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Turkey's role and interests in Central Asia

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Introduction

TURKEY CAN BE CONSIDERED A SECOND-TIER RISING POWER. Distant from the economic weight of China, India, or Brazil and without their global reach, Turkey is nonetheless increasingly present in conflict-affected regions of the world. This presence is manifested in commercial ties, official and non-governmental aid, security cooperation, and diplomatic efforts to mediate between conflict actors. Despite Ankara's attention to the region having waned since the early 1990s, the Central Asian states maintain a special place in Turkish foreign policy given ethno-linguistic Turkic ties.

This paper explores Turkey's relations with Central Asia and the implications for its engagement on conflict in the region. It examines Turkey as a rising power, followed by an overview of past engagement with Central Asia and a broad examination of today's bilateral relations, multilateral forums, economic ties, aid provision, and security cooperation. It is based on a select number of interviews with experts in London, Istanbul, and Ankara, alongside a limited literature review.[1] As such, it is not intended as a comprehensive study or an in-depth analysis. The paper concludes with some key questions for future research related to Turkey's role in Central Asian conflict management.

1 The author acknowledges the extremely helpful insights and comments from Prof Oktay F. Tanrisever, Gareth Winrow, and Dr Cengiz Günay.

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Turkey's relations with Central Asia

Turkey as a rising power

OVER THE LAST DECADE OR SO, Turkey has become a more visible international actor. With a population nearing 75 million, it saw GDP grow at an average rate of six per cent between 2002 and 2008, increasing to over eight per cent in 2011 following the financial crisis.[2] Although slowing in 2012, the Turkish economy is currently the world's 18th largest, placing it within the ranks of the G20. With growing economic ties with the rest of the world, Ankara's diplomatic reach is progressing at an equally rapid pace – in 2009, Turkey's Foreign Minister announced the opening of 33 new embassies alongside an increase in budget and personnel for his ministry. Turkey's membership of a wide variety of multilateral forums and organisations is illustrative of a diplomatic reach that cuts across usual groupings.[3] Despite still being an aid recipient, Turkey's overseas aid has increased from US$120 million in 1999 to an estimated $1.3 billion by 2011.[4]

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002, has sought to demonstrate to the world that Turkey is an active player in regional and global politics. Ankara's foreign policy is generally preoccupied with Turkey's wider neighbourhood, including Central Asia. With greater economic prosperity and political stability at home, Turkish leaders perceive the country to be a 'central power' due to its geographic, religious, cultural, and historical bonds with Central Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Caspian, the Middle East, North Africa, and even the Horn of Africa. Because the international community has a critical interest in the stability of this oft-turbulent landscape, Turkey's unique 'central' position (or 'strategic depth') is perceived to mean that it can play a leading strategic role in addressing shared international challenges.

An explicit focus on supporting peace – which has rhetorical precedence in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's "Peace at home and peace in the world" slogan – figures highly in the AKP's foreign policy discourse. Several Turkish approaches to conflict management overseas can be broadly categorised: diplomatic mediation, multilateral diplomacy, provision of aid, indirect support for governance, peacekeeping, and security sector cooperation. Where relevant, this paper seeks to highlight the linkages between these approaches and Turkey's actual engagement in the Central Asian region.

2 Migdalovitz, C (2011) 'AKP's Domestically-driven Foreign Policy' in *Turkish Policy Quarterly* Vol 9 No 4, p 38, World Bank Statistical Database, website, accessed on 17 October 2012

3 This includes, for example, membership of, observer status or limited participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the BRICS Forum, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

4 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012) *Statistics on resource flows to developing countries*, website, accessed on 25 October 2012

Turkey's past engagement in Central Asia

After the independence of several regional states in the early 1990s, Turkey focused significant diplomatic effort on its stated goal of assisting the 'Turkic sister republics' to become functioning, stable states that were integrated into the international system.[5] Underpinning this engagement were the perceived linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and historical links with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. Following its rejection of membership by the European Union in 1989, Turkey hoped that by building ties with these new states it could build a Turkic community that would fall under its own leadership, a concept put forth by then Turkish President Turgut Ozal. This community would "benefit Turkey economically and politically and, by serving as a bridge to the Islamic post-Soviet world, demonstrate Ankara's usefulness to Western states."[6] Indeed the engagement and idea of a bridging role for Turkey was partially driven by an attempt to find a new strategic value to its relationship with the US after the end of the Cold War. Further, as a means of countering the perceived influence of Iran's Islamic regime, a 'Turkish model' of democratic politics was touted by the West and presented to the Central Asian states.[7]

Turkey was the first country to recognise the independence declarations of all the Central Asian countries. Ankara attempted to build on this and deepen relations through increasing the number of official and diplomatic exchanges, announcing potential trade deals, promising free capital flows, and pursuing a general deepening of economic cooperation. Scholarships to study in Turkey were awarded, while Turkish satellite TV was broadcast into the region and more frequent flights established. Central to this engagement were promises of relatively significant aid for the new republics, which led to the creation of Turkey's International Development and Cooperation Agency (TIKA) and a very large proportion of all of Turkey's overseas aid being spent in the region (see below). Regular summits of the leaders of Turkic-speaking states were initiated in 1992.

However, with an economic crisis and political instability at home during the mid 1990s, "the great enthusiasm generated by the proximity to the sister states led to promises that Turkey would prove unable to keep … The role ascribed to Turkey as a model and a bridge country failed."[8] Aid, though significant, fell short of expectations while economic cooperation remained limited. Furthermore, the stated intention of promoting democracy and political liberalisation largely fell flat: the "situation was more complex than it seemed at first, and Turkish authorities were forced to accept local regimes as they were. Like many Western countries, Turkey supported existing regimes out of concern for regional security and stability."[9] Finally, to Ankara's disappointment, Central Asian states failed to support Turkey diplomatically, for example in backing it in its dispute with the Republic of Cyprus, leading them to question the depth and meaningfulness of the bonds between them.[10] On the other side of the fence, and perhaps more importantly, Central Asian states became ambivalent about engagement with Turkey. Having just won independence, they were reluctant to embrace Ankara's role of 'big brother' and join a union that would be dominated by it. In addition, relative to that of larger powers courting the region, Central Asia's leaders came to perceive a gap between Turkey's rhetoric and its capacity to deliver.

Turkey's engagement today

It is debatable whether the AKP has renewed Turkish interest in Central Asia following the setbacks of the mid-1990s. On the one hand, some point to growing trade and aid with the region, as well as frequent diplomatic exchanges and Turkey's backing for

5 Saferworld interviews, Ankara, 2013
6 RAND (2003) *Fault lines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army* RAND Corporation: Santa Monica
7 Aras B & Fidan, H. (2009) 'Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a new geographic imagination' in New Perspectives on Turkey no. 40 p 200.
8 Aras & Fidan (2009), p 200.
9 Balci, B (2013) 'Turkey Lowers Its Sights on Central Asian Reform' *World Politics Review Op-Ed* 13 June 2013
10 Saferworld interviews, London, 2013

the creation of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (CCTS) in 2009 as evidence of the AKP seeking to expand Turkish influence. Others argue that the AKP is in fact more focused on the EU, MENA, and even Africa relative to Central Asia.[11] Opposition parties in Turkey have actually criticised the AKP for 'forgetting' the region.[12] Perhaps indicative of this, the proportion of aid spent in Central Asia has shrunk relative to other regions. Deep knowledge and expertise on Central Asia in the wider Turkish foreign policy community is not as established or widely held as it is on other regions, notwithstanding notable exceptions. Indeed, it seems reasonable to doubt whether Central Asia has been given a special priority in current Turkish foreign policy, though this does not mean that some aspects of its engagement have not inevitably become more visible in parallel with, and as a consequence of, a Turkey much more engaged with the world beyond its borders.

The existence of a clear, coherent, and well-coordinated foreign policy towards Central Asia is open to question.[13] Nonetheless, according to one analyst, the Turkish Government's current policy towards Central Asia contains five central components:[14]

1. Developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the fields of energy, economy, commerce, culture, society, politics, etc.
2. Assisting them to find a peaceful solution to the frozen regional conflicts.
3. Serving as an energy terminal.
4. Providing assistance to the regional states in their nation- and state-building processes.
5. Helping them develop and maintain close relations with the other countries.

Turkey's Foreign Minister has dropped the 'bridge' concept and replaced it with the idea of Turkey as a 'central power', thus rhetorically reorientating Turkey's engagement in the region away from Western interests and more closely towards its conception of being a global power in its own right. Its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) states that Turkey's desire for a "stable, independent and prosperous Central Asia has guided our policy priorities in the region towards building free market economies and functioning democracies."[15] Along with some of the priorities listed above, it appears that the Turkish Government is, at least in principle, intent on engaging on matters of conflict and security while continuing to advocate for open politics as a means to promote stability.

At the same time, Turkey's Foreign Minister has argued that "we have established a more functional policy toward these countries", prioritising helping them strengthen their independence while remaining neutral during conflicts between or within Central Asia countries.[16] Some analysts argue that Turkey has indeed been less ideological and more pragmatic, for example focusing on economic and energy cooperation while at the same time becoming reluctant to upset Central Asian governments (and Russia) through interference on internal affairs, including on issues related to conflict. They also note that the government is much more aware of its limitations with regards to promoting democratic politics in the face of highly centralised states.[17] Furthermore, though there are some examples of security cooperation, it is not clear what tangible interventions Turkey has made to manage conflict in the region.[18]

This stands in contrast to its relatively extensive role in Afghanistan, where Turkish troops and reconstruction teams have been deployed as part of the International

11 Balci (2013)

12 Hurriyet Daily News (2010) 'Central Asia plays central role in Turkish foreign policy, Davutoglu says' *Hurriyet Daily News* 7 March 2010

13 Saferworld interview, Vienna, 2012

14 Efegil, E. (2008) 'Turkish AK Party's Central Asia and Caucasus Policies: Critiques and suggestions' in *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* Vol 2 No 3, p 169.

15 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (2013) 'Turkey's Relations with Central Asian Republics' *Online*

16 Hurriyet Daily News (2010)

17 Saferworld interviews, Ankara, 2013

18 The notable exception is Afghanistan, where Turkey has played a relatively large role through the provision of troops, aid and provision of provincial reconstruction teams that include civilian experts. For more on this see Murphy, T & Sazak, O (2013) *Turkey's Civilian Capacity in Post-Conflict Reconstruction* Istanbul Policy Centre

Security Assistance Force, Turkish diplomats have sought to mediate between Islamabad and Kabul, and Turkish aid has been used to promote post-conflict reconstruction and capacity building.[19] Turkey's significant investment in Afghanistan, alongside any risks emanating from the imminent withdrawal of NATO troops from the country, may prove a significant consideration in its relations with Afghanistan's northern Central Asia neighbours in years ahead. Another critical factor shaping its engagement in the region will be the status of its bilateral relations with the major powers: Russia, China, the United States, and to a lesser extent the EU. The deepening of major power rivalry in Central Asia will likely have implications not only for the region's inter- or intra-state conflicts but also for whether, how, and with whom, Ankara chooses to involve itself in resolving them.

Bilateral relations

Kazakhstan remains the most important country for Turkey, given the extent of its economic ties and investments in the country.[20] The MFA notes as much, and a Strategic Partnership treaty was signed during the visit of President Nursultan Nazarbayev to Turkey in October 2009. Turkey has actively supported Kazakhstan's bid to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO), as well as its desire to take the rotating lead of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The creation of a transport corridor from Turkey through the Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and on to China may become a feature of future relations, as might Kazakh efforts to rebalance the country's reliance on Russia.

Kyrgyzstan is an important potential economic opportunity for Turkish trade and investment. However, despite rising trade, the Turkish MFA admits that economic relations have been "falling short of expectations, particularly given the excellent political relations between the two countries."[21] There have been several high-profile official delegations between the two countries over recent years, suggesting it has received special attention from the AKP.

After Kyrgyzstan's ethnic clashes in 2010, Turkey's visiting Foreign Minister boasted that "our plane will be the first to land in Bishkek following the unrest."[22] Turkey provided humanitarian aid during the unrest and subsequently pledged $20 million for technical assistance and joint projects.[23] While seeking to lead by example, Turkey's government claims not to have an official policy of promoting democracy overseas.[24] Turkey's MFA simply states that "Turkey welcomes the peaceful and democratic change in Kyrgyzstan and supports the establishment of democratic rules and principles in the country. The strengthening of the political, social and economic climates in the Kyrgyz Republic is key to regional peace and security."[25] Visiting in April 2013, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Kyrgyzstan's democracy had given Turkey hope, while his counterpart responded that Turkey was a model for the development of Kyrgyzstan.[26] However, according to one Turkish observer, some protests in the country have directly targeted Turkish businesses because they have been seen as too close to the government. As such, Turkey wants to be perceived as a more neutral actor. Furthermore, Ankara has been wary of upsetting Russia through too openly driving a pro-democracy agenda.[27] In some regards, as an alternative partner to Russia, China, and the US, Turkey may be more important to Kyrgyzstan than vice versa.

19 See Murphy and Sazak (2013)
20 Saferworld interviews, Ankara, 2013
21 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Turkey-Kyrgyzstan relations *Online*
22 Hurriyet Daily News (2010)
23 Hurriyet Daily News (2010)
24 Evin et al (2010)
25 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (2013) 'Turkey's Relations with Central Asian Republics' Online
26 Hurriyet Daily News (2013) 'Krygz democracy gives Turkey hope: PM' *Hurriyet Daily News* 10 April 2013
27 Saferworld interviews, Ankara, 2013

Uzbekistan was once seen by Turkey as "a key recipient of its secular model emphasizing modernization and democracy in post-Soviet Central Asia."[28] However, according to several analysts, Uzbekistan's leadership is highly sceptical of Ankara due to its perceived pro-democracy agenda. Furthermore, the influence of Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Turkey over Uzbek citizens and groups has been of concern.[29] Uzbek dissidents have lived and organised in Turkey since the early 1990s. The Turkish Government's refusal to extradite them has led to frequent clashes with Tashkent. For example, in response to one such case in 1994, the Uzbek Government ordered all Uzbek students back from Turkey; following another incident in 1999 it closed all Turkish Islamic schools in Uzbekistan.[30] After a thaw in 2003, relations with Uzbekistan soured again significantly following the 2005 Andijan massacre and Turkey's support for the UN's condemnation of the government. Uzbekistan responded by refusing to attend meetings of Turkic-speaking leaders and preventing Turkish President Abdullah Gül from visiting the country. In 2011, Turkish companies were directly targeted by Uzbek security forces while state television accused them of supporting Islamic extremists.[31] To Tashkent's displeasure, in May 2013 Uzbek opposition activists held a meeting in Istanbul to mark the 8th anniversary of the massacre.

According to the official line of the MFA, "Turkey has a special kinship with Tajikistan that derives from the heritage of a common history and culture … There is a strong will on both sides to strengthen the friendship, brotherhood and cooperation in every field."[32] However, despite this rosy rhetoric, analysts suggest that the reality is that Tajikistan is not currently a country of high priority for Ankara.

With regards to Turkmenistan, the Turkish MFA states that in "2012, Turkish-Turkmen relations, gaining a new impetus, have continued to develop rapidly with a busy schedule of high level visits."[33] Political engagements aside, it is Turkish businesses that play a significant role in the relationship, with over 600 registered in the country, though some are reportedly increasingly having to confront debt and other business challenges in Turkmenistan.[34]

Multilateral forums

With the setbacks of the 1990s in mind, completing the institutionalisation of relations with Central Asia has been a priority for Turkey, most notably through the creation of the CCTS as a means of further formalising meetings of Turkic-speaking leaders.[35] The CCTS includes several organs: the Council of Heads of State, Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Committee of High Level Officials, Council of Elders, and the Secretariat, all located in Turkey. After Turkmenistan claimed its neutrality an obstacle to participation and Uzbekistan stopped attending Turkic leader meetings after 2006, only Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are left in the grouping. The 10th Summit of the Heads of Turkic States was held in 2010, and its outcome statement included references to matters of conflict and security, though it is unclear what practical cooperation initiatives these have resulted in. At least rhetorically, the Heads of the Turkic Speaking States at the summit:

"… Reaffirmed their commitment to the preservation of national and regional security, stability and peace and to the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and development of market economy, rule of law and good governance …

28 Devlet, N (2012) 'Turkey and Uzbekistan: A Failing Strategic Partnership' *GMF Analysis* 5 January 2012 German Marshall Fund
29 Saferworld interviews, Ankara, 2013
30 Devlet (2012)
31 Devlet (2012)
32 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Turkey-Tajikistan relations *Online*
33 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Turkey-Turkmenistan relations *Online*
34 Turkish Ministry of Economy (2013) Countries and Regions: Turkmenistan *Online*
35 Hurriyet Daily News (2010)

"… Reemphasized the importance of the cooperation and joint actions in fight against the threats and challenges endangering international security including terrorism, extremism, trafficking in persons and illegal migration, illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, transnational organized crime as well as trafficking in firearms and reaffirmed the importance of solidarity among themselves and with international organization…

"… Reiterated their position on the inadmissibility of forcible change of the borders, noted their conviction that strengthening of the struggle of the international community against acts of aggression threatening peace and stability, state sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, is a determining factor for the establishment of the global security."[36]

Turkey is also the only NATO country to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), though not as a full member. After formally becoming a 'dialogue partner' in April 2013, Turkey's Foreign Minister announced that "Now we declare that Turkey also shares the same fate as [SCO] countries … We are thankful for being accepted as a member of this family. This is only a start."[37] This announcement came hot on the heels of Prime Minister Erdoğan's suggestion that the SCO could be more important for Turkey than the EU. While few took this statement as more than rhetorical political posturing, the statement does reflect Ankara's intention to expand relations beyond the West. It is questionable whether the SCO can actually become an important forum to pursue this objective.

Economic relations

Economic interaction with the rest of the world has mattered for Turkey's own economic growth: whereas trade accounted for just 17.1 per cent of GDP in 1980, it accounted for 52.3 per cent by 2008.[38] At the same time, domestic growth in Turkey has also led to a new class of businessmen ('the Anatolian tigers', a significant AKP constituency) who, thanks to geographic proximity and cultural factors, have "started to explore the economic and financial opportunities in the neighbouring countries and have backed the state in its efforts to stabilise the region for the sake of their interests, *inter alia*."[39]

Trade, infrastructure, energy, and communication are sectors where Turkey has deepened its economic relations with the Central Asia region. Turkey's trade volume with the region was valued at $6.5 billion by 2010, with total foreign direct investment (FDI) from Turkey exceeding $4.7 billion, while Turkish contractors' projects were valued at $50 billion with nearly 2,000 Turkish companies operating on the ground.[40] Turkey's access to EU markets gives it a special attraction for Central Asian states. Business associations, such as the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), are increasingly seeking to launch initiatives and deepen their members' engagement in the region. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that Turkey's economic ties with Central Asia have deepened faster than ties with other regions in the world and no Central Asian country lies within the list of Turkey's top 20 trading partners.

In terms of Turkey's global trade partners, Kazakhstan comes close, ranking 21st for exports and 20th for imports. Both have grown dramatically: Turkish goods exported to Kazakhstan in 2012 were valued at $1.06 billion, up from $160 million in 2001. Imports from Kazakhstan totalled $3.3 billion in 2012, up from $203 million from 2002. Turkish contractor companies have worked on 402 projects to date at a value of $16.5 billion. By the end of 2011, Turkish FDI stock in Kazakhstan reached $2 billion.[41] Kyrgyzstan ranked 72nd among Turkey's exports destinations in 2012, a market valued at $257 million. Turkish goods imports from Kyrgyzstan totalled only $45 million in

36 Foreign Affairs (2013) Declaration of 10th Summit of the Heads of the Turkic Speaking States (Istanbul, 16 September 2010)
37 Cited in Eurasia (2013) *Turkey makes it official* with SCO 28 April 2013
38 Evin, A. et al (2010) *Getting to Zero: Turkey, its neighbors and the West* Transatlantic Academy, p 23.
39 *Ibid*, p 76
40 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (2013) 'Turkey's Relations with Central Asian Republics' *Online*
41 Turkish Ministry of Economy (2013) Countries and Regions: Kazakhstan *Online*

2012. While up until 2006 Turkey was the second largest investor in Kyrgyzstan, it now lags at seventh place.[42] Despite poor political ties, economic relations with Uzbekistan seem relatively healthy: there are 579 Turkish companies in the country and it ranked 49th among Turkey's most preferred exports destination in 2012. Exports in 2012 were valued at $450 million while imports were at $813 million. Total Turkish FDI is calculated to be around $1 billion.[43] Turkish companies have undertaken contracting work in Turkmenistan worth more than $34 billion since the country's independence. In fact, Turkish contracting businesses reportedly account for 90 per cent of all construction projects in Turkmenistan.[44] Turkish exports to the country are valued at $1.48 billion in 2012 while imports totalled only $302 million, with a $1.1 billion surplus. Tajikistan ranked 81st among Turkey's most preferred exports destination in 2012, valued at a mere $234 million, while imports totalled only $345 million that same year.[45]

The protection of deepening economic interests – especially when directly involving a well-networked business community with close links to the AKP – may become an important factor in shaping Ankara's approach to the region. On the one hand, sensitivity over the risks to investments could lead to greater attention to, and direct engagement on, matters of internal politics and stability. On the other hand, maintaining healthy diplomatic ties with Central Asian governments may be seen as the most pragmatic and effective means of risk management, making involvement on sensitive domestic issues strictly off-limits. While time will tell how Ankara navigates these dynamics, they should not be overstated. It is clear that economic cooperation with Central Asia has grown, but one analyst argues that Turkish officials have tended to "[exaggerate] Turkish business activities in the regions. Turkish firms have not dominated the regional economics, and their actives are not more noticeable than those of other firms."[46] Central Asia may simply not be, or become, that important in terms of economic interests.

One area that may become more significant is energy. With a booming economy overly reliant on a select number of energy suppliers, notably from Russia, Ankara has been keen to diversify its suppliers, including from Central Asia. Ankara has sought to mediate disputes over oil and gas fields in the Caspian between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, the latter of which is directly linked to Turkey through the 1,700 kilometre Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the parallel Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline. Although much discussed, but without progress since the 1990s, Turkey still has hopes for the creation of a Trans-Caspian gas pipeline which could add to this energy corridor supplies from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The establishment of such links would greatly contribute to the vision of Turkey serving as an energy-hub for the wider region, thus cementing its global significance. Indeed, in 2007 the AKP suggested that an institution like the Organisation for Petroleum Exporting Countries, but focused on regional gas suppliers, should be created between Turkey and the Central Asian states – though there appears to be no progress on this front.[47] The geopolitics of Central Asia's supplies of energy, where Russia and China play such consequential roles, looks set to intensify and further complicate Turkey's position.

Aid

Globally, Turkish overseas aid has grown dramatically. In 2012, a year when deficits were forcing traditional donors to cut aid, Turkey increased its official development assistance by an enormous 98 per cent.[48] Much of this aid has gone to states affected by conflict, where Turkish NGOs – that raise money from a now more prosperous

42 Turkish Ministry of Economy (2013) Countries and Regions: Kyrgyzstan *Online*
43 Turkish Ministry of Economy (2013) Countries and Regions: Uzbekistan Online
44 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) Turkey-Turkmenistan relations Online
45 Turkish Ministry of Economy (2013) Countries and Regions: Tajikistan Online
46 Efegil (2008)
47 Efegil (2008)
48 OECD (2013) 'Aid to poor countries slips further as governments tighten budgets' Press Release 3 March 2013

public – also operate. Indeed Turkey's MFA states that it has "boosted its overseas development assistance to various countries affected by conflicts and other sources of instability such as natural disasters".[49] For example, in Afghanistan, Turkey had spent over $400 million between 2005 and 2009, seen by Turkish officials as a contribution to stability.[50] Referring to aid conditionalities, Turkish officials have stated that "our principle is not to interfere with the domestic policies of certain aid recipient, but concentrate on cooperation and coordination."[51]

As noted, TIKA was originally set up to deliver Turkish aid to newly independent Central Asian states. According to Turkish academics, today it aims to support several areas: the emergence of stable states, regional stability, economic and political reform, regional and global integration, bilateral relations, and the profitable transfer of energy.[52] In 2005, 50 per cent of the total assistance provided by Turkey to Uzbekistan was related to social infrastructure. This ratio is 40 per cent in Turkmenistan, 63 per cent in Kyrgyzstan, 82 per cent in Tajikistan, and 58 per cent in Kazakhstan.[53]

Capturing accurate statistics on Turkish aid to the region is challenging. First, TIKA's allocation of aid was reportedly somewhat uncoordinated until AKP-driven reforms were implemented in 2005, meaning that data from this period may not be reliable. Second, TIKA is a body with several functions: it delivers its own aid budget, delivers the aid of other government ministries (for example, from the Ministry of Education), coordinates aid from non-official sources, and also coordinates commercial partnerships. As such, while the following statistics are recorded as official development assistance, they should be treated with some caution.

Aid to the region is decreasing as a share of total Turkish aid globally, which is instead increasingly focused on Africa and MENA. For example, in 1992 nearly all of Turkey's aid went to Central Asia, in 2005, 55 per cent of TIKA's projects were conducted in Caucasian and Central Asian countries; this was reduced to 36 per cent in 2010 (no equivalent figures for Central Asia alone exist).[54] Total aid to the region has peaked at just over $1 billion a year at several intervals: in 1992, 1999, 2002, and 2003. It decreased fairly dramatically from 2003 until 2008, the last year with statistics available for all Central Asian countries. Indeed, total aid to the region under the AKP government is lower than during the previous decade, which leads to questions about whether Turkey has renewed its interest in the area.[55]

Analysing aid from a regional perspective may not be as illustrative of Turkish policy as assessing it on a country-by-country basis. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were, by a very significant margin, the largest beneficiaries of Turkish aid between 1992 and 2008. This is largely due to aid delivered to the two countries in the 1990s and early 2000s. Aid to Tajikistan was significant through the 1990s, peaked in 2004 at $648 million, and then fell dramatically to around $5 million a year until 2008. The country does not appear in lists of top ten recipients for years 2009, 2010, or 2011, suggesting this fall in priority is yet to been reversed. Aid to Uzbekistan peaked between 1999 and 2003 then, as with Tajikistan, fell dramatically to similarly low levels for subsequent years. In contrast, aid to Kyrgyzstan – relatively insignificant through the 1990s and early 2000s – increased markedly since 2004. It is now the largest beneficiary of Turkish aid in Central Asia, receiving $83 million in 2001. Kazakhstan, which also received very modest amounts through the 1990s and early 2000s has also received significantly more aid since 2004, and appears to be the second largest recipient. Aside from $95 million allocated in 1992, Turkmenistan has consistently received a relatively small proportion of Turkish aid.[56]

49 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'Development cooperation', website, accessed 11 October 2012 www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-development-cooperation.en.mfa

50 *Ibid*

51 Africa Online 'Interview with Sedar Cam, Director of TIKA' (2012) *Africa Online* 3 August 2012

52 Kilic, G (2011) 'Turkey's Foreign Aid Policy Towards Central Asia from a Comparative Perspective' *Thesis Submission* Middle East Technical University, Turkey

53 Kilic (2011)

54 Daloglu, T (2013) 'Turkey's Foreign-Aid Priority is Central Asia' in *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse* 29 May 2013

55 Kilic (2011)

56 Murphy & Sazak (2013)

Keeping in mind the possible inaccuracies in the data, the allocation of Turkish aid to Central Asia suggests that over the course of 2003/04, there was a change in focus from support for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to support for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, with Turkmenistan remaining a low priority. Such changes of policy could be explained in reference to the AKP's 2002 electoral victory and subsequent policy changes in Ankara, or due to changes within Central Asian states, for example related to the Uzbek Government's suspicion of Turkish intentions.

Security

According to one analysis, Turkey today "shares particular concerns about destabilising factors such as extremist movements, drug and arms trafficking, and terrorist activities within the Central Asian republics … As such, the government provides financial assistance and military training to these countries alongside its development capacity assistance."[57] Military-to-military ties only date back to the early 2000s, with the provision of Turkish equipment and training for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan "to help prepare their forces to battle insurgencies." Turkey also worked closely with Special Forces from both countries in training.[58] Since 1999, Turkey has hosted the NATO Partnerships for Peace Training Centre in Ankara, where military personnel from various Central Asian countries have attended courses on a number of occasions. In 2012 Turkey agreed to provide military aid to Kyrgyzstan to fight terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and to strengthen the defence and security sectors.[59] In 2013 Turkey also suggested it would help Kyrgyzstan turn the NATO Manas military base into a commercial airport. Turkey's aid budget has funded police training programmes for Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.[60] Judges and prosecutors have also been trained in Kazakhstan.[61]

57 Murphy & Sazak (2013)
58 RAND (2003)
59 24K News Agency (2012) "Turkey to assist Kyrgyzstan in strengthening of Defence Ministry, Security Council and Frontier Service' *24K News Agency* 13 January 2012
60 'Number of countries requesting police training from Turkey rises' (2012) *Anadolu Agency* 27 August 2012
61 Murphy & Sazak (2013)

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Concluding questions

RELATIVE TO THE BOLD VISION laid out after their independence in the early 1990s, the states of Central Asia no longer appear to be of high priority for Turkish foreign policy. At the same time, it would be wrong to conclude that the region has been entirely forgotten. Steady efforts appear to have been made to deepen or at least maintain diplomatic relations with most of the countries and with the region as a whole through the CCTS. In parallel, but perhaps with more tangible consequences, levels of trade and investment have markedly increased, though there is no evidence that this outstrips the growth of economic ties with other regions of the world. While Turkey's total aid budget has grown significantly, available data suggests that Central Asia has not featured highly in Ankara's calculations of where it should be allocated. Security cooperation appears to have become only a low-key feature of its engagement over the past decade or so. Finally, it is clear that Turkey is not as significant a player as larger powers that have more established interests in the region and greater capacity to protect them. Central Asia is, to some extent, a crowded and competitive field for a middle-tier power.

According to its government, "Turkey attaches special importance to preventative diplomacy, pioneers a great deal of mediation attempts in a wide geography and endeavours actively for the peaceful settlement of disputes."[62] Nonetheless, there is little evidence that such endeavours have featured prominently in relations with Central Asian countries. Taking into account the dynamics of its existing diplomatic, economic, development, and security cooperation, there is little to suggest that Turkey will inevitably deepen its efforts to manage conflict in Central Asia. Of course, a number of contextual changes – such as a significant deepening of Turkish involvement in the energy sector, the targeting of Turkish businesses, escalating intra- and inter-state conflict, security spill overs from Afghanistan, or intense geopolitical competition – could force Turkey to take on a more proactive role. When Ankara has sought to engage on conflict issues in other regions, it has legitimised its engagement with reference to shared histories and identities with the regions in question. In a similar vain, its Turkic links with Central Asia may be perceived by decisionmakers in Ankara to be a distinguishing asset for Turkey that guarantees it influence and a special role. Five specific questions are worth further exploring when forecasting what kind of a role Turkey may come to play:

1. If Turkey's economic and energy relations in Central Asia continue to deepen, will it inevitably increase engagement on conflict and security issues as a means to protect them or, in an attempt to please host regimes, avoid interfering on sensitive issues and take a 'neutral' position?

62 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'Resolution of Conflicts and Mediation', website, accessed 11 October 2012 www.mfa.gov.tr/resolution-of-conflicts-and-mediation.en.mfa

2. How will Turkey balance its stated support for democratic institutions – understood to underpin long-term stability and conflict management – with its apparently pragmatic approach focused on economic and energy cooperation with non-democratic regimes? Does a 'Turkish model' have any resonance in Central Asia today?
3. If Turkey does choose to engage on conflict issues, will it use its growing aid budget to promote peace and state-building in Central Asia and, if so, how? What other tools will it use to promote stability?
4. With the significant withdrawal of NATO troops looming, what would a serious deterioration in Afghanistan's stability mean for Turkey's engagement on security issues in the Central Asian region?
5. Turkey has growing trade relations with China, energy dependence with Russia, and a traditional security alliance with the United States. Should these powers start to aggressively compete with one another in Central Asia, how important does 'pivot power' Turkey become, and how will it position itself? What will this mean for whether, how, and with whom it engages on conflict issues?

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

COVER PHOTO: The road between multi-ethnic Osh (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Dungan, Russian) and more conservative and Uzbek Aravan follows the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. The border, at the time of this photograph, was marked just by white poles and a ditch. © KAREN WYKURZ

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