
Reset Of Turkish Foreign Policy Or Reset Of Region?

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"Turkey has reset its foreign policy." That's the most popular thing to say these days. The following has happened only in the last 3 weeks: Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu first visited Shiite leaders during his visit to Iraq and then Tehran, Ankara engaged in a renewed dialogue with Baghdad, Prime Minister Erdogan and Russian President Putin gave mutual warm messages during Erdogan's visit to Moscow and Davutoglu emphasized commonality of Turkish-US interests during his visit to Washington.

In addition, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki will probably visit Ankara in early January and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Prime Minister Erdogan will pay reciprocal visits very soon. Turkey has also taken concrete action, backing up its denial of supporting al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria. Ankara expressed its support for the Geneva II Conference to be held on Jan. 22, which Turkey had previously signaled deep skepticism about. These all attest to the argument that Turkey is shifting away from a foreign policy of the last 2 years, which has given it a sectarian-based image. Moreover, Erdogan said last week that he trusts Israel will fulfill Turkey's preconditions to normalize relations soon and, according to recent reports, Ankara has also prepared a road map to normalize relations with Armenia. All of these developments are interpreted as signs of Turkey shifting back to its "zero-problem policy".

Yet, this shift only reflects a major systemic change, a broader trend in the region. There is a new Middle East underway. The agreement between Iran and P5+1 last week is only one foot of this trend and signals a gradual end to all of the proxy wars in Syria, most notably the U.S.-Russian one. Maliki's upcoming visit to Tehran, following his visit to Washington and coinciding with the Iran agreement and the ongoing rapprochement between Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad, point at a broader cooperation. On the other hand, Egypt, a trusted American ally for over three decades, is warming up to Russia while U.S. and Iran are making peace at the expense of the U.S.' two major regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia. In other words, the regional balance of power and alliances are in tectonic shift.

This all shows that governments have caved in to the facts on the ground. The Syrian war proved once again that it is impossible to end a conflict in this region without reconciling the regional powers and superpowers that support different sides of the conflict, pursuing a proxy war. This is the reason why the US has foundered in Iraq and Afghanistan and why the Syrian conflict gets more and more complicated every day. Radical Islamist groups, which the Syrian crisis has attracted to the country, have now become the common enemy, not just for the US and Russia, but also for regional powers.

Furthermore, the Arab uprisings, the Syrian war in particular, have intensified sectarian tensions in the region. Coupled with the U.S.

withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the new configuration demands the cooperation of regional powers as well as the superpowers that are in one way or another part of any regional problem. It is about time to make them part of the solution instead.

In short, Turkey plays the new game by its own rules.
