SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.675| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 9 | Issue: 11 | November 2024 - Peer Reviewed Journal

TURKEY'S INVOLVEMENT IN RESOLVING REGIONAL CONFLICTS

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ABSTRACT

Today, global political and economic crises, conflicts, and disputes are leading to the erosion of the foundation and decisive principles of the international relations system. Confrontation and protectionism are causing the fragmentation of the world economy and the disruption of supply chains. New barriers are emerging that hinder effective cooperation between states in the areas of trade, finance, investment, technology, and innovation transfer. In particular, the events unfolding around Ukraine and in the Middle East demonstrate that the international geopolitical balance has entered a state of crisis. As a result, traditional trade and transport chains are being disrupted, logistics costs are significantly increasing, and new obstacles are appearing. In such an unstable situation, the Republic of Turkey is also striving to protect its national interests in its foreign policy, as well as to create conditions for establishing sustainable peace and development not only in the Eurasian region but also in the world. This article provides a scientific analysis of Turkey's participation in resolving regional conflicts.

KEYWORDS AND EXPRESSIONS: *Türkiye, global security, opportunities, challenges, foreign policy, alliances, diplomacy, leadership, conflicts.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, Turkey remains one of the countries actively involved in resolving regional conflicts. It is worth noting that in recent years, the geopolitical situation, international security threats, and strategic interests in the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East regions have been significantly influencing Turkey's foreign policy decisions. In this process, Turkey is engaged in managing and resolving regional conflicts through several strategic approaches.

Currently, Turkey places great emphasis on diplomatic mediation and negotiations in conflict resolution. For instance, during the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, Turkey organized negotiations between the parties and mediated the "Black Sea Grain Initiative". As is known, the Grain Deal, or the Black Sea Grain Initiative, is an international agreement signed between Russia and Ukraine on July 22, 2022, in Istanbul, under the mediation of Turkey and the United Nations. It aims to ensure the safe export of Ukraine's grain and other agricultural products through the Black Sea[1]. This agreement was of crucial importance at a time when the war posed a threat to global food security.

The main objective of the agreement is to establish a corridor for the safe and uninterrupted export of grain and other food products from the Ukrainian ports of Odessa, Chernomorsk, and Yuzhny, as well as to remove obstacles to the export of Russian food and fertilizers. Indeed, Ukraine is one of the world's major grain suppliers, and grain exports ceased after the outbreak of war, leading to a sharp rise in global food prices and food shortages. Initially, the agreements were concluded for 120 days, and in November 2022, they were extended for the same period. On May 18, 2023, Russia announced that it would extend the agreement by 60 days, until July 17, 2023, stating that this time would be sufficient to assess the implementation of the memorandum signed with the UN. Subsequently, Russia declared that the Grain Corridor Agreement would be suspended from July 18, 2023[2]. The reason given was that the West had not fulfilled any of its promises related to Russia's interests within the framework of the agreement. Russia announced that it would suspend its participation in the initiative until all conditions of the grain agreement were met. However, Turkey is still actively working to preserve the grain agreement.

MAIN PART

Overall, Turkey's initiative contributed to ensuring global food security and, as a result of the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine, led to a decrease in global agricultural product prices and reduced food shortages. According to UN data, millions of tons of grain products were exported as a result of the agreement, which was particularly important for countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This demonstrated Turkey's significant influence on the world order. Moreover, this agreement showed that it is

[1] *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea_Grain_Initiative*
[2] *https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1897157/*

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possible to reach a consensus even in the conflicting situation between Russia and Ukraine. In a sense, this became a success for Turkey's foreign policy.

It is known that by 2013-2014, a new organization threatening the security of the Republic of Turkey - the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) - began to emerge. Initially, Turkey attempted to support the opposition and address security issues with the assistance of the West and NATO, and even joined the anti-terrorist coalition. However, their interests regarding the Syrian crisis did not always align. In this context, Turkey began to address its security concerns through military operations in 2016, against the backdrop of its policy of independence from other countries. It is worth noting that almost all of these operations were actually directed at Kurdish structures, rather than ISIL, which is recognized as a terrorist group.

The first of Turkey's military campaigns began in August of that year following a deadly terrorist attack organized by militants in the border city of Gaziantep[3]. Operation "Euphrates Shield" which was not agreed upon with the official Syrian government, commenced in the spring of 2017. Through this operation, Turkey succeeded in capturing the Al-Bab region and pushing the Kurds away from its borders.

Furthermore, Turkey's subsequent military operation was named "Olive Branch" and commenced in January 2018. The main objective of this military campaign was to liberate Afrin, which had been occupied by Kurdish structures of the "Democratic Union" party and the national self-defense units.

In addition, on October 9, 2019, Turkish President R.T. Erdogan announced the launch of a military operation called "Peace Spring" against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is banned in Turkey, and ISIS. This operation concluded on October 22, 2019, as a result of negotiations between the leaders of Russia and Turkey. It is particularly important to note that Turkey's "Peace Spring" operation was not supported in either the West or the Middle East.

In recent years, Turkey has been actively involved in the peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict. In particular, Turkey is striving to strengthen its regional influence through the "Astana Process" and has achieved several important successes as a result. This process, which has been ongoing since 2017, was established with the aim of ending the war in Syria and resolving the conflict through political means. Turkey has actively participated in this process as one of the main "guarantor" states (*along with Russia and Iran*). Turkey's main achievements through the "Astana Process" can be summarized as follows:

1. Creation of de-escalation zones
During the "Astana Processes," Turkey achieved a reduction in military conflicts in Syria and ensured the safety of civilians. Based on the agreement signed in 2017, four de-escalation zones were created, in which measures were taken to cease fire and provide assistance to civilians. The establishment of de-escalation zones helped to reduce the level of violence in Syria.

2. Active mediation role in political negotiations
As part of the Astana Process, Turkey, together with Russia and Iran, held negotiations between the main military and political forces in Syria. Through this process, Turkey gained the opportunity to directly influence the conflict and strengthen its mediating role in the region. Turkey also actively participated in the Geneva process and played an important role in seeking political solutions in cooperation with the international community.

3. Creating conditions for humanitarian aid
Through the "Astan Processes," Turkey has managed to create conditions for the continuous provision of humanitarian aid in Syria. During this process, agreements were signed aimed at creating safe zones for refugees and improving the socio-economic situation in Syria. This contributed to the recognition of Turkey as a leading country in providing humanitarian aid.

4. Regional security
Through the Astana Process, Turkey gained the opportunity to protect its national security interests and reduce the influence of Kurdish militants and terrorist groups in Syria. The establishment of de-escalation zones in the northern regions of Syria held strategic importance for Turkey, as it allowed Turkey to successfully ensure its border security in these areas.

5. Strengthening geopolitical influence
Through the "Astana Process" Turkey has increased its geopolitical influence in the region. By cooperating with Russia and Iran, Turkey has strengthened its position in Syria and become an important player in international diplomacy. This process has enhanced Turkey's influence in the Middle East, transforming it into one of the key mediators in resolving regional issues.

[3] *Erdağ R. Normalleşmeden gerilim ve çatışmaya: Türkiye-Suriye ilişkileri // İnat K., Aslan A., Duran B. Kuruluşundan bugüne AK Parti. Dış politika. 2. Baskı. İstanbul: SETA Kitapları, 2018. S. 333.*

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In conclusion, Turkey has achieved significant progress in resolving the Syrian conflict, providing humanitarian aid, and mediating political negotiations through the "Astana Process". This process has given Turkey the opportunity to protect its national security interests, strengthen its regional influence, and play a role as a key mediator in international diplomacy. The "Astana Process" has served to reduce the level of violence in Syria, enhance dialogue, and improve the situation of the civilian population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The most sensitive point in Turkish-Israeli relations is the ongoing struggle for territory between Israel and Palestine. Considering that the majority of Turkey's population consists of Muslim citizens, Turkey, as a Muslim state, considers it its duty to support the Palestinians. Israel, however, expresses dissatisfaction with this stance.

By March 2018, a new wave of tensions had resurfaced in the region. This was attributed to the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem. The President of Turkey declared Israel a terrorist state and proposed convening an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Moreover, relations between the two sides further deteriorated due to the conflict that erupted in the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023. Simultaneously, Turkey's independent policy is causing negative dynamics in the relations among regional countries. Relations with Iraq have also worsened due to Turkey's arbitrary military operations on Syrian territory. Turkey's direct or indirect involvement in all political processes in the region and its pursuit of hegemony are causing discontent among leading countries such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran.

It should be noted that Turkey is attempting to restore its position by providing humanitarian aid to countries in the region. To date, it has extended a helping hand of unconditional assistance to countries such as Yemen and Palestine. Only time will tell how effective this strategy proves to be.

The measures taken by Turkey against Israel's policies towards Muslims have led to an increase in its standing among Arab and Islamic countries. In response to Turkey's harsh measures against it, Israel has announced its full support for PKK militants located in Turkey's most troubled southeastern region and the entire Kurdish nation in pursuing an anti-Turkey policy.

Taking advantage of the political instability in contemporary Arab countries, we can observe that Turkey is trying to reduce Israel's military potential in the region while increasing its own power and sphere of influence. The policy aimed at displacing Israel from its leadership position in the Middle East region has demonstrated that Turkey is enhancing its prestige among Islamic countries, thereby signaling significant changes in its foreign policy.

The improvement of relations between Iran and Turkey does not fully align with Israel's interests. In particular, the inclusion of Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the improvement of these relations may lead to Israel's isolation in the region. In turn, it can be observed that Israel is also striving to maintain its sphere of influence in the region with all its might.

In addition, Turkey supported Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, achieving several successes during this war. During the conflict in the fall of 2020, Turkey established close military cooperation with Azerbaijan, thereby successfully strengthening its regional influence. We can list the following as Turkey's main achievements in the Azerbaijan-Armenia war:

1. Strengthening geopolitical influence

Turkey bolstered its geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus by supporting Azerbaijan. Through this assistance, Turkey developed a close strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and emerged as a powerful player in the region. Following the war, Turkey's political and military influence in the South Caucasus region increased significantly, which enhanced Turkey's competitive position in the area.

2. Strengthening the leadership role in the Turkish world

Turkey strengthened its leadership role in the Turkish world by strengthening strategic cooperation with Azerbaijan. During the war, President Erdogan's open support for Azerbaijan and his strong anti-Armenian stance increased Turkey's leadership position among the Turkic states. Through this, Turkey strengthened the principle of "one nation, two states" with Azerbaijan and achieved further rapprochement between the Turkic peoples.

3. Testing and exporting military technology

During the war, Azerbaijan achieved significant success using Turkish-developed "*Bayraktar TB2*" unmanned combat aerial vehicles. These drones proved highly effective on the battlefield, destroying numerous military equipment units of the Armenian

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army. This success further elevated the reputation of Turkey's defense industry on the international stage and provided a strong impetus for expanding its military technology exports.

4. Opportunities for implementation of joint infrastructure projects
After the war, when Azerbaijan regained its sovereignty in territories bordering Karabakh and Armenia, opportunities arose to implement new infrastructure projects with Turkey. In this regard, the project to restore land communication between Turkey and Azerbaijan through the Zangazur corridor is of great importance. This corridor not only strengthens trade and economic ties, but also serves to develop the transport network connecting the Turkish world.

5. Regional cooperation and expansion of economic opportunities
Azerbaijan's victory has created new economic opportunities for Turkey in the region. Turkish companies have participated in rebuilding infrastructure in the Karabakh area and gained investment prospects. Additionally, Turkey is taking steps to strengthen cooperation in energy and trade within the region, which is expanding the scope of economic benefits.

6. Promoting the peace process with Armenia
After the war, Turkey is endeavoring to establish diplomatic dialogue with Armenia to strengthen peace and stability in the region. Within the framework of the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey is also striving to restore relations with Armenia and reinforce peace. This is considered an important step in safeguarding Turkey's strategic interests in the Caucasus.

In summary, Turkey has achieved significant gains in the Azerbaijan-Armenia war by supporting Azerbaijan, thereby enhancing its regional influence, consolidating its leadership role in the Turkic world, increasing exports of military technologies, implementing infrastructure projects, and expanding economic opportunities. Concurrently, Turkey continues its efforts to ensure stability in the region and improve diplomatic relations with Armenia. These achievements have further strengthened Turkey's strategic role in the South Caucasus and transformed it into a key player in the region.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it should be noted that Turkey is one of the countries actively involved in resolving regional conflicts, and its political, economic, and military strategies are manifested in various ways. Turkey operates in several areas in order to expand its influence in the international arena, protect its national interests, and ensure regional stability. The following key areas describing Turkey's participation in dispute resolution are presented:

1. Diplomatic Mediation and Negotiations
Turkey is assuming the role of diplomatic mediator to facilitate peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region. For instance, during the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, Turkey acted as an intermediary to establish dialogue between the parties. This involvement resulted in the signing of the "Grain Deal" which contributed to ensuring global food security. Additionally, to resolve the Syrian conflict through political means, Turkey, Russia, and Iran jointly initiated the "Astana Process." This process served to reduce violence and establish peace in Syria.

2. Military Operations and Security Measures
Turkey is conducting military operations to ensure regional security and stability. Several military operations have been carried out against Kurdish militants and terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. Specifically, the "Olive Branch" and "Peace Spring" operations were aimed at protecting Turkey's national security and ensuring safety in border areas. During the Libyan Civil War, Turkey supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) and provided it with military assistance.

3. Humanitarian aid Programs
Turkey is implementing humanitarian programs to provide assistance to populations affected by regional conflicts. During the war in Syria, Turkey has actively participated in receiving, accommodating, and assisting millions of refugees. Additionally, Turkey has provided support to the local population in Afghanistan by implementing assistance programs in the fields of medicine, education, and other social sectors.

4. Establish Regional Alliances and Strategic Alliances
Turkey is playing a crucial role in conflict resolution by strengthening regional alliances and strategic partnerships. For instance, during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020, Turkey provided political and military support to Azerbaijan, contributing to Azerbaijan's victory in the dispute with Armenia. Additionally, during the political crisis in the Persian Gulf, Turkey supported Qatar by establishing a military base there and developing strategic cooperation with the country.
In conclusion, Turkey has been employing various methods and means to resolve regional conflicts, increasing its influence through diplomatic mediation, military operations, humanitarian aid, and strategic alliances. These approaches reflect Turkey's aspirations to maintain regional stability, protect its national interests, and play a significant role in international politics. This involvement serves to enhance Turkey's prestige both in the region and on the international stage.

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