



TURKEY AND THE GLOBAL STORM: Ambassador Ozdem Sanberk

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First, I would like to make an overview of the international situation in conjunction with Turkey's performance for the last ten years. The scale of change in the world for the last decade has been spectacular, and its basic dynamism has shown that Turkey's role in the European scene, in the former Soviet zone and in the Middle East, has grown strongly and should continue to do so even more sturdily in the future. The political emancipation of the former Communist world, the pipeline, communication and energy projects, and the solidarity with the United States against the terrorism and religious obscurantism in the world are some of the causes that affected Turkey's role. Turkey, however, did not thrive with these changes. Some of the main factors include the end of the bipolar world structure, the strategic threat from the communism, the huge strides the European Union made by its enlargement and strengthening its institutions, the Customs Union with the EU, and the end of the PKK terrorism with the capture of Ocalan. Of course, we must also mention the Oslo Peace Process that opened new horizons of cooperation and peace in the Middle East that unfortunately are faltering at the moment. Turkey's contribution to peace in Bosnia and Kosovo in the Balkans, and Turkey's solidarity with the coalition in monitoring the no-fly zone in northern Iraq must also be taken into account.

Turkey has also faced, and still faces various challenges, such as an acute economic crisis and a fragile coalition government at home resulting mainly from the collapse of the political center. Other challenges can be listed as follows: the rebirth of the religious obscurantism threat in the world at large, Turkey's failure to optimize the Helsinki Process and the accession to the European Union, to optimize the capture of Ocalan, and to solidly install the basis of national reconciliation and peace in the southeast and make the necessary investments in order to heal the wounds of fifteen years of armed struggle, to settle the Cyprus problem, to arrive at a compromise on ESDP; in addition to the revival of irredentist nationalism around Turkey's frontiers in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR that portray Turkey as a post-imperial successor state to estrange it from the Western world, the dismissive attitude of the European Union and the perpetuation of the prejudices and obstacles against Turkey on the basis of its Muslim identity.

Now, foreign policy of every country is shaped by its geo-strategic situation. Turkey has eight neighboring states: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria and Greece; apart from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania and Lebanon with which Turkey shares shores. Turkey is in the midst of several regions of great turbulence and political conflict. In spite of such a politically fluid environment, however, one of the essential characteristics of the Turkish politics is its fundamental continuity. The main strategic and economic realities for Turkey dictate a particular response, which has been vindicated by many decades of experience. The pattern of stability, consistency, and continuity has always been the characteristic of our diplomacy, irrespective of frequent changes in the government. Turkey is a reliable country, with a capacity to take long-term view of events, and a consistent vision of what it wants to achieve. The constant pillars of the Turkish foreign policy are the protection of the territorial integrity and national unity, as well as the search for regional peace and economic cooperation around the country. Turkish foreign policy by and large is driven with the convergence with the European Union.

Let me say a couple of words on the events of September 11. This revolting reality of the terrorist attacks highlighted once again the need for security in the world because this attack was not only against the United States but also against the whole community of nations. This, of course, made the third component of the Turkish foreign policy, that of security, acquire new priority. In the aftermath of September 11, Turkey cannot stay neutral anymore. In the first couple of days following the attack, we have seen some sort of hesitation in the government but I would say that this was a cold-blooded analysis of the situation without rushing to conclusions. In my opinion, it was a mature analysis of the facts, and they have taken the right decision at the end of the day since the attack would affect the freedom, and alter the way of life of the Turkish people. This does not mean that Turkey is a frontline state. But, since Turkey shares historical and cultural ties with Muslim countries, it must have its views on this matter listened to as an equal and active member of NATO. And, it can credibly draw the attention of its partners on the regional risks, such as assessing the political risk in Pakistan and the Arabic countries, because it is vital to prevent a fundamentalist regime to develop somewhere, particularly in Pakistan, right after destroying one.

Bulent Aliriza: You mentioned that the Turkish government's response was not so much one of a failure but one of a cold-blooded calculation and analysis. My own reading of the situation is somewhat different. There were confusing statements; even the question of sending troops was mismanaged. Do you think that Turkey will actually behave differently than its track record, which is not quite successful, and be able to cooperate with the US beyond Afghanistan, if an Iraqi front is to be opened along the lines suggested by William Safire?

Ozdem Sanberk: Well, I mentioned the Turkish cooperation with the US in northern Iraq as a concrete example of Turkey's commitment to the policies of the Western world. I disagree with you on the pace of decision-making, because every crisis has its own particularities. As for the question on Iraq, I think this will definitely be a difficult debate for the international community. Although the Desert Storm freed Kuwait, it did not establish peace in the region. A permanent situation without a perspective for stability is morally and politically unacceptable. When we talk of Iraq, we are talking about a nation that is also entitled to peace and prosperity. So, any new initiative must also take this into account. Secondly, one must also think about how to compensate Turkey's unavoidable additional economic losses in case of Turkey's involvement in the operations. Another issue is of course the split up of Iraq, hence the creation of a Kurdish state. I am not sure whether a non-Turkish, a non-Arab, a non-Persian entity can have the capacity to survive in the region if there is not a consent in the region. Such an attempt would unleash an unstoppable conflict in the region. Anything about northern Iraq cannot be done without Turkey's consent. Do not forget that at the moment, Turkey sits in northern Iraq, protecting the Iraqi territorial integrity. This should not create concerns about Turkish ambitions of broadening its borders because Turkey has declared our 'Misak-i Milli' (the National Charter) in 1919, which at first included Musul and Kerkuk. Afterwards, however, Turkey accepted the ruling of the League of Nations, which excluded those lands. In fact, because of this, we are perhaps the only country in the region with clear ideas about its borders.

Mark Parris (Former US Ambassador to Turkey): To follow up on the question about Iraq, did you intend to suggest that there is a negotiation on the Iraqi issue, or do you see it as a very difficult conversation topic?

Ozdem Sanberk: Well, I do not want to create wrong impressions in the minds of my and your compatriots. I let you draw any conclusion yourself of what I said.

Mr. Parris: Well, then I think it will be a difficult discussion issue.

Ozdem Sanberk: I think Turkey must come up with a comprehensive plan in the region, since Turkey is not happy with the status quo as I mentioned before, taking into account the security of the people, elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the oil supply.

Keith Weissman: Historically, what you just have said does not hold. Generally, Turkey and other countries in the region simply reacted to what the Americans have done. Nobody knows when the second phase is, whether there is going to be one, it is a big mystery. You are going to be surprised, just like we are. We wake up one morning and hear of something, and how will the system react then? Because Turkey will be resistant to some efforts to include Iraq on the targeting list, as well as some other targets that might surprise you. It sounds to me that what you are saying is, you want to be reassured that finally the job will get done this time, instead of ten years of nonsense we have been going through.

Ozdem Sanberk: Again, I do not speak for the government, but you are basically right.

Stephen Larrabee: So, from what I understand, you are not necessarily excluding the possibility of a global approach that would include Saddam. Is that fair?

Ozdem Sanberk: Yes, I think it is fair.