**A resurgent Turkey, the US and Afghanistan**

[Senator Rehman Malik](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/senator-rehman-malik/)

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It must have been somewhere around 2008 when I had my first meeting in my capacity as Interior minister with Recep Tayyib Erdogan. Of course, back then he was Turkey’s prime minister. As we sat in his modest office in Ankara, I was struck by his firm grasp of international relations, particularly the situation in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

He was a pragmatic politician. I had read a lot about him. One thing that stood out was the smart move of forming a new party with a secular outlook to reduce tension with the Turkish establishment. He demonstrated immense wisdom in handling the situation.

The years after the Arab Spring proved difficult for the region, including Turkey, as the militant group Daesh (or ISIS) gained global prominence in Iraq. It was and remains an overtly anti-Shia outfit.

During a sitting with then President Abdullah Gul, I remember urgently warning that Daesh would ultimately prove a bigger monster than either the Taliban or Al Qaeda. The former of Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hammad Bi Khalifa Al Thani, was also briefed on this development and I must appreciate how he opposed the oppression of the Syrian people. He also called on UN forces to play their role in Syria during the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) summit in Mecca back in 2012.

Turkey has long faced multiple tensions on the international front, namely with Russia, China and the US. Yet with Erdogan in the presidential seat — things took an upward turn. Not least after the transfer of parliamentary powers to the head of state. Thus, Erdogan rebuilt the tetchy relationship with Washington that floundered even more after the failed military coup in July 2016. Ankara pointed fingers at General Akin Ozturk and US-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen.

Once the Treaty of Lausanne expires — Turkey’s modern borders will be rendered obsolete. If Ankara reclaims lost territories, including claims to the Black Sea, it would entirely upend the current geo-strategic map. We will have to wait and see the potential American response

The trust level between NATO member Turkey and the Biden administration has improved to the extent that the US has handed over the running and security of Kabul airport to Ankara. This bolstering of ties is not welcomed by Russia or China.

Elsewhere, Saudi-Turkish relations have always fluctuated and the mistrust dates back to the Ottoman era. During the peak of which, the holy cities of Mecca and Medina fell under Ottoman protection until the Arab revolt of 1916, which marked the beginning of the end of the Ottoman Empire. This battle left deep scars in the Middle East and the Arab states gradually came under heavy European influence. The Ottoman Caliphate ended and Palestine came under British rule, leading to the eventual creation of the State of Israel.

After their defeat, the Ottomans were coerced into signing the Treaty of Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, which eventually fell. It was replaced in 1923 by the 100-year Treaty of Lausanne, signed by: representatives of New Turkish Govt and Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). The treaty formally concluded the end of World War I. It stipulated that Turkey:

\* Relinquish claims to its former Arab provinces;

\* Recognise British and Italian possession of Cyprus and the Dodecanese, respectively;

\* Surrender claims to the Bosporus Strait — linking the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and, by extension, the Mediterranean Sea — as an international maritime corridor. Turkey was also prohibited from receiving transit fees from ships passing through;

\* Allow the Turkish Straits, the waterway between the Aegean and Black seas to open up to all shipping;

\* Be barred from from oil exploration (several exemptions notwithstanding) for the next 100 years.

Once this treaty expires, these provisions will likely be reversed and, in theory, Turkey’s modern borders will be rendered obsolete. If Ankara were to reclaim lost territories, including claims to the Black Sea, it would entirely upend the current geo-strategic map. We will have to wait and see the potential American response.

Such historic context is important in the expected eventuality of a treaty on Afghanistan; not lasting 100 years but at least five years to restore peace to that country.

South Asia is already sitting on two volcanoes: Afghanistan and Kashmir. The Middle East is still burning after the failure of the Arab Spring. One can only imagine how the world powers will react towards a resurgent Turkey. As for now, the handing over of Kabul airport to Turkey appears to represent a new era in US-Turkish ties. It is therefore hoped that Ankara and Washington along with Pakistan will work closely together for Afghan peace and rehabilitation.

The views expressed here are solely mine and do not necessarily represent the views of my party.

*The writer is a former Interior minister, author of five books, Chairman Institute of Research and Reforms (IRR) Islamabad. He tweets @Senrehmanmalik*