<sup>5</sup> in an area of 110,000 km; the amount of damage it caused is comparable to the explosion of hundreds of atomic bombs.<sup>6</sup>

After the earthquakes, time was of the essence. Türkiye took swift action at home and mobilized aid from abroad. In the areas affected by the earthquakes, 38 governors, 200 local administrative chiefs, 19 Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency's

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(AFAD) Senior Managers, 68 provincial directors, and hundreds of thousands of search-and-rescue personnel were assigned. In the hour of greatest need, Türkiye issued a level-4 alert to seek international assistance. One hundred and two countries answered the call, and more than 10,000 international personnel from 90 different countries—from specialists with search-and-rescue teams to engineers, seismologists, and search dogs—were deployed to the area.<sup>7</sup> During the first month, the disaster area received support from 272,046 Turkish personnel, 11,488 international personnel, almost 10,000 psychosocial support personnel, 18,053 earth-movers, and hundreds of other vehicles from ships, aircraft, and helicopters to UAVs and drones. To provide support for the relief effort, 437,410 tents, 21,714 containers, and 36 fully stocked field hospitals were installed in the area.<sup>8</sup>

Major catastrophes and crises with global or transboundary implications have previously shaken most states. Türkiye believes that providing assistance to countries facing crises resulting from natural disasters, conflict, poverty, and social turmoil is a humanitarian duty; as such, the country is a vital contributor to fostering worldwide stability. Likewise, the world has shown solidarity in facing the devastation in Türkiye, from providing humanitarian aid to deploying search-and-rescue experts, from establishing field hospitals to arranging top officials' visits to the disaster area, countries have demonstrated their solidarity. Türkiye's generous acts of kindness for the greater good and its readiness to extend a helping hand to those in dire straits over many years were reciprocated when the country needed help the most. Especially in the last twenty years, through the humanitarian aid Türkiye provided which has been crowned by humanitarian diplomacy, Türkiye has become a symbol of hope not just for the region, but for the rest of the world. Thus, when the disaster of the century happened, more than 100 countries<sup>9</sup> offered assistance and showed solidarity through relief diplomacy. Nonetheless, countries where diplomat-

ic relations were interrupted also provided/offered humanitarian assistance and paid top official visits to the earthquake areas which can be seen as the practice of disaster diplomacy. This paper evaluates three distinctive yet intertwined dimensions of the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes<sup>10</sup>: Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy to date, international relief diplomacy, and disaster diplomacy which can pave the way for new horizons of interrupted diplomatic relations. After exploring those dimensions, the study will focus on the relief diplomacy dimension, by employing Ilan Kelman's concept of 'disaster diplomacy' to test and understand the international solidarity shown through relief diplomacy, as exhibited in the recent top official visits, provision of humanitarian assistance, and statements of other countries towards Türkiye.

## The Most Generous Donor

For many years, Türkiye has served as a beacon of hope for the region and for the globe thanks to the humanitarian assistance carried out by the Turkish state's relevant stakeholders, namely the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) and other humanitarian aid organizations. Türkiye's caring hand has been extended to those in the hour of need wherever they reside, from the Balkans to Central Asia, from the Middle East to Latin America. While helping those outside Türkiye, Turkish authorities have also extended assistance to those who had to take refuge within the country as well. According to the UNHCR's 2022 Mid-Year Trends Report,<sup>11</sup> 103 million people were forcibly, internally and internationally, displaced in 2022. As mentioned in the report, Türkiye currently hosts 3.7 million refugees, internationally displaced people and asylum seekers. Also, according to UNHCR, there are now far fewer opportunities for long-term solutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Resettlement, naturalization and refugee returns rose

in the first half of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. Disturbingly, the report states that 104.5 million individuals will need protection and assistance by 2022.<sup>12</sup>

Türkiye has a long history as a top aid provider. According to the 2017 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Türkiye was the second largest donor country in that year, providing \$6 billion in donations around the world.<sup>13</sup> According to the report, Türkiye's donations increased by 119% compared to the previous year. Türkiye increased its assistance to \$8.14 billion in 170 countries in the 2018–2019 period; of this amount, \$7.2 billion was earmarked for humanitarian assistance.<sup>14</sup> The importance of humanitarian funding in relation to the size of a donor country and other expenditure priorities can be seen by examining international humanitarian assistance as a percentage of gross national income (GNI). According to the 2022 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Türkiye provided \$5.6 billion<sup>15</sup> and as stated in the report, when Türkiye's contributions are compared to its GNI, Türkiye spent 0.86 per cent of its GNI on humanitarian aid in 2021 (up from 0.35 per cent in 2015). For comparison purpose, the United States came in first place in terms of financing volume with humanitarian assistance percentage of GNI of 0.04. In other words, when considering GNI level, Türkiye is not just the most generous donor country for 2022, but also for prior years.

The UNHCR<sup>16</sup> notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reduced the possibilities of achieving durable solutions.<sup>17</sup> Despite the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing global economic crisis, Türkiye has remained committed to providing assistance to those in need. According to the 2022 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Türkiye remains the second largest international humanitarian assistance donor.<sup>18</sup> Even though COVID-19 sparked global economic decline, Türkiye provided \$5.6 billion for humanitarian assistance while continuing to host more than 5.1 million refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers.



Indeed, according to data from the World Bank, Türkiye remains host to the greatest number of Syrian refugees.<sup>19</sup> Approximately 12% are hosted in camps, i.e., temporary housing, while the rest reside in cities either in rented or owned residences; the majority hold temporary employment. As may be seen in the latest reports, Türkiye's image as a generous country has a basis in fact. Türkiye has supported the Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis with both public relief and financial aid. From the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, and Türkiye's humanitarian aid is not limited to the aforementioned geography but extends to all parts of the world in the international arena, Türkiye has come into prominence for three critical values: truthfulness, global power, and generosity<sup>20</sup>.

### Türkiye's Helping Hand in the Hour of Need

As underlined by Ulusoy, Türkiye considers humanitarian assistance in response to disasters as a moral obligation and an international responsibility. With this understanding, Türkiye extends a helping hand to all disaster regions in its neighborhood and beyond, an ongoing act of altruism that contributes essentially to the stability of the international community as well.<sup>21</sup>

Türkiye also provides disaster relief in the form of vital humanitarian assistance. The end of the 2004 earthquake in Southeast Asia, the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, the Pakistan flood catastrophe, the earthquake in Japan in 2011, the typhoon in the Philippines in 2013, the flood catastrophe in the Balkans in 2014, the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, the relief efforts after the flood catastrophe in Macedonia in 2016 and many other recent disasters give just a glimpse of the many instances in which Türkiye has provided humanitarian assistance. To give just a few more examples, Türkiye has provided economic and humanitarian assistance to the following countries as a result of natural calamities such as floods, forest fires, earthquakes,

hurricanes and volcanic eruptions: Colombia and Georgia, 2017; Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia, 2018; Mozambique, Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Djibouti, Chad, Ethiopia, Palestine, Gambia, South Sudan, Georgia, Iraq, Iran, Cameroon, Colombia, Comoros, TRNC, Lebanon, Mongolia, Myanmar, Namibia, Niger, Central African Republic, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Jordan, and Yemen, 2019; Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Philippines, Palestine, Fiji, South Sudan, Cambodia, TRNC, North Macedonia, Burma, Niger, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Romania, Somalia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ukraine, Jordan and Yemen, 2020; Bosnia and Herzegovina, Fiji, Guatemala, South Sudan, Haiti, Croatia, Honduras, Mongolia, Mozambique, Panama, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tajikistan, 2021; and in 2022, Afghanistan, Brazil, Iraq, Madagascar and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup>

As Ulusoy argues,

*“Türkiye has a strong tradition of responding to those in need. Situated in a disaster-prone geography, the land of modern Türkiye has historically been molded with humanitarian efforts. As early as in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Turkish rulers provided sanctuary to several hundreds of thousands of exiled populations fleeing persecution in their homelands. Since then Turks have embraced countless peoples in dire need, regardless of their religious, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds, throughout history. Based on such heritage, modern Türkiye has continued to provide humanitarian assistance to such peoples in need, by either hosting them in its territory or helping them in their own or third countries, to the extent of her resources and capacities.”<sup>23</sup>*

Thanks to Türkiye’s practice in the field for many years, the country can draw on its experience in the realm of global humanitarian aid, supporting the United Nations’ drive to overcome the impasse that the international humanitarian aid system is presently

encountering and establish a more equitable and effective system. Türkiye's efforts paved the way for the country to host the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.<sup>24</sup> The success of Türkiye's outstanding efforts in the field of humanitarian assistance and emergency response in recent decades is attributable to the cooperative and efficient work of its public institutions, NGOs and humanitarian organizations. Türkiye's performance in this field has served as an exemplar, with particular recognition given at the global level to the international efforts of TİKA, AFAD and Kızılay, which have worked tirelessly, especially in the last twenty years, to strengthen Türkiye's brand as the most generous and compassionate country in the world.<sup>25</sup>

TİKA, AFAD and Kızılay have taken on initiatives as a continuation of Turkish foreign policy, from the Balkans to Africa and from the Middle East to Latin America. For instance, TİKA played an important role in Afghanistan's reconstruction process. In Africa, TİKA has been involved in projects such as drilling wells and constructing water pipelines to provide clean water; it has also assisted in alleviating the aftermath of natural disasters by providing shelter and food. TİKA has provided technical assistance and foreign aid to recipient countries to support their institutionalization processes and help establish positive bilateral relationships as part of Türkiye's foreign policy objectives. TİKA's activities include education, training and seminars to develop human resources and infrastructure in these countries. This assistance also helps recipient countries establish and maintain institutionalization processes. TİKA has expanded its presence globally by increasing its Program Coordination Offices from 12 in 2002 to 60 in 2022; it currently operates in 170 countries.

AFAD, known for its rapid and efficient emergency response and humanitarian aid delivery in numerous countries ranging from Ukraine to Somalia, was the initial aid team to reach Nepal to support relief efforts after the 2015 earthquake. On a global scale,

AFAD has successfully performed missions to deliver humanitarian aid to more than 50 nations, including Somalia, Palestine, Ecuador, the Philippines, Nepal, Yemen, Mozambique, Chad, and many others, across five continents.

Over the past decade, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) has been involved in responding to disasters in 138 countries and has provided essential aid such as shelter and nutrition to those in need. In addition to its humanitarian aid efforts in nations such as Palestine, Sudan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Somalia and Pakistan, the TRC has undertaken numerous long-term welfare initiatives. For instance, the TRC coordinates the delivery of hundreds of trucks of humanitarian assistance to Syria. The organization has concentrated its projects in countries requiring assistance, including the construction of housing, schools, community centers, places of worship and public facilities. The TRC also supports and provides aid in the areas of livelihood, health, education, social assistance, agriculture and irrigation.

As one of the most generous countries in the world, Türkiye has a special place in people's minds and hearts as a consequence of its wide-ranging humanitarian assistance efforts. As President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated in a 2018 speech at the TİKA Coordinators meeting, “[Türkiye’s] humanitarian diplomacy [is] crowned in the very heart of Turkish foreign policy.”<sup>26</sup>

## Global Response to the Earthquakes in Türkiye

Unfortunately, Türkiye has had to endure several devastating earthquakes in recent years, and the international community has thankfully responded each time with aid and support. To cite a few of these instances, after the 1999 İzmit earthquake, many countries provided humanitarian assistance to Türkiye, including search-and-rescue teams, medical personnel and supplies. Similarly, depending on the scale of devastation and in line with the call for international assistance, the international community has

rallied to provide aid and support to Türkiye in the past.

Given this track record, it was no surprise that following the catastrophic earthquakes in Türkiye on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, the global community mobilized quickly to provide assistance. Within just two days after the earthquakes, thousands of specialists, including search-and-rescue teams, engineers, seismologists, search dogs, and fully equipped field hospitals arrived in the country from around the world.

On February 9, 2023, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated:

*“The international community has demonstrated a strong sense of solidarity and we express our gratitude for their support. We would like to extend our thanks to the international community on this occasion. We have received offers of assistance from 95 countries and 16 international organizations. Many countries have dispatched search and rescue teams, medical professionals, field hospitals, and aid supplies to our country. As of February 9, 6,479 personnel from 56 countries were on the ground providing assistance.”<sup>27</sup>*

Furthermore, immediately after the earthquakes, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) within the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was activated, leading to the participation in the search-and-rescue efforts of 48 INSARAG teams. UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams with over 1,500 staff arrived in Adana, Ankara, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman, coordinating needs assessments and dispatching assistance, together with UN agencies, local administrations and civil society, in support of the government’s efforts, which are ongoing as of the time of this writing. Additionally, on February 16, the United Nations made a “Flash Appeal” to the international community, calling for 1 billion USD in urgent assistance.

According to Minister Çavuşoğlu's statement on February 9, which recognized the role of international solidarity, teams from 56 countries, ranging from the United States to China to Germany, India to Japan, were already on the ground, and teams from an additional 19 countries were expected to arrive shortly. In addition, the statement highlighted the 95 countries and 16 international organizations that had already supported the earthquake response effort.<sup>28</sup> After the first month, those numbers reached 12,384 personnel from 90 countries,<sup>29</sup> and 102 countries had offered assistance.<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned above, in the last twenty years, Türkiye has prioritized a foreign policy focused on humanitarian aid and development assistance. In other words, humanitarian diplomacy has become the core of Turkish foreign policy. While the international community typically responds with solidarity and support during major natural disasters, the overwhelming outpouring of supportive response to the February 6 earthquakes that struck Türkiye may well reflect the reputation that the country has cultivated over the years.<sup>31</sup>

For instance, U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that Washington would keep providing aid to Türkiye and noted: *"We are proud to join the global efforts to help Türkiye, just as Türkiye has sent humanitarian aid and rescue specialists to many countries in the past."*<sup>32</sup>

Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif, highlighted Türkiye's previous support while pledging solidarity, stating that Ankara had gone above and beyond to assist Pakistani citizens during natural disasters such as the earthquake in 2005, and the floods in 2010 and 2022. Sharif specifically mentioned Türkiye's past assistance as a demonstration of solidarity between the two countries.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Alvaro Rodriguez, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Türkiye, highlighted that the country has been hosting approximately 3.7 million Syrian refugees for many years. This has

resulted in Türkiye having the largest refugee population globally due to the ongoing war in Syria. Additionally, Rodriguez noted that Türkiye has provided aid to other nations in their moments of need and urged people to consider Türkiye's generosity and be equally generous toward Türkiye during this time of crisis.<sup>34</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the devastating earthquake, brotherly Azerbaijan and the TRNC were the first to deploy search-and-rescue teams, as always. Similarly, many countries, be they neighbours, allies, European partners and those from the Middle East to the Far East, have shown solidarity and provided support at different levels such as technical, fiscal and personnel. In addition to the aid from countries, many international organizations, from the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) to the United Nations, the European Union (EU) to the World Bank and NATO have demonstrated solidarity with Türkiye and provided technical and fiscal support. To take just one example, the EU organized with Turkish authorities and hosted a Donors Conference<sup>35</sup> that took place in Brussels on March 20, 2023, aimed at raising international funds to aid the citizens of Türkiye and Syria affected by the recent earthquakes.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, an OTS Heads of State Extraordinary Summit was held in Ankara on March 16, 2023 with the theme of "Disaster-Emergency Management and Humanitarian Aid." As planned, the summit provided a platform where the extraordinary agenda that emerged after the earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş was discussed at the highest level.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the financial aid mentioned above, several countries and international organizations provided assistance in the form of equipment, essential humanitarian supplies and field hospital support.

Overall, the international response to the earthquakes in Türkiye has demonstrated the importance of international cooperation and solidarity in times of crisis. As Minister Çavuşoğlu stated,

*“It is remarkable to observe that both the wealthiest and the least developed countries have extended significant support to Türkiye during this challenging time. The severity of the earthquake disaster is apparent to all. Türkiye has always been at the forefront of providing assistance wherever there is a disaster, and a country or society is in need. Now, everyone is also endeavoring to support Türkiye in this regard”.*<sup>38</sup>

Türkiye’s call for assistance received responses from 103 countries, with 90 of them providing assistance according to their capabilities. This demonstration of solidarity has two significant implications: First, Türkiye’s acts of kindness and generosity to those in dire need, coupled with its well-established reputation as a leading country in humanitarian diplomacy has yielded positive responses from others in the country’s time of need, as Mr. Rodriguez stated in his speech.<sup>39</sup> Second, this relief diplomacy, in this case disaster diplomacy, has the potential to contribute to the restoration of interrupted diplomatic relations as Kelman suggests<sup>40</sup>.

## New Horizons Through Relief Diplomacy

Since the early days following the tremors, several foreign top-level officials have visited Türkiye, among them Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Ceyhun Bayramov, Greek Foreign Minister Dendias, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamed Al Sani, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina Croatian Member of the Presidency Council Zeljko Komsic, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and many others. In addition to these visits, numerous leaders from around the world expressed their solidarity with Türkiye via telephone after the earthquake, including Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, U.S. President Joe Biden, Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dibeybe, Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, French



President Emmanuel Macron, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mahmud, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou and Prime Minister Kiriakos Mitsotakis, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Kazakh President Kasım Cömert Tokayev and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, all of whom offered their condolences and support.<sup>41</sup> The primary goal of these visits and calls was to demonstrate solidarity with Türkiye; this solidarity has the potential to pave the way for new opportunities in diplomacy.

Kelman argues that a disaster can serve as a catalyst for diplomatic efforts that were already in place, but is unlikely to generate new diplomacy on its own; while disaster-related activities can stimulate cooperation, they do not create it from scratch.<sup>42</sup> This paper will examine the application of Kelman's disaster diplomacy concept in the context of relief diplomacy demonstrated through international solidarity towards Türkiye. Three case studies will be evaluated: first, countries with diplomatic relations that remain unaffected by the situation in Türkiye; second, countries with diplomatic relations marked by tension with Türkiye; and finally, countries whose diplomatic relations with Türkiye have been interrupted or terminated.

### *Uninterrupted Diplomatic Relations*

For diplomatic relations that continue unaffected, Türkiye's relations with Africa could be a suitable example. Türkiye's declaration of 2005 as the "African Year" encouraged the strengthening of relations with the continent. The country's main priorities for Africa are to ensure sustainable development and to provide experience, knowledge and resources in line with the principle of finding "African solutions to Africa's problems." Türkiye's aim is to provide mutual benefit, improve relations and accelerate development assistance activities in Africa in accordance with its com-

mitments to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In this vein, Türkiye has been involved in humanitarian aid efforts in Africa for many years.

It was thus emotional that following the earthquakes, African countries did not spare any moment to extend their hand by providing aid to Türkiye. As Demirtaş argues,<sup>43</sup> the support and assistance from Africa demonstrate solidarity and the notion of being a friend in need, with a range of African countries providing aid such as cash, shelter, and search-and-rescue teams, including citizens from African countries who were in Türkiye at the time, who fulfilled their solidarity to the country by assisting in disaster zones.

### *Diplomatic Relations Marked by Tension*

Türkiye-Greece relations present a case of strained diplomatic ties. Yet, just like Türkiye did on many occasions toward Greece, the latter too did not fail to express sympathy to the Turkish people and offer help. Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis called President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to express their condolences to the earthquake victims and extend assistance to Türkiye. Mitsotakis stated that Greece was prepared to make all its resources available to Türkiye.<sup>44</sup> As Ekinci argues, the prospect of achieving long-term normalization in bilateral relations with Greece, similar to what happened after the 1999 earthquakes, seems challenging currently. Nonetheless, in a positive gesture, Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that Türkiye and Greece should not wait for another earthquake to mend the fences.<sup>45</sup> As Kelman suggests, disaster diplomacy can open up new opportunities in diplomacy. Naturally, what may come to pass between the two countries in the wake of this episode remains to be seen.

## *Interrupted Diplomatic Relations*

Türkiye-Egypt relations could be the primary focus when considering interrupted diplomatic ties. For this case, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry's visit to Türkiye to express solidarity after the earthquake was meaningful; it was the first Egyptian ministry-level visit to Türkiye in over a decade. During his visit, Minister Shoukry stated,

*“During our meeting with the Minister, we revisited the topic of the recent meeting between President Sisi and President Erdoğan, which we deemed to be significant in paving the way for us. This meeting led to the re-establishment of communication channels between the two countries, including the governments and institutions. It is crucial that we take advantage of this opportunity to normalize relations between our countries as quickly as possible and create a roadmap for the future. Our countries have deep ties and shared history, which are essential to us.”<sup>46</sup>*

Minister Shoukry's comments can be viewed as an instance of Relief Diplomacy, which can contribute to the resumption of the stalled Türkiye-Egypt reconciliation process in the aftermath of the earthquakes. In this case, since the normalization step was taken before the disaster, Relief Diplomacy has the potential to act as a catalyst and accelerate normalization efforts between the two countries, which are already in progress.

With similar processes of reconciliation witnessed before the earthquake *vis-a-vis* relations between Türkiye and some other countries, one can argue that the earthquake has contributed to them positively. The assistance and solidarity extended from Israel, the UAE, Armenia, and Saudi Arabia to Türkiye after the earthquakes should be viewed in this context. However, as Kelman suggests, the underlying structural issues will be the determining

factor in the long-term relationship between the countries; nevertheless, even if disaster diplomacy does not produce the desired outcome, the functional relationships established between individuals and organizations within, and outside governments often persist. These relationships can serve as a foundation for future cooperation<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusion

As President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said at the State Distinguished Service Medal and Order Conferment Ceremony, “*It is a requirement of our ancient culture to respond to effort, sacrifice, and goodness*”<sup>48</sup>, Türkiye’s generous acts of kindness for the greater good and its readiness to extend a helping hand to those in dire straits over many years were reciprocated when the country needed help the most. The people of Türkiye received support and solidarity from various countries, including 102 nations, which deployed 11,488 international personnel from 90 different countries. Additionally, international organizations such as NATO, the EU, the OSCE,<sup>49</sup> the Organization of Turkic States, and several others also demonstrated their solidarity with Türkiye.

This demonstration of solidarity has two significant implications: first, it highlights Türkiye’s well-established reputation as a leader in humanitarian diplomacy, which has been globally acknowledged and appreciated. Second, relief diplomacy has the potential to contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations with countries that have encountered difficult times of either acute or chronic nature. The official visits from Egypt, Armenia, Greece, and Israel can be cited as remarkable in this regard. These visits can be interpreted in the context of disaster diplomacy, which involves the potential for renewing interrupted diplomatic relations, as mentioned previously. Nonetheless, Kelman suggests that disasters can stimulate existing diplomatic efforts but not create new ones; while disaster-related activities may encourage cooper-

ation, they cannot initiate it from scratch. Yet the encouragement of cooperation is not a negligible effect of disaster diplomacy. Indeed, one can argue with confidence that the silver lining of such catastrophes is that they provide an opportunity for improving strained relations thanks to the humanitarianism that facilitates compassion, affection, and solidarity among countries, which in turn could foster common understandings among governments too.

Despite the devastation caused by the recent quakes, Türkiye's strength as witnessed on many occasions gives every confidence that it will overcome the hardships it is facing and fully recover. As a leader in humanitarian diplomacy, Türkiye will continue to serve as a symbol of hope, not only for its region but also for the entire world.

## Endnotes

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## NOTES

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## About SAM

Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye (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 Türkiye, 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 Türkiye.



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