



Shifting Dynamics: The International Order in a Post-Pandemic World

— 1st - 2nd of December | 2020 —

Turkish Foreign Policy: Tradition, Geopolitics and Ideology in a Changing World Order

EXPERT ROUNDTABLES

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EDITED BY

MUHAMMED LUTFİ TÜRKCAN
MICHAEL ARNOLD
ANNA MURPHY
HATİCE NUR KESKİN

CONTRIBUTORS

ABDINOR HASSAN DAHIR
ANNA MURPHY
ARUKE URANKYZYN
EDEBALİ MURAT AKCA
ELİF ZAİM
FATİH ŞEMSETTİN IŞIK
FERHAT POLAT
HATİCE NUR KESKİN
LAMIS CHEIKH
MAMOON ALABBASI
MICHAEL ARNOLD
MUHAMMED LUTFİ TÜRKCAN
MUSTAFA METİN BAŞBAY
RAVALE MOHYDIN
SERKAN BİRGEL
TURAN GAFARLI

DESIGN BY

ERHAN AĞIRGÖL

TRT WORLD İSTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347
ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ
İSTANBUL / TURKEY

TRT WORLD LONDON

200 GRAYS INN ROAD, WC1X 8XZ
LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1275 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE NW, SUITE 320
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

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Session 8

Turkish Foreign Policy:

Tradition, Geopolitics and Ideology in a Changing World Order



- Turkey's current proactive foreign policy approach is based in geopolitical needs, rather than an expansionist ideology-based policy.
- Disputes between the United States and Turkey that date back to the Obama administration, and proceeded through the Trump administration, may continue with the upcoming Biden administration. However, the institutional aspect of the alliance and convergence of long-term interests allows for a promising view of the future of Turkey-US relations.
- Turkey's EU bid needs a refresh based on a re-evaluation of EU-Turkey relations with a focus on commonalities and finding solutions to the issues that harm Turkey's candidacy.
- Ankara's relations with Moscow should be considered as both an advantage and balancing factor for NATO, especially after the power vacuum created by the US in the Middle East has led to increased Russian presence in the region.
- Turkey is always ready to negotiate with its Western friends in order to coordinate conflict resolution efforts in the Middle East and North Africa, on the condition that parties consider Turkey's interests.

Summary of the Session

In the session “Turkish Foreign Policy: Tradition, Geopolitics and Ideology in a Changing World Order”, experts, academics and former officials discussed the current state of Turkey’s foreign affairs with a particular focus on relations with the United States, the European Union and Middle Eastern states. Moderated by Talip Küçükcan, Senior Fellow at the TRT World Research Centre, panellists included Faruk Kaymakcı, Deputy Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs, Francis Ricciardone Jr., former US ambassador to Turkey and Egypt, Joachim Bitterlich, member of the board of directors at the Jacques Delors Institute and Professor Burhanettin Duran, General Coordinator of the SETA Foundation and a professor at the Ibn Khaldun University.

The main framework of the panel was the challenges that Turkey continues to face in its immediate neighbourhood and possible ways

to overcome these challenges. On the US-Turkey relationship, after having agreed on the presence of some problems between the two sides, panellists highlighted the fact that enduring interests between the two states — combined with a long-standing personal relationship between the two leaders (Erdogan and Biden) — allows for a measure of optimism about the future of bilateral ties. In regard to Turkey’s EU accession process, panellists emphasised the need for a refresh in reciprocal relations by looking at common interests and coordinated action with regards to conflicts around the EU neighbourhood. Turkey’s proactive role in Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts was also discussed within the framework of the country’s advancing military technology capabilities and changing dynamics in its foreign policy agenda.

Faruk Kaymakçı's Highlights



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs

Ambassador Faruk Kaymakçı assumed office as Deputy Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs in August 2018. He is holder of Bachelor's degree from Ankara University and two Master's degrees from the London School of Economics and the College of Europe. In 1994, he joined the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he worked on multilateral economic organisations, the Balkans and the EU. He also served as the Chief Foreign Policy Advisor at the EU Ministry. His previous missions abroad include Tripoli, Kabul (NATO Office) and Brussels (Turkish Perm. Del. to the EU). He also served as the Consul General of Turkey in Basra, the Ambassador of Turkey to Iraq and Permanent Representative of Turkey to the EU. Ambassador Kaymakçı is holder of the NATO Medal for his service in Afghanistan and was selected as one of the three Alumnus of the Year 2007 from the College of Europe.

- ” “Turkey sees its future in Europe, and we feel that having Turkey as a full member of the EU would be in the interest not only of Turkey, but also of the EU.”
- ” “If Turkey had been a member of the EU or if we had had better relations with the EU, we could have prevented the war in Iraq and the internal conflict in Syria, the ongoing conflict in Libya and we could have created a lake of peace, welfare and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the region.”
- ” “We also believe that membership in the EU is not a win-win case, but rather is a win-win-win case, because the EU can be a better global actor by reaching out to the Islamic world and reaching out to conflict areas, which are actually surrounding Turkey these days unfortunately.”
- ” “Turkish foreign policy is proactive and based on initiative-taking today. We cannot wait for the West, NATO and other European allies to act. Unfortunately, they do not act, as long as the problem doesn't knock on the door of our Western/European friends. They do not give it much of attention, as we have seen in the case of irregular migration and in the case of Iraq, Syria and Libya conflicts.”
- ” “With our traditional and geopolitical approaches in our diplomacy in the last 65 years, basically we have counted on the West. We hope that the West would also fully support us, so that the transatlantic relations would be always solid.”
- ” “I think the best time in Turkey's history is from 1999 to 2005, when we started the reform process, and we were being given a clear prospective for accession [to the EU]. But problems started again in 2009-2010 with Sarkozy and when EU member states didn't mind Greek Cypriots' abusing their veto rights against Turkey's accession process and the whole process went off track.”
- ” “Some colleagues claimed that Turkey is overstretched in different parts of the world. When we look at our Western friends like France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and their investments and relations in Central Asia, in Africa, in other parts of the world, they have a bigger presence than Turkey. So, why we should be worried about Turkey's presence in Africa and in the Middle East? I think it would be much better if we could do this together with the EU, because it could bring a real added value to the competition that we see in terms of tackling Chinese policy or the Russian policy in the Balkans, in Africa and in the Middle East.”
- ” “Instead of creating tensions and threatening Turkey by [way of] sanctions, I think we should try to understand Turkey and why it acted in this way in the last few years. You never went through a military coup attempt by FETÖ, which cost more than 250 lives and created a security-focused Turkey. How many countries are dealing with three terrorist organisations as notorious as DAESH, the PKK/PYD/YPG and FETÖ? Let us be realistic. Instead of marginalising, isolating Turkey, we should extend a hand of solidarity and alliance to Turkey when it needs it most.”

Burhanettin Duran's Highlights



General Coordinator, SETA

Burhanettin Duran received his BA in Political Science and International Relations from Bogazici University in 1993, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from Bilkent University in 2001. He was a visiting scholar at George Mason University in 2010-2011. He worked for Bilkent University and Sakarya University as a research assistant and assistant professor between 1993 and 2009. Prof. Duran has been focusing on the transformation of Islamism, Turkish political thought, Turkish domestic politics, Turkish foreign policy and Middle Eastern politics. Currently Prof. Duran is a professor at Ibn Haldun University and General Coordinator of the SETA Foundation. On October 9, 2018, Prof. Duran was appointed as member of Turkish Presidency Security and Foreign Policies Council.

- ” “We should see that Turkey’s foreign policy activism is not ideologically motivated. That is why we should get rid of all this Neo-Ottomanism or Islamist foreign policy discussions. This foreign policy is based on Turkey’s geopolitical realities and the power vacuum in the regions surrounding Turkey.”
- ” “Turkey is ready to open a new page with the US [...] Turkey is ready for multilateralism, diplomacy, humanitarian ideals and a new world order that Biden will try to make.”
- ” “We have to be aware of the reality on the ground that this agreement that is imposed by Russia is not the final one. There are still some points to be suspicious about any possibility of conflict for the future. The future of Nagorno-Karabakh is not decided yet.”
- ” “After the presidential elections in the US, we have two unknowns: First, what would be the impact of the post-COVID international order? Second, what will be the impact of the post-Trump era? We know that although Trump lost the elections, Trumpism will be there in the US. Therefore, the Biden administration has some challenges to deal with, not only in terms of global power politics, but there are also many problems to be solved domestically.”
- ” “We also have a reality on the ground in that the US left some power vacuums [during the Trump Presidency], especially in the Middle East, in North Africa, in Eastern Europe, in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea. Many of these vacuums were filled by the Russians at a low price. To roll back those developments, Washington has to cultivate shared interests with European nations, including Germany and Turkey.”
- ” “If the Biden administration will strengthen multilateralism and alliances, Turkey occupies a crucial place for such an attempt, because of its recent diplomatic and military activism, especially in the last four years. Turkey is playing a very proactive role in various conflict areas, ranging from Syria, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya and even Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, all of the issues between Turkey and the US should be dealt with based upon this new geopolitical reality.”
- ” “You cannot be stuck on the Bay of Antalya because of the expansionist demands of Greece and southern Cyprus. It is the same in Libya and in Nagorno-Karabakh, too. Therefore, Turkey’s military activism is not overstretched. It is because of geopolitical realism, not because of ideology. But, honestly speaking, this is also something new, not just for the world or for our allies, but also for our competitors and even for our domestic observers.”
- ” “I know that as Turks, we are trying to explain ourselves to our Western allies and they are sometimes tired of seeing tensions either in the Eastern Mediterranean, or in Syria, or in Iraq. But Turkey is suffering from these problems most of all. We are at the front of these problems, and they are keeping us outside the gate of the European Union.”

Francis Ricciardone's Highlights



President, American University of Cairo & Former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt and Turkey

Francis J. Ricciardone was appointed the 12th President of the American University in Cairo and began his term on July 1, 2016. He previously served as a US Foreign Service Officer from 1978-2014, including appointments as US Ambassador to Egypt, Turkey, and the Philippines, and Chargé d' Affaires and Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan. After graduating from Dartmouth College Summa Cum Laude in 1973, he received a Fulbright Scholarship and taught in American international schools in Trieste, Italy, and Tehran, Iran. From 2014-2016 he was Vice President of the Atlantic Council and Director of the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. He was a distinguished scholar at the US Institute of Peace in 2008-2009. He speaks Arabic, Turkish, Italian, and French. He is married to Dr. Marie Ricciardone, a molecular biologist.

- ” “I think there are still some enduring [shared] interests of Turkey and the United States that are at least as compelling as ever. Those interests will drive the decision-making processes on both sides, and each state will be leading its popular opinion and will be responding to its popular opinion as well. These underlying realities make me believe that this relationship between Turkey and the United States and the relationship between Turkey and Europe can be, maybe even more, as productive as ever, depending on the choices that everybody makes.”
- ” “As I have just mentioned, global issues are at the fore now like climate change, the global spread of refugees and migration and the global spread of a disease in these days of pandemic. Even before this, there was SARS and many others. These are things that the incoming administration has spoken and written about, and I can only guess that these will be the priorities in foreign policy.”
- ” “If [only] we could bring Turkey, Israel and Egypt once again, at least into some kind of an alignment, not necessarily warm and fully trusting relations, but a cold, hard-look at the national interest and regional security and stability, along with the way that the United States and Europe tends to look at these things.”
- ” “Hence, to the extent Turkey has been concerned about Islamophobia and otherisation from the perspective of the West, I believe that the incoming American administration has put a real emphasis on returning to America's traditional celebration of its own internal diversity, openness to the world and productive collaborative relations with the Muslim world in particular.”
- ” “Turkey has a long and strong tradition of statecraft that even goes [back] before the Republic. It has a first-class diplomatic corps and a first-class military as traditionally one of the strongest in NATO, and one that drew its strength from its alliances that it valued and didn't wish to put them at risk. It has law enforcement and intelligence apparatuses that have close relations with all of the apparatuses in Europe and the United States. More broadly, it has a mixed economy, an educated populace and near-universal literacy.”
- ” “Turkey has immense national, not only interests but advantages, if it chooses to exploit them in the traditional way. I'm very confident that the incoming American administration will be responsive to those advantages, without pretending to speak for them.”
- ” “In any case, the American government is resetting, as we do with every big national election, no matter which party has won in the executive branch or the Congress. I would not expect a return because there is no return to the world that has been stretched out of shape and the way it used to be.”
- ” “I would suggest that the way to approach the Americans and the Europeans is at least with another rethink of 'the peace at home, peace in the world' traditional Turkish approach, the zero problems with neighbours' approach, rather than rehearsing grievances and litigating. It should not be a litigious relationship between Turkey and its traditional allies, but rather a joint problem solving one.”

Joachim Bitterlich's Highlights



Member of the Board of Directors of the Jacques Delors Institute

Joachim Bitterlich is a diplomat who has been a consultant since 2013. He is also a Professor at the École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris and Vice-President of the Jacques Delors Institute. Throughout Mr Bitterlich's diplomatic career, he served as Ambassador; Permanent Representative of Germany on the North Atlantic Council; and Ambassador to Spain and Andorra. He is a former advisor to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, head of the European Policy Department at the Federal Chancellor's Office, and Foreign and Security Policy Advisor to the Chancellor. His current roles include but are not limited to senior advisor at Berlin Global Advisors and the Austrian Home Ministry; founding member of CogitoPraxis; member of the Historical Commission of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture; and board member of the École Nationale d'Administration. Mr Bitterlich studied law, economics, and politics at the University of Saarbrücken and the French National School of Administration in Paris.

- ” “By the way, these neighbours include at least two members of the European Union, and I see so many common and vital interests of both sides. But we need another form of dialogue between the two sides, in order to overcome this deep crisis of the EU-Turkey relationship.”
- ” “We need another form and another type of reset in dialogue between Turkey and the European Union, because when you look at the situation objectively, especially at the neighbourhood, you see a series of common interests between European Union and Turkey.”
- ” “20 years ago, we were under a sort of illusion on both sides, Turkey and the EU, to launch accession negotiations and to come to a real fruitful end. I have the same hope from that period. Then we went through a sort of alienation between Turkey and the EU, and they are always, as it is in life, two responsables.”
- ” “Both Europeans and Turkey should have been more honest. We have both been responsible in this field. When you look at the last years, what some people told me reminded [me of] this: In Germany, you say ‘Viel Feind, Viel Ehr’ or I translate into English, ‘the more enemies you have, the more you are honoured.’ No, this is not foreign policy. I think we should really have a deep and urgent look at the common points and common interests in order to overcome this crisis.”
- ” “Biden will be concentrated much more on Asia, particularly on China. Second, perhaps to some extent, he will focus on Russia, but much less on Europe and its environment. He will tell the Europeans, ‘please look after your wider region, your neighbourhood, up to you’, particularly to the Germans and to the French, perhaps to the British, too.”
- ” “If I try to be an objective interpreter of what has been happening in the last 10 years, we are in a strange decade now, accelerated by the coronavirus. You may call this a transition to, hopefully, better times, but it is a period of absence of strategic reflexes and foreign policy at the end of the day. What we need in order to resume these reflexes and foreign policy, first of all, comes from a deep review of Turkish foreign policy. Second, we need another type of reset in the dialogue between Turkey and the European Union, because when you look at the situation objectively, especially at the neighbourhood, as [Deputy Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director for EU Affairs] Kaymakcı mentioned, you see a series of common interests between European Union and Turkey.”
- ” “We know and see Turkey as a nation that is not feeling fairly considered. I understand this to some extent even with regard to the Eastern Mediterranean situation.”



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