

## **Change of Turkey's Middle East Policy in the Second Half of the XX Century in the Context of Relations with Syria**

Sabina Nameddinovna Kulueva and Ramil Mirgasimovich Valeev  
Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies,  
Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to study trends in the Middle East policy of Turkey in the second half of the twentieth century. In the basis of the work are key components of the policy of Turkey's relations with the countries of the region. The basic research method is a systematic approach, for the Middle East policy of Turkey is a separate subsystem in the system of foreign policy of Ankara. As tools of historical research were used such methods as historic-genetic and problem-chronological. Historical-genetic method allows us to trace the successive disclosure of changes in the object of this study. Problem-chronological method of study and presentation contributes to the progressive lighting of features of significant events of regional and international importance. As a result of the study a trend of transformation of the Middle East policy of Turkey was revealed. The policy of active rapprochement with the United States and the European Union, adopted by the Turkish leadership, has negatively affected Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East region. Nevertheless, some regional events and the negative results of a one-vector policy, forced Turkey to establish relations with its neighbors, including Syria, relations with which from 1938 were characterized as tensed. In our opinion, the fact that many researchers have noted the priority of relations of Turkey with the West, until the end of the cold war era, quite incorrect, for the analysis of bilateral treaties in the field of trade, culture, security indicates the trend of establishing interstate relations with the countries of the Middle East region (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Israel).

**Key words:** Middle East, Turkey's foreign policy, Syria's foreign policy, International relations, Adana agreement, arab-Israeli conflict, the Kurdish issue

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Political processes in the Middle East in the second half of the twentieth century raise scientific interest among researchers up to this day, for this period of time was rich in events, having a significant influence on the course of contemporary regional and global politics. There is a voluminous layer of different papers on this problem, however, every researcher brings something new in connection with a change in the interpretation of historical events, the emergence of new data, using different approaches and methods of analysis of the problem, as well as personal factors. This work focused on the coverage of Turkey's relations with Syria from the perspective of both domestic and foreign historians, involving primary sources. The concept of defining the vector of Turkey's foreign policy was based on the principles of Kemalism, however, internal and external factors has subjected the country's policy adjustments. In the postwar period, the Republic, due to disagreements

with the Soviet Union on the future of the Straits and the Eastern territories, joined the Western bloc and became one of the countries, receiving financial support according to the Marshall plan. Over time, however, a unidirectional foreign policy has led to the economic crisis which caused the military intervention to stabilize the political situation.

As it is known, in accordance with the text of the secret agreement, of Sykes-Picot from 1916, Syria along with Lebanon and Mosul Kirkuk were part of the so-called zone A, the zone of influence of France. Paragraph 1 of this agreement meant that in the region A - France and in the region B - Britain alone will provide advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab State or Confederation of Arab States (Anonymaous, 1998). After the World war Syria was to settle the question of concessions and the protection of the common border with Lebanon, to revise the membership of Aleksandretskoy Sandzak, however, the task of paramount importance was the struggle with Israel. It is

known that the attempt of the members of the League of Arab States to win a military victory over the state of Israel failed. Despite of a peace agreement, signed in February 1949, military clashes on the Israeli-Syrian border escalated. A special difficulty in bilateral relations was represented by the possibility of Israel's right to the further drainage works in the swamp of the lake Hula. Alternating coups, in which each new Governor has implemented new reforms, led to a loosening of the system, for there was not a single, coherent program, as for economic recovery measures and for definition of the external policy. This situation continued until 1970, when the government passed to the former Minister of defense Hafez al-Assad who was in charge of the country during the next thirty years and managed to achieve relative peace in the state. In foreign policy, the new Head has improved relations with the USSR, trying to recover the Golan Heights, lost in 1967 and to turn the country into a leader in the Middle East region.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research is primarily based on the use of a systematic approach. The Middle East policy of Turkey is a complex system, in which relations with each individual state in the region under study is a subsystem. The influence of various events, primarily of regional significance, made possible the withdrawal of Turkey from a one-vector policy, namely the gradual establishment of relations with Iraq, Iran, Syria and Israel which together have led to a change in the entire Middle East policy of the country. The next tool of historical research historical-genetic method allows us to reveal consistently properties of the studied reality in the process of its movement. Such events of the second half of the twentieth century, as the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the Iran Iraq war 1980-1988, the aggravation of the Kurdish question in 1984, became the reasons of the changes in the diplomatic course of Ankara. Thanks to the problem-chronological method the interconnection of all the key events of the period under review is achieved.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Since the second half of the twentieth century a change in the concept of foreign policy is proclaimed in Turkey: from now on, it begins to work closely with the Soviet Union and with the countries of the Middle East. It is considered, that a departure from the previous course was carried out only with the aim of developing and strengthening the country's economy and all the other arguments were just a kind of smokescreen. However,

many of the events of the second half of the twentieth century and Turkey's position in relation to them can be interpreted from another point of view. There is a reason to believe, that in this period of time one of the factors, that influenced the foreign policy of Turkey, was Islam. As one of the researchers of modern Islam Abdullah Rahnamo says, the Islamic factor is the Islamic structure and organization, the Islamic clergy, the Islamic political and non-political movements, Islamic culture and values, traditions and mentality of the Muslim population, Islamic education etc (Rahnamo, 2016). Thus, Turkey's relations with the countries of the Middle East, specifically Syria, should be seen from this position too, for a long-standing dominance of Islam in the country could not influence the foreign policy of the state.

The Middle East policy of Turkey was part of a unified diplomatic course of Ankara. The history of relations between Turkey and Syria is a vivid example of Turkey's relations with its neighbours. After the change of leadership in Syria in 1961, Turkey was the second country to recognize this power, however, it is worth noting, that in the post-war period Turkish-Syrian relations were very limited in scale, because Alexandretsky Sandzak, passed in 1938 to Turkey in exchange for the conclusion of a Treaty with France and Great Britain on mutual assistance on the eve of the Second World war, for many years has become a stumbling block in the development of bilateral relations. For example, when in 1956 the Suez crisis broke out, Syria fully supported the efforts of Egypt to nationalize the Suez Canal while in the company of Tehran and then of Baghdad conferences of the Baghdad Pact (in November 1956), the representatives of Iran and Turkey actually justified the actions of Britain (Anonymaous, 1998). At the beginning of the 1960-s the relations between the countries, although there were many unifying factors, had strained due to contradictions, both political and ideological nature.

A new stage in relations between Turkey and countries of the Middle East began in the early 1970-s. On the one hand, the Yom Kippur War broke in 1973, on the other hand, the Cyprus crisis of 1974 led to a cooling of relations with Western block. With the outbreak of the Yom Kippur war, countries-the oil exporters of the Persian Gulf have increased fuel prices by 70%. This step was taken in order to compel Israel to leave Arab territories and recognize the rights of the Palestinians. The subsequent jump in prices has hit the economy of the States, importing hydrocarbons, among which was Turkey. As a result, European Economic Community expressed their sympathy for the Palestinians, Britain stopped supplying arms to Israel and Japan ceased to

provide Israel with verbal support (Calvocress, 2009). Ankara, in turn, initiated the revision of the Middle Eastern vector of foreign policy: Turkey joined the UN resolution and demanded the return of territories, seized by Israel during the six day war, in particular, the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Western Bank of the Jordan river. In the conflict of 1973 Turkey openly took the position of the Arabs (Balci's, 2013). not allowing the US planes to use the Incirlik military base. In the Cyprus crisis, from two NATO members, the West has chosen the side of Greece which led to the corresponding reaction of Ankara. The factors, summed up together, contributed to the improvement of relations between Turkey and its neighbors and gave benefits for both sides.

Another part of the Middle East policy of Turkey is resolving the Kurdish problem. The war in the Persian Gulf in 1991 and Iraq war of 2003 have made it real the creation in 2006, of the Iraq Kurdistan which served as a strong incentive for other representatives of the national minorities in the struggle for the attainment of sovereignty. It is well known, that during the first decades after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, three large-scale Kurdish uprising in 1925, in 1927 and in 1936-1938 were recorded. All the rebellions were harshly suppressed and then the desire of the Kurdish population to create their own state faded. The issue of security of the south-eastern borders of Turkey was raised in the mid-1980-s which was the result of a hard refuse of the Turkish government to grant for the Kurds cultural, linguistic and political rights, because of fears that the measure could lead to the collapse of the entire state (Gunter, 2008). In addition, the power vacuum, resulting Iran-Iraq war, was on hand to the Kurds and, first of all, to the Kurds, inhabiting Northern Iraq. The increase in terrorist operations, organized by the Kurdistan Labor party (KLP), has led to the strengthening of cooperation between the four sides, namely, to the conclusion of various agreements on combating the terrorist activities of the KLP. For example, in accordance with the Agreement on border security and mutual cooperation, signed with Iraq, Turkey received the right to pursue the KLP fighters into Iraqi territory for five miles. The provision by Syria of support to the militants of the KLP and ASALA, located on the Lebanese territory. caused strong resentment of Turkey, to which it threatened to use armed force. As a result, Syria by the end of 1983 expelled the forces of the KLP and ASALA from its territory to Iran, to the North of Iraq and into the Bekaa valley. However, this step did not completely solve the problem, because Syria continued to support the KLP. The atmosphere was tensed and by the end of the 1990s Turkey began to threaten with the outbreak of hostilities.

As a result, in 1998, a bilateral Protocol was signed in Adana, according to which Syria was obliged to recognize the KLP as a terrorist organization, to ban its activities on its territory, not to allow the members of the PKK to the country and to counteract the activation of the KLP camps. The Kurdish question which received the status of international issue, has priority for Turkey to this day.

Another important issue, that requires concerted action of several states, is the distribution of water. The lack of fresh water is due to several reasons. Firstly, the population of the Middle East and of the whole world is growing steadily. Secondly, the amount of water in the rivers, flowing from the territory of the states of the "upper" pool, due to the increasing consumption, is gradually decreasing. Thirdly, the quality of water, entering the territory of the states of the "lower" pool, due to the construction of various water structures, is declining over time. The problem of water resources for Turkey is to find a compromise in the allocation of waters of the Tigris, the Euphrates and the ASI with Iraq and Syria. The difference in opinions, regarding the dedicated portion of water of the total volume is a stumbling block for all three countries. Over time, the problem of water resources has become so acute, that Turkey started to use it as a tool of pressure in solving the Kurdish question. The plan of Turkey in the construction of a complex of buildings, called "The Project of southeastern Anatolia", has alarmed Iraq and Syria. Especially in Syria, in the late 1980-s, an active policy to overcome the foreign trade deficit by increasing exports of agricultural products began. Therefore, the construction of modern irrigation canals, hydropower plants, reservoirs in the region has become a serious problem in the implementation of the program of the state. To solve the problem, the Protocol on cooperation in the sphere of economy was signed in 1987. Paragraph 6 of the Protocol obliged Turkey to pass to Syria a water volume of 500 cubic meters per second, in the case of lowering the volume, the Turkish side took the obligation to compensate for the resulting difference in the following months (Anonymous, 1998). However, the Turkish government's actions can be regarded as quite hard, however, considering peculiarities of the Syrian climate, this agreement contributed to the year-round providing Syria with water. Two years later, Syria and Iraq signed a bilateral agreement on the percentage distribution of water, coming from the Turkish territory. A significant aspect of this issue is the shift in Turkish policy, because it is promised not to use its geographical position as a political instrument of pressure in the future.

Since, the 1970s, Ankara, along with the improvement of political relations with the countries of the region, began to establish relations in trade and economic sphere.

Constant US financial assistance could not fully improve the economy of Turkey because Turkey was a strategically important military point which field of defense but not the development of national production, had to be maintained. Close cooperation with the West had a negative consequence in the form of separation from the neighbors which were very profitable markets for Turkish goods. Striking confirmation of this is the Turkish-Syrian contract of 1982, providing for the development of bilateral trade. It is noteworthy that export of the Turkish products is much more, than the Syrian. Syria has pledged to export oil and oil products, while Turkey exported products of light and heavy industry. In addition to this document, the countries signed an agreement on cargo transportation. Special attention should be paid to the enclosed letter with the request to prohibit the provision of transport services to passengers, who arrived from Israel or traveling to Israel, not to carry loads that are to be sent to Israel or follow there from (Anonymous, 1998). Syria itself was interested in improving bilateral ties. President Hafez al-Assad, till the end of his reign, wanted to make his state the leader of the Arab world in the struggle against Israel and to regain the lost territories. To achieve this goal it was necessary to strengthen the domestic economy, so the establishment of trade relations promised benefits for both sides.

The conclusions, given in the study, largely develop the materials presented in the works of such historians as A. Baldry, O. Sander and M. Shahin. Turkish historian M. Shahin notes, that the adjustments to the change of the Middle East policy of the country was made under the influence of the Western countries. O. Sander describes in detail both internal factors, namely the growing influence of the public on the political course of the country after gaining a broader civil rights, thanks to the Constitution of 1961 and external factors, such as the escalation of the Cyprus crisis, etc. The Turkish researcher A. Baldry, in turn, says that the Turkish-Syrian cooperation coincided with the need to implement economic and political reforms (Balcis, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

To summarize the aspects of Turkish-Syrian intergovernmental relations, it should be recalled that both states for nearly four-hundred-year period were the parts of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the development of sovereign states, the people of both countries will always have a unifying moments: combined centuries-old ethnopolitical history, culture and Islamic tradition. It is the preservation and development of historical and cultural traditions which will largely contribute to mutually beneficial political, economic and cultural cooperation between Turkey and Syria, despite inter-state differences and conflicts.

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