



# Peace, War and the World in European Security Challenges

## Securitization of Turkish Middle East Relations

Intensive Course

“Navigating Security in the Storming World”

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# POWERS

- **Is Turkey a Middle Eastern Country?**

- **YES**

- Ottoman History
- Same religion
- Different ethnic groups
- Different languages
- Some similarities in traditions and life style







# Why is Middle East Important for Turkey?

**1. Energy (oil & natural gas)**

**2. Economic significance:**

- Middle East states are Turkey's trading partners.
- FDI in Turkey by Middle Eastern investors is high. (Especially by the oil-exporting countries of the Gulf).

**3. Security dimension.** Developments in the region may have critical impact on Turkey.

**4. Historical & cultural ties with the region** (Ottoman legacy).

**5. Middle East is a critical** for Turkey's relations with the West.

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- Current states of
  - Syria,
  - Iraq,
  - Lebanon,
  - Israel,
  - Palestine
  - Jordan
  - Egypt
  - Tunisia
  - Libya
  - Saudi Arabia
- (partially or the whole country) were either under the rule or control of the Ottoman Empire for centuries





- Early Years of the Republic of Turkey
- During the Cold War Period

**I. Securitization** of Turkish Middle Eastern relations during the 1990s

**II. Desecuritization** of Turkish Middle Eastern relations during the 2000s

**III. Back to securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern relations during the 2010s**



# Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the early years of the Republic of Turkey and the Cold War

## Between Two World Wars

- Middle Eastern countries are under the British and French Mandates
  - Syria and Lebanon are under French mandate
  - Iraq and Jordan are under British mandate
- Turkey is in the process of establishing its republic
- Reluctance to get involved in the affairs of the region—keeping distance

## In the Aftermath of World War II

- Middle East countries are in the process of establishing their independent republics
- Turkey is not supportive of these independence movement due to its skepticism that → the neighboring countries would join the Communist bloc.

## • Early Cold War Period (1945-1970s)

- Turkey becomes a member of NATO in 1952
- Turkey joins the Western bloc & a USA ally
  - Bagdad Pact
- Most Middle countries follow anti-Western and pro-Soviet policies

## • Late Cold War Period (1970s-1990s)

- Declining Turkish American relations
- Rapprochement between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries

## I. Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 1990s

- In the 1990s, Turkey's **regional security concerns** → related to Turkey's **own internal problems**.
- Turkey's activism in the region was limited to its immediate neighbors and focused mainly on **security issues** → **security oriented foreign policy**
  - Rise of PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) attacks
  - 1990-1991 Gulf War
- In the 1990s → use of **military means** to resolve conflicts was common
- Balancing alliances, military relations, military threats & interventions ...
- **Hard power** policy





## I. Securitization of Tur-ME Rel. during the 1990s



- **Turkish Syrian Relations**

- Syrian support for PKK
  - PKK members were trained in Syria and its leader lived in Syria
  - Intensification of PKK attacks to Turkey in late 1990s → Tr massing troops to Syrian border demanding expulsion of Ocalan
- Hydropolitics (Water Politics) → Turkey's GAP Project
- Hatay question





## I. Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 1990s

### • Turkish Iraqi Relations

- PKK terrorists attacking from Iraqi border throughout the 1990s
- Turkey played an active role in the first Gulf War by participating the US-led international coalition.
- By the end of the Gulf War:
  - More PKK attacks to Turkey
  - Massive Kurdish refugee flow to Turkey
  - Establishment of Kurdish Regional Government in 1992
  - Economic loss due to Kerkuk-Ceyhan Pipeline
  - Use of Incirlik airbase for Operation Provide Comfort



Kurdish refugees at the Turkey-Iraq border a few days after the end of the Gulf War, 1991. Photo by Chris Kutschera

# I. Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 1990s

## • Turkish Iranian Relations

- Ideological differences
- Competition over newly independent counties of Central Asia and Caucasus countries
- Turkey accused Iran for getting involved in the serial assassination of Kemalist intellectuals in Turkey.
- Turkey accused Iran for supporting **PKK**
- Turkey accused Iran for attempting to export an '**anti-secular regime**' to Turkey.
- Iranian ambassador Bagheris' extreme talk in Jerusalem Day in Jan. 1997.





## II. Desecuritization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s

- In the 1990s, Turkey's activism was limited to its immediate neighbors and focused mainly on **security issues, security oriented foreign policy**

➔ In the 2000s, Turkey's activism was region wide, focused on various issues.

- PKK attacks emanating from Syria and Iraq shaped the relations of the period

"Zero problem with the neighbors"

Strategic Depth doctrine.

"Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs."

- Relations of 1990s were identified with military means (balancing alliances, military threats & interventions) ➔ Relations of 2000s were identified with more **diplomatic means** to achieve foreign policy objectives in the region (**soft power**)
- "Zero problem with the neighbors"
- (diplomatic negotiation, engagement, economic interdependence, mediation, common culture).
  - Desecuritization of the PKK problem
  - Creating economic interdependence
  - Close relations between leaderships

## II. Desecuritization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s

- **Turkish Syrian Relations**
- Rapid improvement of relations
- Adana Accords (1998-Hafez Assad period)
- Increasing cooperation, on tourism, trade and investment → abolition of the visas and initiation of joint military exercises
- Land mines along the border were cleared.
- Border restrictions were eased.
- Turkey defends Beshar Assad regime against American President Bush's imposed economic sanctions against Syria in May 2004.
- Both countries signed a Joint Political Declaration on establishing High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) in September 2009.
- Turkey attempting to play mediator role between Syria and Israel





## II. Desecuritization of Turkish-Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s

### • Turkish Iraqi Relations

- US Invasion of Iraq in 2003 → Turkey did not join
- Turkish government improved its relations with both Shiite and Sunni groups
- Increase in high-level visits
- Turkey recognized Kurdish Regional Government and increased economic relations → KRG is important for the construction sector of Turkey
- Trade volume increased tremendously
- KRG was a mediator in Turkish Kurdish relations
- KRG was a significant supplier of oil and natural gas
- Turkey is the key transit route for Kurdish exports (hydrocarbon) to world markets—transit fees



## II. Desecuritization of Turkish-Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s

### • Turkish Iranian Relations

- Improving relations -- Both are against US occupation of Iraq in 2003
- Both are against PJAK and PKK--Turkey and Iran signed a **memorandum of understanding** to express their willingness to develop cooperation on security issues in their fight against PJAK and PKK in April 2008,
- Improvement in energy relations—Iran is a viable supplier for Turkey—economic interdependence
- In 2001 Tabriz-Erzurum gas pipeline started carrying natural gas to Turkey reducing Turkish dependence on Russian natural gas
- Turkey has tried mediating a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear program





## II. Desecuritization of Turkish-Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s

### ■ Turkish GCC Relations

- Turkish-GCC political, trade and economic and trade relations improved
  - Oil rich GCC countries direct funds to Turkey
  - Turkish businessmen are in GCC markets
  - Turkish workers are in GCC countries
  - Turkey attracts investment from GCC countries
  - Increase in the exports of Turkey to the region
  - Turkey becomes a tourist destination for GCC countries
- Both sides supported Iraq's territorial integrity following USA invasion in 2003
- Both sides are Sunni Muslims and concerned about Iran's increasing influence on Iraq
- Framework Agreement for Economic Cooperation between Turkey and GCC signed in May 2005 in Manama, Bahrain.
- "Strategic dialogue" was signed in Sept. 2008.





## II. Desecuritization of Turkish-Middle Eastern Relations during the 2000s



### • Turkish Saudi Arabian Relations

- Mutual negative perceptions improved under Justice and Dev. Party and King Abdullah rule
- Establishment of an investment fund to encourage private and public investments
- Signing of a cooperation agreement in Feb. 2005 → to fight against transnational terrorism.
- During the Arab Spring two Sunni countries cooperated against Iran-led regional Shiite bloc.



### ▪ Turkish Qatar Relations

- Many high level visits throughout the 2000s
- Visit of Qatari emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to Tr. In Dec. 2001 paved the way for economic and military cooperation.
- Qatar and Turkey signed a military agreement in July 2002 concerning cooperation in military training and arms sales.
- In 2007 another agreement on defence industries → Tr sold drones to Qatar in 2007 and more military equipment in 2011.



# Arab Spring





## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s

- Turkey foreign policy transformed back to security-oriented foreign policy and started once more resorting to the use of hard power and coercive diplomacy
- Main reason for this turn was:
  - Arab Spring leading to civil war in Syria →
  - Leading to rise of **PKK attacks**
  - Leading to the alliance of **PKK** with Syrian Kurdish groups –**YPG and PYD**
  - Leading to the emergence of extreme groups such as **ISIS** –its attacks to Turkey





## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s



### • Turkish Syrian Relations

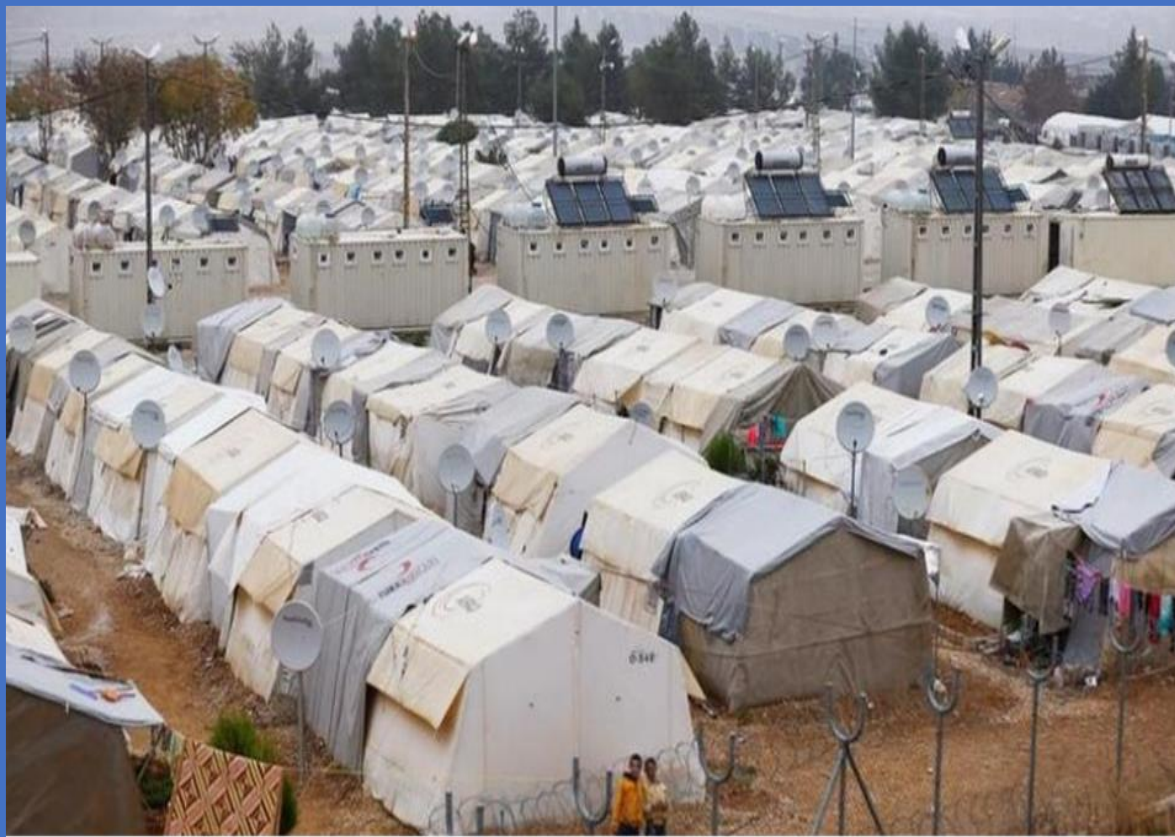
- When the first protests broke out against the Assad regime, Turkey tried to convince Assad to implement political reforms.
- When Syrian government insisted on using force, Turkey took a clear stance against Assad and started openly hosting the Syrian opposition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) by August 2011.
- Syrian civil war poses a serious security challenge for Turkey
  - **PKK attacks** → with the support of PYD and YPG
  - **Refugee Crisis** (Appr. 3.7 mil. refugees in Turkey)

- **Operation Euphrates Shield** (2016-2017)
- **Astana Peace Talks** (Jan 2017-series of talks)
- **Idlib Operation** (2017—1,5 years)
- **Istanbul Summit** (Oct. 2018)
- **Operation Olive Branch** (Afrin Operation) (Jan. 2018—58 days)
- **Operation Peace Spring** (October 2019)
- **Operation Spring Shield** (Feb. 2020)
- **Operation Tiger Claw –Claw Eagle 1** (June 2020)
- **Operation Claw Eagle 2** (Feb. 2021)





## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s



A general view of Nizip refugee camp, near the Turkish-Syrian border in Gaziantep province, Turkey. November 30, 2016. (Reuters Archive)





Turkey is home to as many as three million refugees who fled the civil war in Syria. (Reuters file)



## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s

- **Turkish Iraqi Relations**
- Tensions between al-Maliki government and Erdogan government due to **Syrian civil war**
- Al-Maliki government supported Assad government in Syria, whereas Turkey backed Sunni opposition (Free Syrian Army).
- **Bashiqa conflict** in 2015
- **PKK** ended its five-year unilateral ceasefire in 2015 → starting its attacks in rural and urban areas in Turkey → Turkish government started its airstrikes on PKK bases in northern Iraq → These strikes deteriorated Turkish-KRG partnership.
- Alliance of **YPG**, **PKK** and **KRG** Peshmerga forces due to ISIS attacks worsened Turkish-KRG relations
- **KRG Independence of 2017**—Turkey is afraid of its impact on destabilizing the region and its potential domino effect



| Turkish Kurds   | Syrian Kurds   | Iraqi Kurds   |
|---|--|---|
| <br><b>PKK:</b> Banned Kurdistan Workers' Party led by Abdullah Ocalan (jailed since 1999)<br><br><b>PKK:</b> Operates some camps in northern Iraq | <br><b>PYD:</b> Democratic Unity Party, aligned to the PKK<br><br><b>YPG:</b> Armed force, aligned to the PYD | <br><b>KRG:</b> Kurdish Regional Government<br><br><b>Peshmerga:</b> Armed forces of the KRG<br><br><b>KDP:</b> Dominant Iraqi Kurdish Party, led by Massoud Barzani |
| Aligned   |  |   |

## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s

- **Turkish Iranian Relations**
- Turkey and Iran are on the opposing sides during the Syrian Civil War
- Deployment of NATO missile shield radar in Malatya-Kurecik was considered as a threat to Iranian security.
- =====
- Move towards rapprochement
- **Astana Peace Process** –brought the countries closer
- Both countries opposed KRG referendum in 2017
- Both countries opposed Saudi blockade of Qatar in 2017





## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s



### • Turkish S. Arabia Relations

- Deterioration of relations in 2015 due to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's coming to power

### • Qatar Diplomatic Crisis

- In June 2017 Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates cut off diplomatic and trade relations with Qatar → accusing the country for supporting terrorism and destabilizing the region → although Qatar rejected the accusations → it faced serious economic and political blockade.
- Turkey supported Qatar economically and diplomatically and attempted to solve the crisis
- Tr. sent Turkish troops to be deployed at a Turkish military base in Qatar in June 2017 → S. Arabia is not happy with Turkey's expanding military presence in Qatar

- Murder of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul increased the tension
- Competition between two countries for a leadership role in the Islamic world showed itself in:
  - Qatar Crisis
  - Egyptian coup of 2013
  - Conflict in Syria
  - Libya's civil war
- S. Arabia expresses its solidarity with Cyprus and Greece against Turkey's conduct in the Eastern Mediterranean.



## III. Back to Securitization of Turkish-Middle Eastern Relations during the 2010s:

- Civil War in your neighboring country
- Attacks from your neighboring countries PKK, PYD, YPG
  - Violation of territory
  - Attacks to civilians

**There is no way Turkey can desecuritize its foreign policy towards the Middle East !!!**







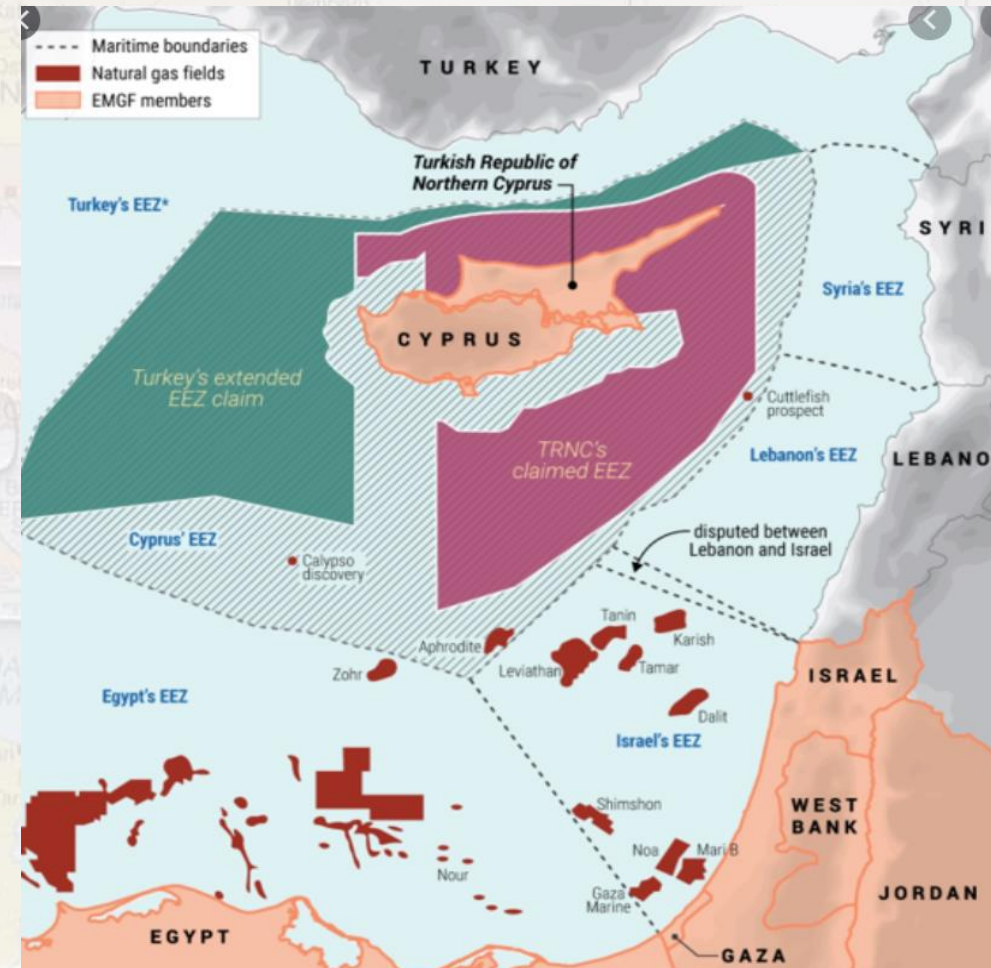
### III. Back to Securitization of Tr-ME Rel. in 2010s: Eastern Mediterranean Dispute

- Eastern Mediterranean region is said to host **five percent** of the world's known natural gas reserves → makes it attractive for many actors
- EU that depends on Russian Federation for its natural gas is also interested in the natural gas in the Med. and supports Greece and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus → brings new projects into the agenda → EastMed Pipeline Project → bring natural gas from Eastern Med. to EU markets via pipelines → but Turkey is left aside in this project
- Greece and the Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus have been acting as the sole representative of the island to drill the gas and control the transfer routes of the gas to the markets
- Turkey has declared that its continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean extends up to 28° E longitude and that the western boundary of the Turkish continental shelf to the west of this longitude shall be drawn through equitable agreements with all concerned states.



## III. Back to Securitization of Tr-ME Rel. in 2010s: Eastern Mediterranean Dispute

- An EEZ is a maritime zone/jurisdiction legally acquired upon declaration by a coastal state.
- Turkey and Greece have not declared their EEZs; therefore, neither state has an EEZ in the region.
- Although it lacks the authority to do so, the GASC declared an EEZ in 2004, as if it were the sole representative of the whole island of Cyprus.
- Turkey has a **wide continental shelf proportional to its long coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean.**
- Contrary to international law, GASC and Greece lay claim to Turkey's continental shelf in the region.



### III. Back to Securitization of Tr-ME Rel. in 2010s: Eastern Mediterranean Dispute

- Turkey signed maritime deal with the Tripoli- based Government of National Accord (GNA) in January 2020
- in response to the formation of **East Med Gas Forum (EMGF)** by **Greece, Greek Cyprus administration (GCA), Egypt, Israel and Italy** while bypassing Turkey and not heeding to its requests for exploration rights of divided Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) which is recognized only by Turkey.





