

**POLICY PAPER**  
**ON**  
**TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY**  
**(Policy and Politics International Perspective)**



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**Abstract:** Today, the Middle East considered the center of world affairs; a strategically, economically, politically, culturally, and religiously sensitive area.<sup>1</sup> After the cold war, and especially follow the Gulf War, Turkey has become more sensitive to the Middle East issues and took a more activist role. Turkey's relations and conflicts with the three main countries in this region, Iran, Syria and Iraq are determined the Turkey's foreign policy. The Kurdish issue and the relation with the US in the region have also had important points for Turkey's Middle East policy. "Peace at Home and Peace Abroad" has been the main principle of Turkish Foreign policy since the establishment of the Republic in 1923.<sup>2</sup>

**Background:** The Middle East has unfortunately experienced chaos and conflict for decades. Turkey has been negatively affected by the instability in the region and has a strong interest in the resolution of its problems. Turkey feels a moral responsibility to actively contribute to the efforts to transform the region into one of lasting peace, security, prosperity and intense cooperation because of profound historical and cultural relations with the region. Although current problems in the region are War in Iraq and The Nuclear Program of Iran, Turkey supports the idea that lasting peace, security and stability in the Middle East can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Turkey continues to strongly encourage Middle East Countries for achieving peace and stability in the region.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East - Wikipedia,

<sup>2</sup> Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's (Founder of Turkey) foreign Policy in 1920s

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Regions/MiddleEast/>

## **Main Conflict Point of The Middle East**

There are many conflicts point in the Middle East today. The most important points which also affect Turkey are:

- Oil (The region contains  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world's oil reserves and producing  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the world's oil),
- The issue of rights to water resources,
- Kurdish Problem,
- The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,
- War in Iraq
- The Nuclear Program of Iran and
- The allegations of state-sponsored terrorism on the part of several Middle Eastern nations

**Iraq Issue:** Turkey supports the idea that territorial integrity and the national unity of Iraq must be preserved. Any political system of Iraq should be determined with the participation and consent of the Iraqi population. Turkey wishes to see a regime representative of and responsible to its entire people, a regime at peace also with its neighbors. The natural resources of Iraq are the wealth and property of the Iraqi nation as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Failure of the United States in Iraq or its unfortunate leaving Iraq before the new organize is fully established will cause chaos. Such a development of course does not serve Turkey's national interests.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Foreign Policy Of Turkey, Directorate General Of Press & Information Ankara, December 2002

<sup>5</sup> Speech of General Ilker Basbug, Deputy Chief Of Turkish General Staff

**Kurdish Issue:** Turkey's relations with Iran, Iraq, and Syria have been strongly influenced by the Kurdish issue. Turkey has a larger Kurdish population than any other state in the region Turkey's policies toward Iran, Syria, and especially Iraq have been shaped by its Kurdish problem.<sup>6</sup>

**Nuclear Power of Iran:** Iran with nuclear production will be the dominant power in the region.<sup>7</sup> Turkey has followed Iran's nuclear efforts with serious concern like other countries especially the US. Turkey can never be happy with an Iran who has nuclear weapons. Turkey supports the idea that the Middle East should be a region that cleared of nuclear weapons. Turkey wants this problem to be solved in peaceful ways. In the long run, Iran's nuclear power can be a threat, which is also an important security risk for Turkey.

**Political Dialogue With US on Middle East Issue:** Today, Turkey is US's strategic partner in NATO, in the eastern Mediterranean, in the Caucasus region and in the Middle East. Although some people argue that America does not need Turkey anymore, in the long run, America will continue to need Turkey especially on the Middle East- Iran, Iraq and Syria- and War on Terror issues.<sup>8</sup> The Turkish-American relation is based on strategic partnership. The dimension of strategic partnership is determined by the variety of the common interests of

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<sup>6</sup> Graham E. Fuller, Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths And Realities, The Washington Quarterly \_ Summer 2004

<sup>7</sup> Karl Vick, Energy, "Iran Spur Turkey's Revival of Nuclear Plans", Washington Post Foreign Service Tuesday, March 7, 2006

<sup>8</sup> Silvia Borzutzky, International Policy and Politics Class, "Presentation on Middle East" April 25, 2006

both nations.<sup>9</sup> The cooperation in the Middle East will be politically and economically beneficial for both countries.

**Economic and Trade Relations with Middle East** Turkey's economy is affected from any conflict in the region. Before the Gulf War, Iraq was the second biggest economic partner of the Turkey after Germany. Turkish economy lost as much as US \$35 billion because of UN embargo decision against Iraq since August, 1990. The peace and stability in the Middle East serves the interests of Turkey as much as the interests of all regional countries and affect the development of economic cooperation opportunities. Both U.S and Middle East countries are important trade partners of Turkey. Trade figures of Turkey with US and Middle East are illustrated below table.

<b>Trade Figures by Middle East Countries and USA (\$ Million)</b>							
	<b>1990</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPORT</b>	<b>12,959</b>	<b>21,637</b>	<b>27,775</b>	<b>31,34</b>	<b>36,059</b>	<b>47,253</b>	<b>63,121</b>
MIDDLE EAST	1,527	1,944	2,211	2,892	3,105	4,994	7,238
USA	968	1,514	3,135	3,126	3,356	3,752	4,832
<b>TOTAL IMPORT</b>	<b>22,302</b>	<b>35,709</b>	<b>54,503</b>	<b>41,399</b>	<b>51,554</b>	<b>69,340</b>	<b>97,540</b>
MIDDLE EAST	2,513	2,645	3,122	2,811	2,983	4,059	5,139
USA	2,282	3,724	3,911	3,261	3,099	3,496	4,697

Source: Turkey Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade

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<sup>9</sup> General Ilker Basbug, Deputy Chief Of Turkish General Staff,

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations:**

- Iran's nuclear power can be a threat; it is also an important security risk for Turkey. Turkey supports the idea that the Middle East should be a region that cleared of nuclear weapons. Turkey wants this problem to be solved in peaceful ways.
- Turkey has a major interest in the future of Iraq. Most important concerns of Turkey are unified of Iraq, Kurdish Issue, Turkmen populations, terrorist activities in the region (Hezbollah and PKK) and economic losses. Failure of the United States in Iraq will cause chaos. This failure does not serve Turkey's national interests
- Turkey should try to find a joint engagement with US against the PKK. If PKK stays in northern Iraq, this will turn the area into another southern Lebanon; this is not in the interests of the US, or Turkey or of a unified Iraq.
- Any conflict in the region, as experienced after the Gulf war, will politically and economically affect Turkey. Turkey foreign policy should be rational against the threats and opportunities in the region. Turkey continues to strongly encourage Middle East Countries for achieving peace and stability in the region.
- The Turkish-American relation is based on strategic partnership. The dimension of strategic partnership is determined by the variety of the common interests of both nations. Turkey should cooperate with US in the Middle East Policies. Strategic partnership of Turkey-US will be beneficial for both countries and this cooperation will positively affect both Middle East peace and stability and world stability at large.