
Turkey's Proposal Of 'Caucasus Alliance' : How Likely Is Its Success?

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Amidst desperate attempts of the EU, and of toughening words from the US against Moscow, to get an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of Russian forces in the war between Russia and Georgia, Turkey has offered the establishment of a formation named as 'Caucasus Alliance'. Surely, Turkey is acting in a good faith as it has, with some reservations, good economic, political and social relationships with both Moscow and Tbilisi, and seeking a durable peace on its doorstep. So, what does the Turkish proposal include? and how likely can it be successful in such a region as complex as the Caucasus, and why?

Goals and Means of the 'Alliance'

Though still in the process of creation, the Turkish Prime Minister, Erdogan, after his prompt visits to Moscow and Tbilisi, outlined the purpose and content of the 'Caucasus Alliance'. The main objective of the 'Alliance' is meant to be the establishment of a permanent peace and security in the region through bringing all regional states together in a joint formation. To this end, in the new structure regional states are expected once again to re-assure each other of respecting state sovereignty, refraining from the use and threat to use of force, inviolability of state borders and of non-harming economic and energy security in their common space of the Caucasus. Such principles as state sovereignty, inviolability of borders and so on in the formation will take their main references from the Charter of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), of which Russia, Turkey and all other Caucasian states are members.

Erdogan is seeing that the establishment of a lasting peace and security is the principal aim here and he believes that this goal could be archived through the increase of economic cooperation among the regional states. In order to better present this idea, he gave the examples of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) and Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) projects as the best economic ventures contributing to the regional peace and security greatly.

He pointed out the necessity to develop more that sorts of projects and to expand them such a way that they could connect all peoples in the Caucasus.

Russia and Georgia appear to have accepted the new formation in principle and foreign ministries of the three states are going to work on details, while Turkey is getting ready to offer it first to Azerbaijan and Armenia and then to the EU for their participation. The Turkish side is particularly hopeful that the 'Caucasus Alliance' in the offing will resolve the other most important regional security issue, the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, between Baku and Yerevan once-and-for-all.

Interdependence as Security Solution

In fact, the proposal Turkey is now presenting is a method that it has been discussed in security studies in international relations for years mainly between the Liberal and Realist thinkers on security. Turkey's suggestion of 'Alliance' for the Caucasus takes its logical base from liberal views on

security solutions developed mainly as responses to those of the state centric realist perspectives in inter-state relations.

Of others, neo-liberal institutionalists principally suggest that there are various diverse and important actors in domestic and international levels which function away from the strict control of governments. Inter-governmental organisations, as well as private ones, with having diverse agendas is and can influence governments' decisions in the way of pushing them to co-operate among themselves further and thereby allowing states to get over a number of inter- and intra-state disputes. Basically, liberal school suggests that presence of complex interdependence among societies and states allows multiple channels open between those actors in their trans-governmental and transnational relations. This 'complex web of linkages' between formal and informal actors deals with a myriad of issues in which military security and/or survival of the state prioritized by the Realists is supposed not to take top priority. Rather, it is assumed that if or when states manage to construct a complex interdependence among themselves, like voluminous trade relations and joint economic projects in a particular region, the risk of the use of military force will be greatly evaded.

Realist perspectives on security on the other hand do not share much of those liberal views on security. For them, though complex interdependence is a source of cooperation and an important method for problem solving, or at least decreasing the tension among states, the same sources are the scarce commodities for which individuals and states often strive for control paving the way for inter- and intra- state military conflicts. Indeed realists argue that states always seek for maximising their power in line with their national interests in economic, military and security issues and minimise the risks in the same matters. Realists see that complex interdependence can only work so long as all parties get satisfied, and yet this is often impossible to succeed and hard to sustain. So, interdependence resembles no more than a fierce power competition and domination over scarce resources. As continuous rivalry on scarce resources is a never-ending phenomenon, conflict cannot always be avoidable. In this never-ending state of rivalry, inter-governmental organisations, for the realists, are no more than instruments in the hands of states for promoting their national/security interests.

Energy Pipelines for Peace?

The interdependent model, so to speak 'Alliance' of Turkey in this case, needs to be such in kind that it must cover most, if not all, of the intra- and extra regional security issues and actors, if it wants to produce fruitful results. But, how easy is it to bring them all together while they all have polarizing priorities and interests? As Erdogan hinted, diversification of energy pipelines in the region is the backbone of the suggested 'Alliance'. This entails that if those actors such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia (S.Ossetia) and Armenia benefit from existing or impending regional big economic projects like energy lines and railways, ethno-territorial wars, the most serious regional security issues, can be prevented and even resolved totally.

Not going into too much detail, however, examples on the ground suggest otherwise. As many remember, similar proposals were discussed and even offered to the conflicting sides to resolve their differences for permanent solutions in the midst 1990s. At that time, it was suggested that if Russia had joined into energy projects and pipelines in Azerbaijan, this would have integrated not only the Caucasian states and ethnic republics but also the neighbouring countries. By this way, for instance, the Chechen problem was believed to be resolved peacefully as Grozny would get transit fees from the Baku-Novorossiysk early oil pipeline crossing the Chechen territory. Yet, Russia did not get so much satisfied with the only early oil pipeline from

Azerbaijan. Nor did the Chechens accept the amount of revenues that their territory. As well known, Russia pushed further for main oil pipeline, later to be known as BTC, to cross its own territory. Not enough, the dispute between Moscow and Grozny forced Russia to change the direction of the Baku-Novorossiysk line from Chechnya to Dagestan Republic. Equally, neither the flow of Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline nor Moscow's shares in the 'Contract of Century' and Shah Deniz projects in Azerbaijan did soften its pro-Armenian position in the NK dispute, and even continued to supply huge amount of arms to Yerevan ready to be used by the NK Armenians in an eventual war against Azerbaijan.

Similarly, the US negotiator in the NK dispute, John Maresca, made public in Winter 1995 that if an oil pipeline, called 'peace pipeline', had followed the direction from Baku to Ceyhan via the NK and Armenian territories, this would have encouraged the like-minded Armenian politicians to capitalize it and so get involved in an honest effort to resolve the dispute. Obviously, the suggested 'peace pipeline' was thought to have the potential that it would have resolved the still existing problems between Turkey and Armenia, too, and given the two the chance to normalise their political and economic relations. At the end, both sides ruled out the project from the outset and did not have any serious discussions on its potential benefits for the inter-state relations and regional security. While Azerbaijan concentrated on alternative roads for its oil, Yerevan followed a realist way of heavily arming itself with Russia's military hardware against Azerbaijan, and intensified its effort of the recognition of the so-called 'Armenian genocide' by the international community against Turkey.

Intergovernmental Organisations for Solution: the OSCE

Interdependence model of the 'Alliance' regarding the inter-governmental organisations can unlikely generate any positive results in the region either. The OSCE, which is referred as another important means in the 'Alliance', has already been involved in the two of the three conflicts of S.Ossetia, Abkhazia and NK for more than a decade. The organisation had had no mandate in the Abkhaz conflict, while it has maintained a very limited role, only 8 observers for monitoring the cease-fire, in S.Ossetia in the Joint Control Commission alongside Russian, S.Ossetian, N.Ossetian and Georgian representatives. With such a limited number of observers and a weak mandate, the OSCE could not have been able to stop unleashing the current fire and Russia's heavy-handed behaviour.

The OSCE's involvement in the NK is even much more worrisome. The Minsk Group established within the framework of the OSCE in 1992 has specifically been dealing with the NK problem in the forms of either bringing the sides to negotiating table or proposing its own peace-plans to Baku and Yerevan. Since then, it brought the sides together for dozens of times for a possible breakthrough in the dispute. As this did not work, it prepared three different peace-plans for the resolution of the NK dispute, but they were not accepted by either Azerbaijan or Armenia due to the disagreement centred especially on the final status of the region. Most importantly, the Minsk Group has three permanent members of Russia, the US and France, each of which is holding chairmanship of the Group in rotation. As Russia has actively participated in the NK since its inception with a pro-Armenian stance, similar to those of the conflicts between Georgia and breakaway regions of Abkhazia and S.Ossetia, the Minsk Group especially under Moscow's watch did not yield a permanent solution acceptable for both Baku and Yerevan. Hence if the 'Alliance' is wanted to become successful on the resolutions of all three conflicts via inter-governmental involvement, the OSCE, as well as its sub-entity of the Minsk Group, must be much more active on the ground and most importantly divorce itself from being influenced by its powerful members, such as Russia, in the Caucasus.

As far as the differing behaviours and conducts of the regional and extra-regional actors above are concerned, the 'Caucasus Alliance' of Turkey, boosted up with the interdependence model of liberal thinking rested on intensive economic relations and institutional involvement, highly unlikely generates any promising results in the establishment of a permanent peace in the region. Indeed, Turkey put 'Caucasian Home', a very similar proposal carrying the same objectives as that of the current one, on the agenda in the 1990s. This met with an outright rejection from the Armenian side claiming that it was against the national interests of both Armenia and Russia, and that it was nothing but aimed to resuscitate the 'old Pan-Turkist dream' of uniting all Turks from Caucasus to Central Asia. There is no any reason now why Armenia should not think the same way as it thought few years ago. In fact, Russia has come out of the war against Georgia much stronger and domineering along its backyard than before, and is now much more defiant against the more active involvement of international organisations (e.g. OSCE) in the 'near abroad'. So, it can be hardly said that Moscow has genuinely believed in the formation and the success of the 'Alliance'. If it is the case, why then the Russian military is bombing various economic sites, destroying railways and sinking ships and boats in Poti and Georgia in general is the question waiting for some answers for all these are the important means for Tbilisi upon which the 'Alliance' is supposed to be built.

It is unfortunate once again to see that old realist thinking of power maximisation of states overwhelms the liberal model of complex interdependence, and of the Turkish proposal of 'Caucasus Alliance', at the expense of peace and security in inter-state relations. How this can be reversed the other way around does not and will not have an easy answer for long years ahead. Indeed, the Caucasus is not a unique region in that respect in the world. This is the fact of the post-Cold world order/disorder, and it can be easily seen all around if one just turns around and looks at what is happening in Iraq today and then asks himself why.
