

Hüseyin Işıksal/Ozan Örmeci (eds.)

# Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Millennium

 PETER LANG  
EDITION

**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in  
the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic  
data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Turkish foreign policy in the new millennium / Hüseyin Işıksal, Ozan Örmeci  
(eds.).

pages cm

ISBN 978-3-631-66402-5

1. Turkey—Foreign relations—21st century. I. Işıksal, Hüseyin, editor of  
compilation. II. Örmeci, Ozan, editor of compilation.

JZ1649.T93 2015

327.561—dc23

2015003314

ISBN 978-3-631-66402-5 (Print)  
E-ISBN 978-3-653-05496-5 (E-Book)  
DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-05496-5

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Frankfurt am Main 2015  
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Hakan Gönen\* & Kubilay Atik\*

## Turkish-Japanese Relations: A Descriptive Assessment

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to propose a descriptive framework to readers on the relations of Turkey and Japan during the prewar and postwar periods. The paper has two main sections. The section on the prewar period reveals that the relations between Turkey and Japan are not profound in political, economic, or cultural arenas. One significant reason may be that the two countries had nearly no points of intersection during their phases of expansion and development. While Japan followed a policy of isolation until the 1860s and began a modernisation process thereafter, during this period, the Ottoman Empire exercised a policy of westernisation in politics and government. In the postwar period section, the two countries increased their high level of diplomatic visits and talks to develop further bilateral economic, political, and cultural ties. However, this paper emphasises that only recently have the bilateral economic and political ties between these countries flourished. The conclusion stresses that 2012 is a turning point in the development of relations between the two countries. They are emphasising their shared values and interests, transforming their newly emerging 'strategic cooperation' into a sustainable and constructive partnership.

**Keywords:** Turkish-Japanese Relations.

### I. Prewar Period: From the 1860s to the end of the Second World War

Many historians assert that the bilateral relations between the two countries started in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration, a period characterized by a rapid modernization of Japan.<sup>1</sup> Prior, Japan was a political and military regime that isolated itself from the outside world. The modernization process aimed to completely restructure Japan's political, economic, and socio-cultural institutions under a centralized

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<sup>1</sup> For further reading on this topic see: Selçuk Esenbel, "Japanese Interest in the Ottoman Empire", *The Japanese and Europe: Images and Perceptions*, ed. Bert Edstrom (Surrey: Curzon Press, Japan Library, 2000); Selçuk Esenbel and Inaba Chiharu, *The Rising Sun and the Turkish Crescent: New Perspectives on the History of Japanese Turkish Relations* (Boğaziçi University Press, 2003).



national government. During this process, Japan began to shape its foreign policy stance and international relations.

The attitude of ruling elites in Japan led the country toward the economic, political and military modernization.<sup>2</sup> Through the Meiji Restoration, they wanted to make Japan a developed and industrialized country in the international arena. To accomplish this, it was necessary to borrow some cultural and political patterns from the Western world. With that aim, in November 1871 the Meiji government sent abroad a diplomatic mission led by Towomi Iwakura, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan. The delegation was to evaluate the possibilities of massive cultural borrowing from the West. After the return of the Iwakura mission, the Meiji ruling elites implemented a state, drafted a constitution, and established a national education system. They started the process rapidly industrializing and militarizing the country.<sup>3</sup>

In February 1873, Generals-Ichuroo Fukuchi and Mokurai Shimaji from Japan received orders to make a detailed inquiry on the legal systems in the Ottoman Empire, Greece, and Egypt. After returning to Japan in 1875, Mokurai Shimaji published a book titled '*A Diary of the Voyage to the West*'. This is the first known book is known to describe Istanbul, the Ottoman capital, from the perspective of the Japanese people.<sup>4</sup>

The first official contact of the Ottoman Empire with Japan took place during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Between the years 1878-1887, a few Japanese delegates visited the Ottoman capital, resulting in agreements for diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries. The visit by the Japanese Crown Prince Komatsu with his wife to Istanbul in September 1887 was a significant contribution to the development of these bilateral relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire. Following this visit, the two countries decided to sign a trade agreement. The most important articles of the agreement were:<sup>5</sup>

- The establishment of consulates and commercial representatives in the mutually open harbors of the two countries,
- The agreement that decisions concerning the citizens in both countries to be made by their own consulates,
- The agreement that allowed the other country's battle ships into each other's waters in the case of an attack by a third country.

2 For more information about the Meiji Period, see: William G. Beasley and William G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 54-84.

3 Kazuhiko Okuda, "Transnationalism and the Meiji State: On the Questioning of Cultural Borrowing", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001). pp. 25-39.

4 Hiroshi Nagaba, "Japan and Turkey Historical Process for Diplomatic Relations", *Vol. II*, no. 3 (1997). p. 175.

5 Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, "Uzakdoğu'da Değişen Dengeler ve Türkiye" in *Çin'in Gölgesinde Uzakdoğu Asya*, ed. Deniz Ülke Arıboğan (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2001). pp. 79-80.

This trade agreement, regarded by both parties as a significant step in the development of bilateral relations, could not go into effect due to the fact that Sultan Abdülhamid II was aware of Russian threat. Sultan Abdülhamid II emphasized that Russia had been a great power threatening both countries for centuries. Consequently, while a possible alliance between Japan for the Ottoman Empire should seriously considered, so was its potential for friction between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Ertuğrul Frigate Disaster: The First Ottoman Visit to Japan**

The Ertuğrul Frigate Disaster played a particularly important role in the development of Turkish-Japanese relations and the formation of Turkish image in Japan. In his book titled '*Yüzyılın Dönemecinde Türkiye (Turkey in the Threshold of Century)*', Atsuko Toyomo, the former Ambassador of Japan to Turkey, describes this tragedy as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Upon the visit of Japanese Crown Prince Komatsu and the presentation of the highest order of Japan by the Emperor Meiji to the Ottoman Emperor, Sultan Abdülhamid II decided to send an Ottoman frigate on a goodwill voyage to Japan so as to make a positive progress in bilateral relations. In July 1889, Admiral Osman Pasha with his crews of 650 men weighed anchor from the Istanbul Port with the aim of paying goodwill visit to the Japanese Empire. After a long voyage, the Ertuğrul frigate arrived in the Yokohama Port in June 1890 in order to visit the Emperor Meiji and give him the special letter from Sultan Abdülhamid II. In returning, in a violent typhoon, the Ertuğrul Frigate was dashed against the rocks and sank near the Ojiyama Prefecture in Kushimoto on September 16, 1890. Nearly 600 crew members, including Admiral Osman Pasha, died in this tragic incident.

Shaken by this tragic incident, the Japanese people collected donations for the survivors and their families. Survivors sailed back to the Ottoman territories in the Japanese frigates the Hiei and the Kongo. When the crews arrived in Istanbul they told of the courtesy shown by the Japanese people. From that point on, the Ertuğrul Frigate disaster became a symbol of friendship between Japanese and Turkish peoples.

### **The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations**

Guided by their motto 'Civilization and Science', politicians of the Meiji era strove raise the political, economic, military, and technical standards of the country to western levels. Beginning with a nation-state framework in the 19th century and

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Nagaba, "Japan and Turkey Historical Process for Diplomatic Relations", p. 178.

extending to the empire in 1945,<sup>8</sup> the powerbrokers in Japan called for an integration of the Japanese economy with other Asian markets. Unfortunately, they also spread belligerent nationalistic and expansionist sentiments throughout the country as they sought to merge their imperial dream with a vision of a modern industrial Japanese economy. Technical and military strategies moved Japan in this direction.

Japan colonized Taiwan Island by defeating China in 1895. They annexed Korea by defeating Russia in 1905 and then colonized it in 1910. The victory of Japan over Russia dramatically increased the confidence Japanese policy makers had in its army and governing strategy. They set their sights on establishing a great empire in East Asia. They stopped short of subsuming European and American powers, believing this exclusion necessary for the peace and stability of the world.

It was from this perspective that Japan entered World War I, essentially a European war, in 1914. They joined the war as a way of increasing their territory in China. In the end, Japan was among the victors. By contrast, the Ottoman Empire was among the vanquished. The Ottomans had to sign the Treaty of Sevres, enabling the allied states to control the whole country.

However, the independence movement that began in Anatolia with Mustafa Kemal in 1924 invalidated this treaty. It was not until July 24, 1923, with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne and recognition of the Republic of Turkey, that peace was restored between Turkey and the allied states. This was the only mutually agreed upon peace treaty of World War I. From this point, Turkey was able to develop a successful foreign policy and managed to maintain friendly relations with nations of both blocks.<sup>9</sup> Back in Japan, the empire ratified the Treaty of Lausanne on May 3 1924, thereby recognizing the Republic of Turkey. Diplomatic relations between the two would again be possible.

An article on Tokyo Nichi-Nichi Shimbun on March 29, 1925 reported that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to open an embassy in Turkey. However, it was yet to be decided who the ambassador would be.<sup>10</sup> Japanese Foreign Minister Kijuro Shidebara proposed Obata Yuukichi, who had previously refused the proposals for the Italian and British embassies, accepted the opportunity in Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

8 Selçuk Esenbel, "Japonya ve Türkiye Çağdaşlaşma Tarihi" in *Çağdaş Japonya'ya Türkiye'den Bakışlar*, ed. S. Esenbel, A.M. Demircioğlu, and C. Kozlu (İstanbul: Simurg, 1999). pp. 27-28.

9 Mehmet Gönlübol and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikasına Genel Bir Bakış" in *Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2000), p. 5

10 Nagaba, "Japan and Turkey Historical Process for Diplomatic Relations", p. 185.

11 When we have a look at the Japanese diplomats who served in Turkey before World War II, we see that they held important positions upon their return to their country. As an example, Ashida Hitoshi who served in Turkey as a diplomat before World War II became the prime minister after the war. Hirano Matsutani, Hironao

The fact that the embassy in Istanbul was the first Japanese embassy in the Middle East attests to the importance given to Turkey by the Japanese government.<sup>12</sup> The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries opened the way improved commercial activities. On June 13, 1925 a Turko-Japanese Association was established – Nitto Kyokai (Nippon Toruko Kyokai). Tokugawa Iemasa, a descendant of the Tokugawa Shoguns, became its first chairman. A short time afterwards, Turkey's first ambassador to Japan, Fuat Hulusi (Togay) arrived in Japan on July 7, 1925, garnering headlines in the important Japanese newspapers of the day. Five months later, in November 1925, a Turko-Japanese Commercial Association was established in Osaka. The Chair of Osaka Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Katsuta Inabata, became its chairman while Ambassador Fuat Hulusi assumed to role of honorary chairman.<sup>13</sup>

In 1928, the two countries cooperated to build a cotton-processing factory in Bursa.<sup>14</sup> In 1934, they signed a temporary commercial treaty based on the principle of equal trade by both parties. Approximately three years after the signing of the treaty, they began negotiations to lift the limits. After agreeing to terms, the treaty was signed and it took effect.<sup>15</sup>

After World War I, influenced by its own modernization process, Japan became increasingly militarist in East Asia. As a result, Japan pursued an expansionist policy from the 1900s until the end of World War II. After World War I, Japan invaded Manchuria. In 1937, it began the invasion of China to acquire the raw materials and secure the immense Chinese markets. Consequently, such expansionist policies dragged it into World War II.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, Turkey avoided involvement in the war and tried to maintain its security through a policy of balancing alliances. Still, despite all its efforts, Turkey eventually felt that it had to enter the war. The Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945) decided that the countries who declared war to Germany and Japan before March 1 1945 would be invited to the San Francisco Conference to establish the structure of the new international order. Therefore, Turkey needed to declare war to Germany and Japan in order to be invited to the conference. Thus, Turkey

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Matsutani, *Japonya'nın Dış Politikası Ve Türkiye* (İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi, 2009), p. 64

<sup>12</sup> Umut Arık, *A Century of Turkish-Japanese Relations: Towards a Special Partnership* (Turkish-Japanese Business Council, 1991). p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-82.

<sup>14</sup> Akara Matano, "Japon-Türk İlişkileri" (Marmara University, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> For further information on this topic see: P.M. Kennedy, *Büyük Güçlerin Yükseliş Ve Çöküşleri: 16. Yüzyıldan Günümüze Ekonomik Değişim ve Askeri Çatışmalar*, trans. B. Karanakçı (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2002), pp. 400-412, Fahir.H. Armaoğlu, *Amerikan-Japon Münasebetlerinin on Yılı, 1931-1941* (Ankara: Ajans Türk Matbaası, 1956).

declared war on Japan and Germany on February 23, 1945. The war was nearly over and Turkey's commitment did not carry any military significance.<sup>17</sup>

## I. The Postwar Period

Japan's defeat in World War II had a significant impact on redefining the main parameters of its foreign policy during the Cold War years. At first, Allied forces occupied Japan, demilitarizing and democratizing the country through various political, economic, and social reforms.<sup>18</sup> During the occupation period, Japan lost its foreign policy capability entirely. According to the policies of the Allied forces, Japan would never again menace the peace of the world. This Allied occupation, led by the United States, continued until 1952.

In September 1951, Japan signed a peace treaty in San Francisco, formally ending World War II for both sides. Signatories included another 48 nations, including Turkey.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after the peace treaty, Japan's economy and foreign policy started integrating with Western countries. At the same time, the Japanese foreign policy makers sought to establish new diplomatic relations with various countries. In the meantime, for the Turkish government considered the renormalization of relations with Japan on a preferential basis. Reasons for doing so included economic priorities and political support from the international society.

As a result, Turkey reopened its embassy in Tokyo and designated General İzzet Aksular as the first ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the republic in 1952. Soon afterwards, the Japanese government also started to operationalize its diplomatic mission in Turkey and designated Mr. Shinichi Kamimura as the first postwar Japanese ambassador in 1953. Mr. Kamimura served as the Japanese ambassador to Turkey between 1953 and 1956. During that period, he played a significant role in concluding a trade and payment agreement. Both countries would later experience the impact of this agreement on their bilateral economic relations.<sup>20</sup>

In 1957, a Turkish diplomatic mission led by Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, the minister of foreign affairs, paid official visits to Japan so as to deepen bilateral economic and political relations. These visits initiated the process of further significant official visits. To illustrate, in 1958, the Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes paid an official visit to Tokyo upon the invitation of the Japanese government, which is the first official visit to be made by a Turkish Premier in the postwar period. Later, the Japanese Prince and Princess Mikasa visited Turkey as the state's guests. These

17 See, Rona Aybay, "Turkey's Declaration of War on Japan at the End of the Second World War", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, no. 23 (2002), p. 296.

18 Beasley and Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, p. 214.

19 James W. Morley, *Japan and Korea: America's Allies in the Pacific* (Walker, 1965), p. 70.

20 [http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc039/kanuntbmmc039/kanuntbmmc03906875.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc039/kanuntbmmc039/kanuntbmmc03906875.pdf).

reciprocal visits in the early postwar period stimulated friendly bilateral relations up to the present.

Visits by the high-ranking officials from both countries continued in the 1950s and 1960s. The most important development of the 1960s for bilateral relations was the agreement concerning credit from Japan to Turkey for the construction of the Bosphorus Bridge. In 1969 Turkish foreign minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil visited Japan in an effort to strengthen economic relations. During negotiations, Çağlayangil and his colleague discussed the amount of the credit needed for the construction of the Bosphorus Bridge. Taking Japanese business interests into consideration, the Japanese government announced that it would providing a credit loan of 30 million dollars to finance the 150 million dollar cost of the project.<sup>21</sup> In turn, a Japanese consortium of construction companies joined the international tender bid for the construction. However, their bid could not succeed against German and British companies. Despite losing the bid for the tender, the Japanese companies nevertheless gained an opportunity to get to know Turkey and its business world.

The Bosphorus Bridge project was to begin in the 1970s. When the Japanese companies failed to win the bid, the Japanese government suspended the credit loan until a mutual agreement could be reached. However, the Turkish government insisted that the credit loan remain as the project also included side roads and another bridge on the Golden Horn. It persuaded the Japanese government to continue its commitment. Following this decision, the two countries have cooperated in two large construction projects: the Hasan Uğurlu Dam and the Golden Horn Bridge. The Hasan Uğurlu Dam had an important place in the second quinquennial development plan of Turkey. Japan provided a 27 million dollar credit; the first non-commercial economic cooperation credit loan that Japan has provided to Turkey. That the same year, Japan provided credit loan support of 9.2 million dollars for the Golden Horn Bridge project.<sup>22</sup>

Another event that concerned Japan and Turkey took place in 1978. The United Nations Security Council held an election for a non-permanent member. Japan and Bangladesh ran for the candidacy of the only seat reserved for Asia. Because both countries sought Turkey's support, it had to make a difficult choice. In the end, although at that time it was very important for Japan to develop its diplomatic ties within the United Nations, Turkey supported Bangladesh and Japan lost the vote.<sup>23</sup> Japanese politicians were disappointed in Turkey's choice and the Japanese public viewed their government's policy towards Turkey as weak and based on abstract notions of historic friendly relations.

<sup>21</sup> Arık, *A Century of Turkish-Japanese Relations: Towards a Special Partnership*, p. 206.

<sup>22</sup> Matano, "Japon-Türk İlişkileri", p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Matsutani, *Japonya'nın Dış Politikası Ve Türkiye*, p. 93.

Observing Japanese foreign policy from 1945 to the mid-1970s, one can see that the country has pursued a strategy of reconstruction and re-adaptation to the world. During this period, Japan's essential goals were to reestablish diplomatic relations, be accepted to the United Nations and other international organizations, and reestablish the foreign relations. These objectives were all necessary for the economic re-development of the country.

Japan, which entered the United Nations in 1956 and OECD in 1964, signed a security agreement with the United States, established its security policies on this alliance, and thus guaranteed its security. By going under the security umbrella of the United States, Japan was able to limit military expenditure and thereby maintain a constant economic growth rate. Between 1950 and 1970, the GDP of the country increased at an incredible rate of 10.5%. Even the oil crisis of the 1973-74, which caused a global scale recession in the world economy, could not prevent the growth of the Japanese economy. In the 1970s, Japan became the third most productive country of the world after the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the August of 1983, the Japanese Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe came to Turkey to discuss a possible cooperation between Japan and Turkey to bring peace and stability to the Middle East. This visit had historical importance because for the first time a Japanese minister was visiting Turkey. During their meetings, they touched on a range of social, economic, political, and regional issues. Notably, at the end of the discussions they agreed on a credit loan of 65 million dollars for Turkey. This agreement had already been promised within the OECD framework as a fourth emergency aid credit. In addition to this, the Japanese government provided a total credit loan of 333 million dollars for the Kinalı-Sakarya Highway project, which also included the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge on the Bosphorus.<sup>24</sup>

In the second half of the 1980s, the contacts between the two countries' parliaments were revived. The visit of the Japanese vice foreign minister Kitahawa Ishimatsu to Turkey in August 1984, the establishment of the "Turko-Japanese Parliamentary Friendship Group" of 70 parliamentarians by the General Secretary of the Liberal Democrat Party Kanemaru Shin in 1985, and the establishment of "Turko-Japanese Inter-parliament Friendship Group" within the Turkish parliament in the same year can be cited as important events.

When we observe the relations between the two countries until the 1980s in political and economic arenas, we see that both Turkey and Japan were passive in developing the relations. This situation was, to a certain extent, the result of the import substitutionist industrialization policy of Turkey. But we can also say that good bilateral relations accelerated during Prime Minister Turgut Özal period, who, at the time was called the most popular Turk in Japan. The reason for this acceleration was Turkey's termination of an import substitutionist industrialization policy and adoption of a new growth and development model based on export and competition. The volume of commerce between the two countries increased

24 Matsutani, *Japonya'nın Dış Politikası ve Türkiye*, p. 108.

from 234 million dollars to 762 million dollars and Turkey received some of Japan's most significant loans.

The economic and cultural relations between the two countries continued well into the 1990s. In particular, the volume of commerce steadily increased to 1.5 billion dollars. However, beginning in the 1990s the bilateral commerce seems to have developed in favor of Japan. The table below reveals the situation.

*Turkish-Japanese Foreign Trade (Thousand Dollars)*

Year	Export	Import	Balance	Volume
1990	239.234	1.119.083	-879.849	1.358.317
1991	226.043	1.091.854	-865.811	1.317.897
1992	162.459	1.112.686	-950.227	1.275.145
1993	158.433	1.620.790	-1.462.357	1.779.223
1994	186.813	967.514	-780.701	1.154.327
1995	180.264	1.399.956	-1.219.692	1.580.220
1996	166.760	1.381.999	-1.215.239	1.548.759
1997	143.823	2.040.111	-1.896.288	2.183.934
1998	112.746	2.045.634	-1.932.888	2.156.266
1999	121.755	1.392.637	-1.270.882	1.514.392
2000	149.489	1.620.561	-1.471.072	1.770.050
2001	124.065	1.307.372	-1.183.307	1.431.437
2002	128.656	1.462.786	-1.334.130	1.591.442

Source: DİE (Turkish Statistics Institute)

Between February 26 and March 1, 1995, the Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller visited Japan with a large mission. Çiller's visit was the fourth in the history of Turkish-Japanese relations after Adnan Menderes (1958), Turgut Özal (1985), and Süleyman Demirel (1992). Within the framework of this visit, the Prime Minister Tansu Çiller provided information about Turkey. To underscore her intention to intensify the Turkish-Japanese relations, she invited the Japanese firms to do business in Turkey. Çiller also pointed that the establishment of the Central Asian Republics created a huge market in this area and Turkey with its ideal position could cooperate with Japan in investing in these republics. It is interesting that Çiller pointed out that existence of this new region could help Turkey to grow economically and politically. It enhances the importance of Turkey and bilateral relations based on this new terrain can be built. Japan is deeply interested in the Eurasian region, in particular in Central Asia and the Caucasian republics.



In addition to the political influence wielded, these regions constitute very important markets. Areas of long-term profitable investment suitable for Japanese capital do exist in this region. As well, Japan can sell its high-tech and conventional industry goods here.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Japan's most important reason for its interest in the Central Asian and the Caucasian regions is energy. For an energy poor country like Japan, establishing relations with these countries has primary strategic importance.<sup>26</sup>

In 1998, Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz also emphasized the importance of Central Asia centered cooperation. He noted in the Turkish-Japanese Business Council Meeting that Turkey comes at the head of the list of countries with which Japan can cooperate for its relations in Central Asia and the Caucasus. He noted that Turkey's power in the region does not come only from its geographic position, but also from its dynamic economy and private sector.<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, such cooperation in the region between Japan and Turkey offers mutual advantages. Compared to Turkey, Japan is perceived as a country which does not give vain promises and has the power and the potential to help meet the needs of countries in the region. Turkey can bring to the table its good relations with the Turkic states of the region but has suffered a decline in its relation with other regional countries.

## Conclusion

In the post-war period following World War II, the high-level diplomatic talks that started with the Menderes government in Turkey have so far failed to bear results in the economic sense. In particular, the talks were stuck within a narrow framework, the Turkish side did not have high expectations for these relations, and the Japanese side saw Turkey only as a potential new market.

At a different level, there is an increase in the cultural exchanges between the two countries. Various culture centers established in Japan, language courses, and the Turkish-Japanese friendship associations in Japan are concrete evidences of this exchange. There is a museum and a mausoleum in the city of Kushimoto where the Ertuğrul Frigate sank. The Kashiwazaki Turkish Culture village near Niigata cherishes Turkish folk culture. The number of visitors who came to the village in its first year is indicative of the Japanese public curiosity for the Turkish culture, history, and arts. The number of Japanese language courses and friendship and culture associations in various cities of Turkey has also increased. The Turkish-Japanese Foundation in Ankara, the Japan Research Association in Istanbul, Japanese language programs in the Bosphorus University and Middle East

25 İbrahim Öztürk, "Yeni Yüzyılda Türkiye-Japonya İlişkileri", *Avrasya* 9, no. 3 (2003), p. 113.

26 Kent E. Calder, *Japan's Energy Angst and the Caspian Great Game*, vol. 12 (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2001).

27 Milliyet, Haber, Haber, *Yabancı Sermayeye Kolaylık Sözü*, 05/05/1998.

Technical University, and the establishment of Japanese language departments at undergraduate and graduate levels in Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University and Kayseri Erciyes University<sup>28</sup> also indicate Turkish interest in things Japanese. To underscore this mutual appreciation, 2003 was nominated as Turkish Year in Japan in order to help promote Turkey in Japan. In return, 2010 was nominated as Japanese Year in Turkey. With such developments, organizers hoped that a certain depth could be gained in the bilateral political and cultural relations.

The two countries took a very important step in the early days of 2012 for the improvement of relations: the Japanese Foreign Minister visited Turkey. In the joint press conference following the discussions, participants stressed that the relations between the two countries should be taken out of their routine and take the form of a strategic partnership supported by strong mechanisms. In the meeting, the two countries also agreed that annual meetings at the foreign ministers level would be held and there would be internship exchange programs between the respective ministries of foreign affairs. All these developments indicate that relations with Japan are becoming more institutionalized in Turkey.

In sum, Japan is seen as a country of great economic power and a country that uses this power for peaceful purposes, and the Japanese people are seen as a calm and polite people in Turkey. As mentioned before, the Ertuğrul tragedy that took place in 1890 has always held a symbolic importance in the bilateral relations. It is possible to say similar things for Japan as well<sup>29</sup>. For Japan, Turkey is known as a regional middle power and the Turkish people are known as a warm and friendly people. Unfortunately, because of geographical distance, both countries have not shown a great enthusiasm so far for the further deepening of the bilateral relations.

It is acknowledged that Japan is among the leading countries of the world in the economic sense. Although it has lost its place to China as the second largest economy after USA in 2011, Japan's institutionalised economic and political structure and role in diplomatic affairs remain. Japan is also an important member of G-8, which includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Britain, and the USA. It is not a permanent member but seeks to be. Japan is working to change the structure and mechanisms of the United Nations Security Council in accordance with the council's purpose and the conditions of the day. Its positive role based on a peaceful cooperative approach in regional affairs also brings Japan to the fore as a peaceful country.

Similarly, Turkey has assumed the role of an important regional power with its political agenda for foreign affairs. It has gained increasing power in Middle East

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28 In more than five cities, Japanese language programs are being established at an undergraduate level as of this moment, and many private and state universities like Bilkent University and Hacettepe University have also begun to offer Japanese courses.

29 As an example, the Japanese citizens who could not be evacuated by the Japanese government during the Iran-Iraq war were evacuated by a plane sent by the Turkish government to Iraq.

after the Arab Spring. Turkey's structure as a both secular and Muslim state as well as its democratic tradition serves as a model to Arab countries that experience political crises. Also, the development of Turkey as an energy hub and its dynamic and strong economy has made it an important actor in the international arena. Within the framework of these developments, it has become a necessity for Turkey to widen its scope and depth of international affairs.

The establishment of foreign affairs with Japan, a country that pursues a sustainable foreign policy with peaceful and democratic values and undertakes important roles in the Asia Pacific region, can help expand the vision of Turkey's foreign policy. In the same manner, the regional roles that Turkey takes reflect globally. Turkey's determined and positive attitude towards its political principles for the establishment of peace and prosperity has caught the attention of Japanese political decision makers. Both countries can benefit if they raise their bilateral relations from a routine to a strategic level.

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