

The Significance of Central Asia in the Foreign Policy of Turkey

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Abstract: As it was mentioned before, collapsing of the USSR, and creating a power vacuum in the Central Asia, this region was surrounded by the big and middle powers tending to influence this region. Although, Turkey might not be the biggest, the richest, or the closest power to the Central Asian republics, it should not be forgotten that it has had vast historical and ethnic relations with the Central Asia, and the people since long time ago. This issue may provide suitable contexts for following Turkey's policies in the region. The main policy of Turkey in comparison to the newly-independent republics of the Central Asia has always focused on political, and economic reforms, maintaining the political, and economic stability, helping with the process of state-building, and supporting the non-stop transferring of the great energy resources of the region to the international markets, and presenting the substitute ways if it was necessary. Since the late 1990s, Turkey accelerated her influence and presence in the Central Asia due to the increasing of the political, and economic power. Therefore, the state and private policymakers started investing in this region. From 1996 onwards, Turkish policymakers adopted a functional policy for the Central Asia. In this new policy, the relations between Turkey and the Central Asia were mainly defined based on the economic commonwealth. Therefore, Turkey tried to adopt a more functional position for the Central Asia according to increasing the economic cooperations and avoiding the mere political considerations in the region. [Masoud Goodarzi. **The Significance of Central Asia in the Foreign Policy of Turkey.** *J Am Sci* 2013;9(2):343-347]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>. 45

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1. Introduction

In the beginning of 1990s, Turkey did not use to be the "first bulwark against communist" from the Western perspective. However, Turkish policymakers defined a new role for that country, which won the attention of the around countries, especially the Central Asia. The Central Asia won the attention of Turkey due to several reasons, including: the advent of Turkish governments in the Central Asia, America's support, the Zionist regime, and other foreign countries, non-state Turkish players, and the Russia weakness in the first years of the 1990s paved the way for Turkey to be presented in this region. In the middle of 1990s Turkey's presence and situation were started shaking; however, it was determined in achieving its goals.

Turkey's goals were: increasing the geopolitical role-playing in the region and in the Central Asia, reinforcing the overland, achieving high shares in the region's markets, spreading the realm of influence through promoting the idea of "pan-Turkism," participating the region's energy resources, and the transferring lines to the international markets, meeting the internal needs of Turkey, and obtaining the economic interests achieved by energy transit, promoting the position of Turkey in the international system through its role of communication, reducing the traditional influence of Russia, presenting the model of secularism for the countries in the region, and trying to accept this model from them, playing the communicative role between the Central Asian

countries and the West, and being selected as the suitable developmental model by some of the countries in the region, competing with Iran, and preventing the implementation of its governmental model in the region, assigning the Central Asian region as parts of its cultural and historical domains, controlling, influencing, and managing the other powers such as Pakistan, India, and Iran in the region, and the intellectual range of the Kemalist Eurasia-oriented, and Turkish nationalists (Pan-Turkism), and socialists who support from the influence of Turkey in this region. The believers in this intellectual range support from substituting Eurasia for the European Union in the foreign relations of Turkey.

1.1. Turkey's New Policy towards the Central Asia

The Turkey's foreign policy in the Central Asia has four properties: 1. Creating balance between its relations in the region with other big powers: Russia, Iran, China, India, and Pakistan. 2. Political activities for achieving the stability and security in the region. 3. Facilitating the energy relations, especially on the transmission routes. Now, Turkey plays the transit role in the Caspian pipeline, and is highly interested in having an increasing role in the Nabucco's pipeline from Turkmenistan to Austria. 4. Increasing the strategic role in the international equations. Through approaching most of the newly-independent Central Asian countries, and having influence in this strategic region, Turkey is determined to show that the best way to keep the newly-independent countries away from the Islamic

fundamentalism and Russia is modeling from Turkey (Aras, B.2009).

In this way, Turkey can both use the Western supports and use them as the promoting tool for the Pan-Turkism's programs. The analysis indicates effective use of Turkey in the civil society, NGO groups, as well as commercial activities to increase the relations and influence in the region. Possessing an Islamic Democrat government can grant more role and influence to Turkey among the countries and the Central Asian people. In this regard, Turkey has succeeded in indicating itself as a stable regional non-interventional power. Therefore, it's had a significant role in showing itself as a paradigm not only to the Central Asian countries, but also to the other regional powers. Finally, due to the ability in creating the political and economic stability in the Central Asia, and the role that it plays as a bridge between the East and West, it can be regarded as a constructive factor in the communications between East and West (Onis, Z. and Yilmaz, S., 2005). Therefore, it seems natural if Turkey expects the European and American allies, as Turkey is following this duty in saving the stability and the regional welfare, to be known as an equal partner in the global strategic equations and issues. Regarding the economic and strategic significance of the Central Asia in the new strategy of Turkey, which are planned based on Ahmet Davutoglu's strategies, Turkey's prime minister, in the form of "strategic depth," and "zero conflict with the neighbors", it seems that despite the problems it encounters in increasing its influence in the Central Asia, it has started removing them. In this regard, Turkey is determined to pave the way to achieve its goals and interests in the Central Asia through adopting a software-type approach and based on adopting the soft power. What has won the attention of the Turkish policymakers toward the Central Asia is rooted from two factors: first, the role of Central Asia in the revival of the Turkish strategic significance for the West both from the perspective of the role of this country as the communication bridge between East and West in oil and gas transit to Europe, and as the regional Western ally in fighting against terrorism. Second, the rich economic interests this region can bring in Turkey, and could not enjoy in the past due to Turkey's too much attention to the West and Europe. Moreover, this region has provided the Turkey's access to the consumptive new markets (Gharabaghi, K.1994). On the other hand, the best shortcut for Turkey's commercial relations is with the Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, it seems that Turkey will play more role for the Central Asia in the foreign policy, and in this regard it seeks to provide the international and regional interests (Winrow, G., 2000a). Most of the Central Asian republics are

Turkish speaking. By providing Turkish language training centers, Turkish schools, religious schools, and universities in these countries (such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), granting scholarships to them after they got graduated, and employing them in the state universities, form the graduated class of Turkey. All these have turned to a significant lobby for Turkey, and have made it possible for this country to continue its influence in these countries. Seen from the other side of the coin, Turkish universities are also active in this region, and it is regarded as an important cornerstone for Turkey's increasing influence in the domain of service, and light industry. Turkey can have more influence in this region in comparison with such other countries as Iran, Pakistan, China, and even Russia. Using the markets of this region, Turkey has tried to invest in the hospitality, and transport. Yet, Turkey has never claimed that it has sought to export the religious ideology to these countries, and it has facilitated the condition for Turkey to enter this region much easier. Some currents have increased such a concern in Iran that is even felt in the Tajik's society.

After the collapse of the USSR, the US supported Turkey's model as the political secular system for the Central Asian countries and the Caucasus, effectively. Despite historical and cultural ties, especially those of ethnic and linguistic, Turkey tried to take the advantage of the geopolitical vacuum in this region to increase its influence. The economic planning has had a special place in Turkey's policies. In the recent years, the presence of Turkey has formed with effective economic programs in these regions. Turgut Ozal, Turkey's vice president, insisted on the integration of Turkey with these countries. Turkey's policy has had serious achievements when Iran does not pay any attention to even Tajikistan. The policy Turkey chose when the USSR collapsed was based on the Pan-Turkism. In Ankara, the revival of the great Turkish emperor was spoken. It is interesting to know that the activities are not only in the economic, cultural, and political fields, and they are in the religious field as well. In the first three years, about 480 of the Central Asian and Kazakh religious students were invited to Turkey to graduate. The non-religious and secular Turkey invites the religious students of these countries. The wonderful internal and religious evolutions changed the Turkey's position, and have turned this country on one hand from an underdeveloped country holding strategic significance for the West to a regional power possessing the ambitious desire in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Although Turkey does not have the strategic significance of the cold war period in the West, Turkey's policy makers have created a suitable role for a regional power with considerable economic-secure ability that is consistent

with the general policy of the Western world. Before the USSR collapsed, Turkey was the only Turk government around the world; however, five Turk republics had appeared in the Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Thus, Turkey could start a special relationship with them because of the Turkish culture and language. The Turkey's policy makers announced this country a desirable sample for the newly-independent countries of the Central Asia. The Central Asia is placed at the junction of the two Asia and Europe continents, and takes the advantage of a very significant geographical position (Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. (2006).

This region is generally considered as an integrated region, where the other member countries take the advantage of many commonalities. They also had traditional commonalities in the USSR emperor, and economic dependency to the USSR in the integration shadow, and they have suffered from the commercial outputs, and limited investing, whose transmission process has been long and laborious, and the way to democracy and the economy of the market has been limited.

The human development index, categorizes the countries in the Central Asia at the "medium level", generally. The Central Asian countries have global significance because of possessing great resources of oil, gas, coal, uranium, ferrous, and non-ferrous metals, and agricultural talents. Therefore, this region has won the attention of many different countries to it. Countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have more significance because of possessing more gas and oil resources (Dannreuther, R., 1994).

2.1. The Significance of Gas and Oil Resources of Some of the Central Asian and Caucasus Countries

Oil Resource

Country/ranking/ million barrels

Kazakhstan/9/40

Azerbaijan/7/20

Uzbekistan/1/64

Turkmenistan/ 1/74

Gas Resource

Country/ranking/ Tcm

Kazakhstan/3/11

Turkmenistan/3/31

Uzbekistan/2/91

Azerbaijan/1/22

The following table indicates the economic abilities of the Central Asian countries: The Country name/ GDP Billion Dollars/ GDP Dollars per capita/the growth rate of the industrial manufacturing of exports (Billion Dollars)

Kazakhstan/ 6.85/5000/9.14%/8.8

Kyrgyzstan/5.13/2800/6%/475

Tajikistan/ 5.7/1140/3.10%/640

Turkmenistan/ 6.19/4300/18%/4.3

Uzbekistan/62 Trillion Dollars/ 2500/5.3%/8.2

The Country Name/ The Defense Spending (million dollars)/the defense spending (percentage of GDP)

Kazakhstan/ 322/5.1%

Kyrgyzstan/3.19/4.1%

Tajikistan/ 4.35/9.3%

Turkmenistan/90/4.3%

3.1. Several Reasons for the Presence of Turkey in the Central Asia

A) The tendency of some of the internal groups of Turkey in the Central Asia: many groups in Turkey believed that the end of cold war brings degradation of position and strategic significance of Turkey for the West, and Turkey won't be Nato's Eastern arm and the first bulwark with the former USSR, and since the collapse of the USSR was a reason for appearing Turkish governments in the Central Asia, Turkey can turn into a regional significant power through alliance with these countries. In other words, Turkey does not have any way except saving alliance with the Central Asia government so that it can save its position. Therefore, it is the only exit way for Turkey from the undesirable isolation (due to the end of the cold war). These groups argue that Turkey is placed on the margin of the Europe, the Islamic world, and the Arab world; however, it is not any part of them. On the other hand, at the beginning of the collapse of the USSR, such a sense existed among the countries of the Central Asia(Lesser, I., Green, J., and Chubin, S., 2001) . Special geopolitics and great energy resources of this region increased Turkey's appetite to influence this region, and created some kind of alliance between the internal forces of Turkey in the Central Asia. Therefore, the Islamists looked at the Central Asia as an Islamic country, Pan Turkisms, as a historical and ancestral land, the military as a tactic for fighting against the excessive demands of the European union , and the conditions of this union for Turkey's membership, and seculars as the energy supply.

B) The second effective factor for the presence of Turkey in the Central Asia is the America's and Israel's support, and some other foreign forces. The United States tries to use Turkey's influence to seclude Iran, and fight against Russia and China's influence in this region. America is strongly worried about the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and increasing the Iran's Islamic paradigm in the newly-independent countries of the Central Asia and Caucasus; therefore, through promoting the secular model, as the considerable model of the West, Turkey tried to fight against the influence of Iran in this region. Furthermore, America's fear of the Russia's return to the Central Asia, and becoming to the main threat against the America's interests, made the Americans use Turkey to fight against Russia's ambitions. The European Union and Israel also, were

about to make their wishes true through the relative support of Turkey in the Central Asia. According to Europeans, Turkey could enter the Central Asian countries to the global society, and provide the safety of energy transmission to the Europe in this region (Celik, Yasemin (1999). Israel also hoped to prevent the expansion of radical Islamism in the Central Asia with the cooperation of Turkey and America. Furthermore, Israel hoped to decrease Iran's ideologist in the foreign policy through creating some challenges for Iran in the region.

C) In the early 1990s, Russia's weakness and the chaotic situation in the first mid of 1990s prevented this country from effective presence in the Central Asia. Therefore, this situation provided a suitable chance for the presence of other players such as Turkey, Iran, America, and even Israel in the Central Asia. In addition to this, Russia's tendency to the West in the early 1990s, and having West-oriented forces at the top of the power in Russia made the Russian policy makers forget the issues of Central Asia republics to somehow. Turkey always looks at Russia as a rival. Therefore, it started influencing in the central Asia in the early 1990s, and since mid 1990s tried to enter the security constructions of the Central Asia.

D) Turkey's non-governmental players' tendency: another factor of Turkey's presence in the Central Asia was strong tendency and interest of the non-governmental players in Turkey including Turkey's private economic section, Fethullah Gülen's foundation, media, and ethnic lobbies. Having various economic, training, ethnic tendencies, they agree upon Turkey's presence in the Central Asia, and enter force to the Turkey's foreign policy, in this regard. All these factors increased Turkey's presence in the Central Asia in the first mid of 1990s, and some of the Turkish elites imagined that they have found a significant substitute for the European Union, which is able to solve the internal crisis and decrease European's demand for fundamental changes in Turkey. As a result of such a presence, in the late 1990s about 2500 Turkish companies were active in a vast domain of investing in the Central Asia, and their investment was 4.8 billion dollars, whose 4 billion dollars were related to the constructions section. Furthermore, the volume of Turkey's trade with these countries increased from 54 million dollars in 1992 to 6.5 billion dollars in 1999. In addition to this, Turkey's banks denoted 5.1 billion dollar credit to these countries. Turkey has also been very active in the sections of telecommunication service, training and education, and granting scholarships. At the status quo, Turkey has signed more than 2000 economic, educational, cultural, and communication agreements with the Central Asian countries, which cover more than 400 designs, worth

approximately 4.4 billion dollars. Turkish authorities created Turkish International Cooperation and Development, for more effective coordination of its policies in the Central Asian region. The responsibilities of this agency is to make the plans, and different programs in such sections as agriculture, training, small and medium companies, tourism energy, civil aviation, insurance, The most significant economic measures can be summarized as:

- Allocating considerable credits to these republics: regarding the increasing rate of inflation and unemployment, decreasing the production, severe deterioration of people's economic situation, weakness of the economic foundation, .. the credits used to be allocated to meet basic economic needs, mainly. Moreover, these credits were significant encourager for Turkish tradespeople that helped them to enter the new market. In the meanwhile, the role of the Turkish Exim Bank is also very important.

- Encouraging the private section of Turkey to invest in the region: investing in this region is done to create economic foundations, residential and office buildings, industrial facilities, agricultural industry, oil industry.

- Encouraging the Turkish tradespeople to sign contracts and have commercial and industrial joint investments with the companies of the third countries in Turkish republics: for example, one can mention a consortium created between a Turkish company and Siemens, the German company. This consortium signed a contract with Kyrgyzstan to establish a power house, worth 600 million dollars.

- Providing facilities and secure economic ways to transit gas and oil as well as other products of these republics to the international markets.

- Creating commercial relations: regarding the significant role of the small and medium companies in expanding the economy of markets, and their abilities in creating flexible structural changes, these companies are given the priority. In this regard, expanding the private section through small and medium companies in the Central Asia is considered as the agenda of TIKA.

On the other hand, Turkey's strategic situation turns it into a natural energy bridge between the Oil manufacturer in the region on one hand, and consumer markets in Europe, on the other. In the modern era of the international system that is merged with the alternation of the nature of power impressment through coercive means based on militarism in the political, economic, and cultural mild and peaceful forms, the cultural influence has a very high and significant place (Allison, R. 2004) . Having language commonalities with the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,

and Turkish population of Tajikistan, Turkey entered these regions with the policy of Pan Turkism, and in the form of terms such as “the great society of Turan”, “large Union of Turkish states”, and “Turkish Commonwealth”. Taking the advantage of the above-mentioned unique points and getting such policies as establishing a satellite channel devoted to Central Asia (Eurasia Channel) with a 24-hour programs, granting scholarships to the college students, and religious students of these regions, establishing various schools, as well as meeting training needs, publishing types of textbooks. Turkey succeeded in dimming its weaknesses and achieving more success

2. Discussions

Regarding the geopolitical situation, the Central Asia is situated between Europe in the West, Asia in the East, Russia in the North, and the Islamic World in the South. It is the only point of the world that has a 60-million people consumer market. The existence of ethnic groups and several territorial disputes has turned it into an unstable region. The countries of this region are landlocked, and have only access to water because of the neighbor countries. The central Asia posses the second (oil and gas) energy resources in the world. Moreover, many of the rare metal mine such as gold, copper, uranium, and heavy metals are situated in this region. This region is situated in the junction of the Eastern and Western cultures, including Turkish and Islamic cultures, and historically it is situated on the Silk Road. The countries of Central Asia have global significance because of possessing enormous resources of oil, gas, coal, uranium, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, and agricultural talents. These issues caused the Central Asia to be highly significant in the foreign policy of Turkey.

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