

TURKEY, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA AS PARTNERS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: NEW PERSPECTIVE AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL PEACE

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I shall try to analyze Turkey's current relations with Japan and South Korea, then endeavor to provide recommendations and solutions concerning how these relations can be improved further. By using qualitative method, I seek to explore the ways how these relations are and the problems that put obstacles on advancing these relations. Furthermore, I will look for more dynamic ways in regards of developing these relations. Turkish foreign policy aims to have peaceful, stable and cooperative relations by contributing to the global peace. In this regard, relations with Asian countries have always been important for Turkey, but with the influence of external factors, Turkey was late to improve her relations with Asia. Asian countries and Turkey have mutual economic, political and cultural opportunities. Accordingly, relations with Japan and South Korea play an important role. Turkey has no political conflict with Japan and South Korea, they always had nice relations and Turkey sees Japan and South Korea as natural alliances. Although, there is a great distance between these countries, the relations are still friendly and sincerely in the societal base. This paper argues that close relations should be developed more and close collaboration among these countries should be established.

Keywords: Japanese-Turkish relations, Korean-Turkish relations, Korean-Japanese relations

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Asia has always been important to Turkey; however, due to some external factors, Turkey was late to improve her relations with Asia. It is possible to mention about a transformation in Turkish Foreign Policy after 2000's that Turkey has begun to follow proactive and multidimensional policy towards her close neighbors and far neighbors. In that sense, Asia plays different and important role for Turkey. Since Asian countries became new economic powers of the world after the Cold War, Asia's significance to Turkey mostly depends on the economic reasons. Two historically friendly countries, Japan and South Korea, are two of the most significant countries for Turkey in the Asian community. Turkish executives increased the number of their visits to these countries, especially after the Cold War.

In recent years, functionality with Japan and South Korea was increased, but there are still some missing dimensions in these relations. In fact, increased and strengthened relations with these countries are the natural result of the globalized world. Turkey does not have any political conflict with Japan and South Korea. It is for the benefit of these countries to improve these relations. Therefore, Turkey's new approach to the foreign policy and the global conditions are expected also from Japan and South Korea.

Although, Turkey has economic relations with Japan and South Korea, it is still unsatisfactory. I believe the reason of unsatisfactory relations is also about insufficient political relations. From the economic point of view, to increase trade relations consumption patterns should be analyzed carefully and new strategies should be found to improve it. As Turkey seeks for partnership of South Korea and Japan in her country, she also looks for new opportunities in these countries.

From the historical point of view, Turkey had cultural ties with Asia. Improving relations with Japan and South Korea will also increase Turkey's popularity in the other parts of Asia. It should not be forgotten that Asia still holds most of the energy sources in the world, and spreading this energy with the cooperation of South Korea and Japan will increase the power of these countries and will show how history and culture is important for Turkey.

This paper focuses on the cooperation amongst Turkey, Japan and South Korea to contribute to the world peace. Turkey does not have any political conflict with Japan and South Korea. With the help of the historical and cultural ties, I believe Turkey will also be the common point of the investments in the region. Furthermore, Japan and South Korea are the most important trade partners in Asia. Turkey sees these countries as friendly countries.

I. COOPERATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITH JAPAN

Oil is the most significant raw material for Japan to determine her Middle East Policy. Japan has significant economic relations with the Middle Eastern countries. Since most of the economy of Japan depends on oil, natural gas and the other raw materials, Middle East holds crucial significance for Japan. Because of Japan's economic dependence on oil, natural gas and raw materials of the Middle East she naturally increases her political and economic engagement within the region. In that sense, Turkey; as a result of its vital geopolitical position and closeness to the region, also plays an important role in the same region.

Especially after the First Oil Crisis in 1973 Japan became more aware of how much important the Middle East is for her economy. Some scholars argue that Japanese governments understood the significance of the region after the First Oil Crisis, however many scholars argue that even after the Oil Crisis in 1973, Japan did not have a strong Middle East policy until 1990s. Nonetheless, The Gulf War in 1991 became the turning point for Japanese Foreign Policy towards Middle East. It has triggered the shift in Japanese Foreign Policy on the region; therefore it is possible to mention an expressed "Japanese Middle East Policy" after the 90's.

The Gulf War in 1991 had awakened Japan and forced her to play a more proactive role in the region. During that time, the Japanese Prime Minister visited the US and declared that their relations with Arab nations would be independent from their relations with Israel. Furthermore, Japanese business group Keiretsu, declared that they were not bounded by the boycott against Israel and Toyota announced that it would start trading with Israel. The motive behind all these actions was that Japan did not want Jewish Lobby to coerce USA policies for being more anti-Japanese. Finally, Yasser Arafat's declaration that Palestine Liberation Organization would no longer commit terrorist acts resulted with the Israeli decision to provide opportunity for more freedom to Japan in the Middle East.¹

In the Post-Cold War era, balance of powers, perceptions of threat has begun to change for the actors of world politics. Especially, with the break out of Gulf War, Turkey gained a strategic influence in the new world order. After Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, United States has realized Turkey's strategic importance in the region again.² Besides the United States, Japan has recognized new opportunities for herself in the Middle East for satisfying

1 Sezai Özçelik. "The Japanese Foreign Policy in Middle East Between 1904-1998: Resource, Trade and Aid Diplomacy", *Journal of Humanity & Social Sciences*, 3 (2008), 134.

2 Haydar Çakmak, ed, *Türk Dış Politikası: 1919-2008* (Ankara: Platin, 2008), 727.

her economic interests. According to Japanese officials after the Gulf War increasing interest of Japan towards the Middle Eastern region was a major turning point in Japanese foreign policy. The interest of Japan in the region was derived from the actions taken by the external political actors. For instance; US did not see Japan's contribution sufficient to the coalition against Iraq. Despite the fact that Japan sent some aid and became one of the few countries which voluntarily imposed economic sanctions against Iraq, she was accused of being too late. In addition to this, Kuwait did not put Japan's name among the list of the countries which she declared to be thankful in helping to get back their freedom. As a result to have a more active role in the Middle East, Japan started to take more dynamic role in the Arab-Israel peace process. Especially after the Madrid Conference in 1991, Japan took part in many fields related with Middle East such as the problem of limited resources of water, regional economic development, and refugees. This new approach towards Middle East can be considered as an improving partnership rather than just observing the incidents.³ It is beneficial to emphasize that; The Gulf War at that point should be seen as a turning point of Japanese passivism to the activism in the region.

While looking at Turkey's significance, firstly we can mention that Turkey is a stable and friendly country for Japan. Besides, there was also a historical friendship between Japanese and Turkish governments. In 1985, during the Iran-Iraq War, Japanese passengers have been rescued by Turkey. At that time, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein announced that civil planes would also be hit if they pass through Tehran and those attacks would begin on March 19 at 20:30. After this announcement, many European countries began to rescue their citizens. There were 450 Japanese citizens living in Iran, and Japanese ambassador in Tehran, Yutaka Nomura, communicated with Japanese airlines but they rejected to fly without the guarantee of Saddam Hussein. Somehow, 250 of Japanese citizens were able to leave Iran by using the planes of other European Airlines. While, the hopes of the rest 200 Japanese citizens were decreasing, with the direction of Turkey's Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, 200 Japanese citizens were rescued from Tehran by the planes of Turkish Airlines. According to Japanese TV Channel NHK in the program of "Project X", it was called "This Century's Border Rescue Operation."⁴ This incident had reminded the Turkish and Japanese people, that Turkey has sympathy for Japan and Turkish people see Japanese people as their close friends who lives in the long distance.

3 Mohammed Abo-Khazleh. "Transformations in Japanese Foreign Policy toward the Middle East: From Low to More Active Political Engagement", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, 5 (2009), 180-181.

4 "Türk pilota teşekkür ziyareti", (accessed March 8, 2011); available from <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/01/12/siyaset/axsiy01.html>

Furthermore, after 2000, Turkey's "zero-problem-with-neighbors" foreign policy started making collaborations and interventions easier for Japan. Japan has almost no energy resources at all; thus, she is the biggest coal and liquefied natural gas importer and she is the second biggest country which imports oil in the world.⁵ Therefore, while looking at the contemporary political issues in the Middle East, Turkey with her stable position, geostrategic location and young population is an important ally for Japan to have cooperation with. As Dr. Sadao Umeda, Chairman of Japan-Turkey Economic Committee, said in the 18th Japan Turkey Joint Economic Committee Meeting, "Japan sees Turkey as a springboard."⁶ There are several factors lies behind this statement. Fortunately, Turkey and Japan realized how those two countries are important to each other in the 18th Japan-Turkey Joint Economic Committee Meeting in the November 25, 2010. In this meeting, the several topics have become significantly important. These topics can be summarized as:

- ... Turkey told Toshiba, who wants to invest in energy, that it is possible but there will be competition from other companies.
- In this sense it is suggested that Japan may benefit from the advantages of Turkey. It may penetrate the markets of the Caucasus, the Middle East, Africa and Europe via Turkey, and also make use of the young Turkish labor force, as it cannot enter into these markets. Turkish and Japanese firms may cooperate in Third World countries.
- The free trade agreements Turkey signed with various countries may also provide an advantage for Japan. Japanese companies may benefit from research and development support in Turkey. They may be exempt from customs duty in their exports to Europe and have the opportunity to cooperate with Third World countries.
- Turkish and Japanese companies need not limit their business to Turkey and Japan, as they may cooperate to invest in the infrastructure, transportation and energy of the M. East, Central Asia, the Black Sea, Africa, the Gulf and countries neighboring Turkey. Iraq may be a significant cooperation domain with Japan because it is now being restructured at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars. Africa is also being restructured. That Europe cannot produce any more may be an advantage.⁷

5 Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry For Foreign Trade, Japan. (accessed March 7, 2011); available from <http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmadmin/upload/ANL/AsyaDb/japonya.pdf>

6 Gökür Akçadağ. "Is a Turkish-Japanese trade agreement imminent?", *Today's Zaman* (accessed March 8, 2011); available from <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-230054-is-a-turkish-japanese-trade-agreement-imminent.html>.

7 Ibid.

It can be claimed that this committee meeting was contributed to the awareness of that many opportunities' existence for both of the countries. For instance, Japan can easily pass to other markets through Turkey which is a springboard for Japan, since it is known that Turkey has a very young population. Also, it is easy for Japan to extend her investments through Turkey. In order to achieve this objective and satisfy all these demands, making successful advertising campaigns in Japan would be beneficial for Turkey. It is possible to say that Turkish and Japanese are complementary to each other which makes easier and feasible for strengthening Turkish-Japanese partnership in the region.

Obviously, Turkey has a great potential for Japan. Especially with its liberal economy, Turkey has an important potential to advance her technology because it is easier to adjust its technology, it is open to the innovations and has a very important know-how capacity with the investments coming from the most developed countries. While we compare Turkey with other contemporary Middle Eastern countries, it is observable that even an unstable Turkey is much more stable than the Arab countries and offer more opportunities for Japanese investments and cooperation.

Japan needs stability and peace in the region because most of her oil comes from the Middle East. It might be the reason why Japan has separated Japan-Israel relations from Japan-Arab relations in the Middle East and followed a stable policy in the region after the Gulf War in 1991. As a result of the Gulf War, Japan's interest towards the region has been increased and new foreign policy towards that region has been developed. Furthermore, Japan's previous aids to the region also increased her popularity amongst the other Arab States.⁸

What's more, in May 2003, Koizumi has visited Middle East states and has announced the Japanese policies to the region. These policies were shortly about helping Iraq in her restructuring, playing more active role in Middle East Peace Process and increasing the dialogue with Arab states. Likewise, to increase the relations with Gulf States, Japan-Arab Dialogue Forum was established.⁹ Since, any possible negative effects on oil stoppage would give harsh damage to Japanese economy; Japan considers Middle East issues as vital as her security issues.

As a result, since Turkey has historical and cultural ties with the Middle Eastern countries, Japan's cooperation with Turkey would reduce the possible risks for Japanese resource dependent

economy. It is undeniable that Japan needs Turkey's partnership in the region in order to protect her economic interests within the region. This kind of cooperation between Turkey and Japan will increase their benefits from new partnerships in Middle East countries.

II. THE NECESSITY OF COOPERATION WITH SOUTH KOREA

In 2000's, Turkey became more proactive and attunes to the global issues more while following multidimensional foreign policy. Turkey began to use her critical geo-strategic location for her benefit by holding the balance between Asia and Europe. Her neighbors are gas-rich and oil-rich countries and while having good relations with the West it is also for Turkey's benefit to have good relations with Asia. It is the positive effect of proactive foreign policy. Turkey's policy in Asia can be easily strengthened with Japan, South Korea and China because of the previous intense in economic relations. In this regard, as well as Japan, South Korea is also highly important country for Turkey.

In the post-World War 2, Korean Republic was founded with elections in 1948. In the north of the 38th parallel the establishment of Democratic People's Republic of Korea was announced by the USSR. As a result of the attack of North Korea to South Korea in June 25, 1950, Korean War was started. In the direction of United Nations, Turkey and other 16 countries was sided with the Republic of Korea. This war had continued for three years and ended with a cease-fire agreement in Panmunjom in 1953.¹⁰ By considering the conditions of that time, Turkey's intervention in Korea helped Turkey in two sides. First of all, Turkey gained the respect and love of South Korean people. Secondly, Turkey and Greece joined NATO. After this war, the number of Turkish troops in Korea was reduced annually and in 1971, all Turkish soldiers left Korea. Therefore, Turkey's good and friendly relations had begun with South Korea after that war. While Turkish troops were still there, they interacted with Korean people and relations between two societies became more intense. The Existence of Turkish troops in Korea until the 70's helped two cultures to have friendly relations with each other. Korea War helped the relations between Turkey and South Korea in a better way and it was a turning point for both countries to have good relations.

⁸ Nuraniye Hidayet Ekrem. "Japonya'nın Orta Doğu Politikası ve Türkiye", *Turksam* (accessed March 9, 2011); available from <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a751.html>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Kore Cumhuriyeti hakkında genel bilgiler", (accessed March, 12 2011); available from <http://seul.be.mfa.gov.tr/ShowInfoNotes.aspx?ID=1016>.

It can be said that relations with South Korea have begun with military interactions and these relations were developed into also the economic field after 1980's. When we look at the agreements in that time we see that it began with "Convention between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Korea for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and for the Arrangement of Matters with Respect to Taxes on Income" and "Agreement on Trade Promotion and Economic and Technical Cooperation" dated December 24, 1983.¹¹ Furthermore, as South Korean people did not forget our Turkish soldiers in Korea, Turkish people also did not forget how helpful South Korean people were to Turkey in 1999 Marmara Earthquake. Today, Turkish people talk about South Korea with a smile and good feelings in their face. Another unforgettable memory was in 2002 World Cup, South Korean and Turkish supporters were sitting together and waving each other's flags. With these interactions, Turkey's relations with South Korea came to 2000's which is still unsatisfactory in political arena. However, the Agreement on Tourism with South Korea on October 4, 2006 was a positive step to improve Turkey-South Korea relations further.

According to economic data, economic relations are high with South Korea; however, there is an imbalance of trade that disadvantageous to Turkey. In 2010, commercial volume was 5.068 billion dollars, but while Turkey's import from there is 4.7 billion dollars, her export to there is 304 million dollars.¹² This kind of unbalanced in economy is an obstacle in front of both nations on deepening relations with Asia. Turkish business and Turkish bureaucracy do not want to consider this as distrust to Turkish economy by South Korean business initiatives. When we look at the South Korean products, it can be easily realized that Turkish people live within South Korea by Samsung, Hyundai or Kia.

With the last visit of Turkish Prime Minister Ergodan to Seoul, Turkey repeated her demand that she seeks for more investments from South Korea.¹³ Turkey should be considered as a spring board to Europe, Africa and Middle East. While considering her neighbors, Turkey is the most stable country in the region. South Korean businessmen should realize the historical and friendly ties between two nations and increase their investments.

Furthermore, Turkey is a country that wants to be a Nuclear Power, in that sense she looks for the establishment of a new Nuclear Power Plant in Sinop. Turkey has 3 options for

this project; either to have the plant built by Russia, South Korea or Japan. However, Turkey and Russia signed an agreement on establishing nuclear power plant in Akkuyu on May 12, 2010.¹⁴ In fact, Turkey does not want to depend only on Russia. She looks for countries that are almost impossible to have political problems. In that sense, Turkey turns her face to the East where there are historically friendly ties. Unfortunately, Turkey could not agree with South Korea in establishing Nuclear Power Plant in Sinop. However, Turkey is now looking for new cooperation with Japanese firm, Toshiba. Turkey's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Taner Yildiz said that Turkey looks new agreements with USA, EU, and Japan.¹⁵ I believe that Turkey should cooperate with countries like Japan. Because it is a very sensitive and significant issue, and Turkey should look for countries where there is almost no risk of having political problems with that country.

According to these given facts, Turkey and South Korea should deepen their political relations. Economic data confirms that Turkey and South Korea have high but not enough economic relations. Currently, it is for Turkey's disadvantage on economic relations with South Korea, but Turkey still gives importance to South Korean investments. As it was mentioned before Turkey should be seen as a springboard for South Korea. Turkey's proactive; zero-problem-with-neighbors foreign policy and having stable government should increase South Korean investments.

Moreover, Turkey and South Korea have the same problem against China's policies towards Uyghur Turks and Korean Minorities. Unfortunately, although they have intense economic relations, South Korea does not raise her voice against China properly. Dr. Selcuk Colakoglu argues that Turkey and South Korea can make common strategies to raise the China's policies towards minorities in the international law level.¹⁶

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

As a result, Turkey's relations with South Korea and Japan are at the satisfactory level for the time being. South Korea and Japan should also follow Turkey's Foreign Policy strategies in

11 "Türkiye-Güney Kore Siyasi İlişkileri", (accessed March, 12 2011); available from <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-guney-kore-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>

12 "Güney Kore, Undersecretariat of Foreign Trade of Turkey", accessed March, 11 2011 from <http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmadmin/upload/ANL/AsyaDb/guneykore.pdf>

13 *Başbakan'dan 'Türkiye'de yatırım' çağrısı*, "Haber Türk", accessed March,11 2011); available from <http://ekonomi.haberturk.com/ekonomi/haber/571229-basbakandan-turkiyede-yatirim-cagrisi>

14 *Rusya ile nükleer anlaşma imzalandı*, "CNN Türk", accessed March 11, 2011); available from <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/ekonomi/genel/05/12/rusya.ile.nukleer.anlasma.imzalandi/575934.0/index.html>.

15 *Erdoğan'a Güney Kore'de Şok*, accessed March 12, 2011 from <http://www.kanaldhaber.com.tr/Haber/Ekonomi-36/Erdogana-Guney-Korede-sok-10931.aspx>.

16 Selçuk Çolakoğlu. "Türkiye'nin Kore Politikası Açılımı", Institute of Strategic Thinking, accessed March, 5 2011 from <http://www.sde.org.tr/tr/haberler/66/turkiyenin-kore-politikasi-acilimi.aspx>.

developing their relations. By achieving that these three countries can be easily cooperate with each other and contribute to the world peace with the cooperation.

Those countries should arrange new meetings with the participation of academicians and political elites on how to increase these relations. Although, there have been some cultural programs occurred in the past, their numbers and target group should be increased. There should be more cultural exchange programs amongst these countries. Business partnerships should be increased and new investments should be made with business cooperation.

Students should be sent to these countries with the scholarship of the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Expat students should be invited to the seminars that explain country's current politics and they should be encouraged to study on new fields of partnerships and the contributions to global peace. Turkey should not consider relations with Japan and South Korea as alternative to the West. It should be considered as the natural outcome of Turkish multidimensional foreign policy. I believe that this is more important than any economic ties especially for the Asian community.

Moreover, there should be more Japanese and Korean Language and History department in Turkish universities, as well as Turkish History and Language department in Japanese and South Korean Universities. By achieving the increase of students in this kind of departments, it would be easier to make book translations of these countries and people may know each other from easier ways. Book translations from the original source will make people learn about each other's countries from the original sources. Unfortunately, other kinds of materials have the possibility to make a bad image of the country as well as the society, however, by increasing the number of translation of original sources, it would be reduced the possible risk of knowing a culture from a biased literature.

I would like to express also my idea that most international relations experts pay attention to the economic benefits of countries to explain relationships. However, for the future of humanity it is more important to cooperate with regard to moral and cultural value not forgetting the more fundamental human values such as freedom of speech, freedom of belief and other human rights. I am hoping that in future with more cooperative agreements in the economic area will start also cultural and moral ties that will lead to this direction between Korea, Japan and Turkey, which can also be the leaders of establishing the concept of Asian community.