

# Turkey in tough spot over Russia-Ukraine crisis

Thu, 2022-02-24 23:54

ANKARA: As Russia launched air and ground assaults on Ukraine, NATO member Turkey finds itself in a delicate position for maintaining its good relations with both countries.

Its control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, key routes during such a crisis, made Turkey an indispensable partner for the West.

On Thursday, Ukraine asked Turkey to close the straits to Russian vessels.

Turkey, which has maritime borders with Ukraine and Russia, has the legal authority to control the straits under the 1936 Montreux Convention, that gives Ankara exclusive rights to restrict the passage of warships not belonging to countries bordering the Black Sea.

During wartime or under threat of aggression, Turkey can close the straits to the transit of all foreign warships, while non-Black Sea countries and littoral states should notify Ankara 15 days and 8 days in advance, respectively, for sending vessels.

For Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish program at the Washington Institute, if Ankara denied naval access to Russia into the Black Sea, it would open a can of worms, with the area a maritime condominium shared by Turkey and Russia.

“In that case, Moscow would ask to renegotiate the Montreux Convention and Turkey would never get a deal as good as (the) Montreux regime again. It is the reason why Ankara will not violate the existing convention,” he told Arab News.

Turkey’s gatekeeping over the straits will now test the limits of its neutral stance vis-a-vis Russia and Ukraine.

In a press statement on Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey would not abandon either Russia or Ukraine.

“Turkey is currently not in a position to sacrifice its relations with Ukraine or Russia as it has developed significant strategic links with both countries in the last few years,” Prof. Emre Ersen, an expert on Russia-Turkey relations from Marmara University in Istanbul, told Arab News.

“Therefore, it will most likely continue to call for an immediate diplomatic resolution of the conflict.”

At the same time, Ersen thinks Ankara will try to implement the clauses of the Montreux Convention strictly, since this document gives Turkey the opportunity to stay neutral without having to choose a side in the current

crisis.

Turkey, which finds itself in a tough spot, has close ties with Ukraine in the defense industry as it sells its drones and has an active defense deal of co-production, while it is also heavily dependent on Russian gas and defense procurement.

Turkey receives about 33 percent of its natural gas and 66 percent of wheat from Russia.

With tourism season approaching, Ukrainian and Russian tourists traditionally make up almost one fifth of Turkey's total visitors.

But Ankara, which officially described Russian moves against Ukraine as unacceptable, still stands against applying any sanctions on Russia – which presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin recently described as “useless” – and prefers de-escalation through diplomatic means and dialogue.

Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based Russia analyst, thinks that Turkey has so far opted for a moderate stance on the Ukrainian crisis by urging the parties to follow common sense.

“However, for a year Turkey has followed a strictly pro-Ukrainian stance, which will push Russia to take a more cautious and skeptical stance against any diplomatic move by the country,” he told Arab News.

According to Sezer, if Turkey opens its Black Sea waterways to the fleets of the Western powers or if it shares any intelligence with the West about any aerial threat against Ukraine, Russia will take it as a *casus belli*, a justification for war.

With a statement on Thursday, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged Russia to immediately end the “unjust and unlawful action” and underlined Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Under Montreux, aircraft carriers should also seek permission from the Turkish government when crossing over the straits.

However, for Ersen, compared with the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, it will be much more difficult for Ankara to follow a middle-way policy between Russia and the West.

In 2008, Turkey denied permissions to large US military ships to enter the Black Sea based on Montreux upon Russia's military intervention in Georgia.

“Turkey's NATO allies will definitely increase their pressure on Ankara to reconsider its special relationship with Moscow which could also cause significant repercussions for Turkish-Russian relations, especially with regard to thorny issues like the Syrian civil war and the Russian-made S-400 missiles,” Ersen said.

Despite its strained ties with NATO upon the purchase of the Russian defense system, Turkey regained its importance within the alliance in supporting

Ukraine.

Samuel Ramani, associate fellow at the Royal United Service Institute, thinks that Turkey is trying to show its solidarity with NATO consensus by supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity.

"Turkey has also viewed Ukraine as a key partner since 2010, as it burnishes its Black Sea power status and provides it with useful commercial deals, especially in the munitions and drone spheres," he told Arab News.

He added: "In this crisis, Turkey has tried to show its value to NATO by offering itself as a venue for talks that would complement what France is doing. The talks have not taken place and the US views Turkey's role skeptically."

According to Ramani, Turkey will still be a voice of support for diplomacy and oppose sanctions on Russia, as it needs to work with Moscow in several other theaters like Syria, Libya and the South Caucasus.

"However, Turkey could also use its Montreux Convention derived status to bolster its image as a contributor to Black Sea security and sell drones to Ukraine if they are requested," he said.



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Former Turkish diplomats warn Montreux Convention must remain in place  
Black Sea drills showcase strong NATO-Ukraine defense ties

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## [Drugs, tribes, politics a deadly mix in Iraq border province](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-02-24 23:54

AMARAH: A judge shot dead with 15 bullets from a Kalashnikov. A policeman gunned down. Local figures from rival political groups and influential armed factions killed.

The murders all happened in January and February in one Iraqi province, Maysan, which borders Iran and where drug trafficking, tribal disputes and political score-settling have combined in a toxic mix reflecting the country's broader political divisions and struggle against corruption.

War-scarred Iraq is trying to recover from years of violence after the 2003 US-led invasion which toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Normality often hangs by a thread.

But in Maysan, violence is a near-daily occurrence with police and judicial officials regular targets of assassination attempts.

"Drug trafficking and tribal conflicts are the two main causes of the deteriorating security situation in Maysan," independent MP Osama Karim Al-Badr said in the provincial capital Amarah.

February has been particularly bloody.

First came the assassination of police officer Hossam Al-Aliawi.

Judge Ahmed Faisal, who specialized in drug cases, was next to die. He was headed home when assailants blocked his route and opened fire, a police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A month earlier, a prominent member from the movement of powerful Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr was killed.

Sadr's bloc emerged as the largest in parliament after October's elections. Months of intense negotiations among political factions since then have raised tensions while failing to form a majority parliamentary coalition that would name a new prime minister to replace Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

On the same day that Al-Kadhimi visited Maysan in an effort to address the violence another murder occurred. The victim was a member of Saraya Al-Salam, an armed faction affiliated with Sadr.

Al-Kadhimi ordered a reshuffle of top security officials and warned: “We have two choices in front of us: the State or chaos.”

Over the past years, Iraq has seen a surge in the sale and use of drugs, particularly in central and southern provinces that border Iran and which often serve as main routes for narcotics, particularly the stimulant crystal meth.

Iraq’s Interior Ministry says Maysan has one of the highest rates of trafficking and consumption of drugs, and the provincial Security chief Gen. Mohammed Jassem Al-Zubaidi conceded that Maysan has served as a “route for drug trafficking.”

His forces carry out daily raids, and “every day, we confiscate arms,” he told AFP. Security forces also arrested dozens of people within the span of days.

But according to activist and journalist Sabah Al-Silawi, efforts have been hampered by the dominance of tribal traditions, which run deeper in Maysan than elsewhere. Tribes often resort to their own code of conduct and traditions to resolve personal conflicts or even deadly fights, avoiding turning to the authorities.



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## Decisions need to be taken by West to reach deal: Iran negotiator

Author:

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DUBAI: Western partners in nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna have to make decisions on crucial issues to help reach an agreement, Iranian officials said on Thursday on Twitter.

Reuters reported last week that a US-Iranian deal was taking shape to revive the pact, abandoned in 2018 by then-US President Donald Trump, who also reimposed extensive sanctions on Iran.

Iran's top security official, Ali Shamkhani, said it was possible to achieve a good agreement after significant progress in the negotiations in Vienna.

However, he added: "To resolve the remaining crucial issues, Western political decision-making is necessary to balance the accord."

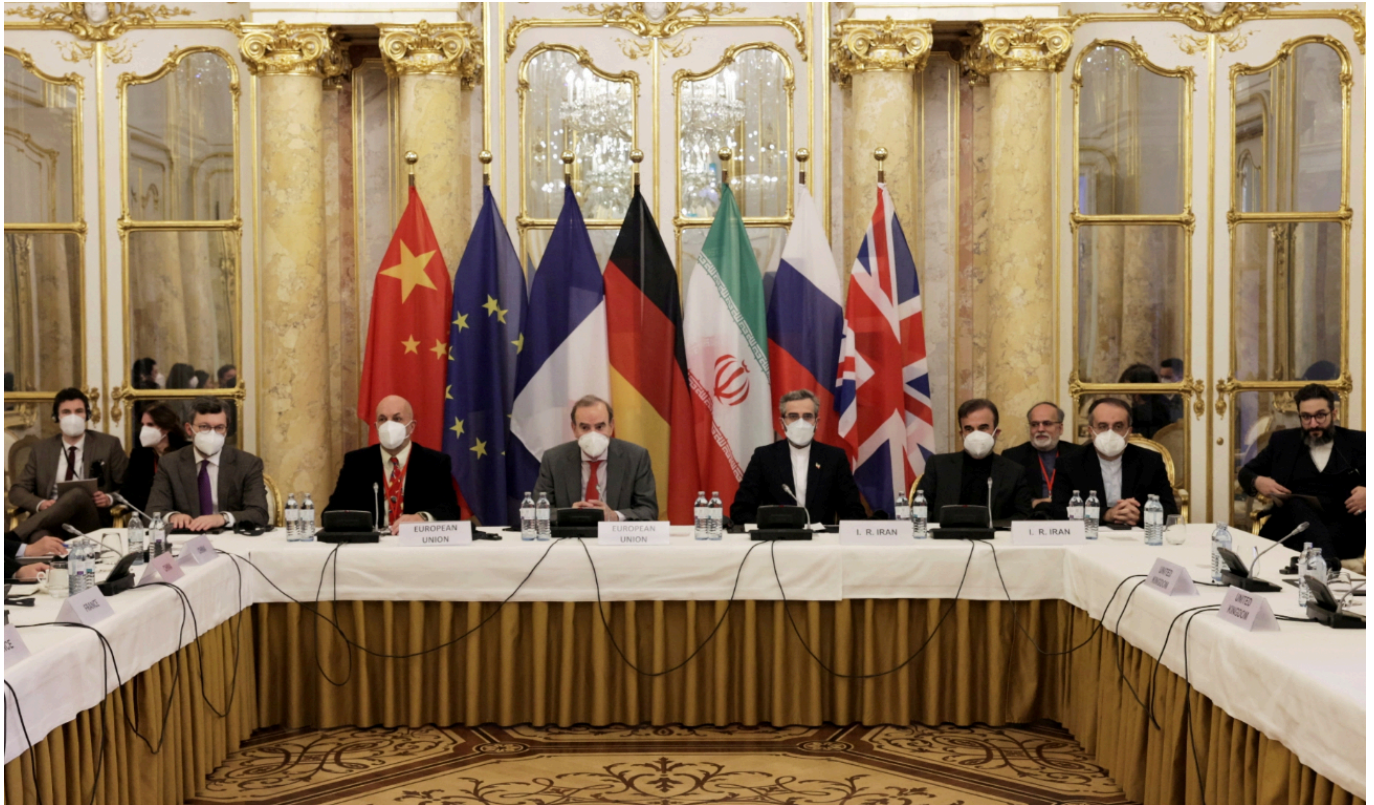
Shamkhani is secretary of Iran's Supreme National Council, which reports directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"Being near the finish line is no guarantee of crossing it" and sealing an accord, Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's chief negotiator at the Vienna talks, said in a tweet.

"It requires extra caution, much perseverance, additional creativity and a balanced approach to take the last step," he added.

Diplomats said a vague mention of other issues in a draft text of the agreement was a reference to the unfreezing of billions of dollars in Iranian funds in South Korean banks, and the release of Western prisoners held in Iran.

Iran on Wednesday urged Western powers to be "realistic" in the talks and said Bagheri Kani was returning to Tehran for consultations, suggesting a breakthrough was not imminent.



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## [Demand for Hebrew lessons jumps in Gaza as Israel eases work restrictions](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:58

GAZA: In a brightly lit classroom in Gaza, a teacher spells out Hebrew words on a whiteboard, followed attentively by Maher Al-Farra and dozens of other Palestinians hoping to take advantage of an opening up of employment opportunities in Israel.

Increased demand for the classes at the Nafha languages center follows a new offer of work permits by Israel as it has moved to calm border tensions following an 11-day war in May with Hamas, the group that rules the Gaza Strip.

It now offers 10,000 permits allowing Gaza residents to cross the border to

work in Israel – a new source of income to a region where 64 percent of the population is estimated to live in poverty and unemployment runs at 50 percent.

Ahmed Al-Faleet, the center's owner, said the number of people enlisted to learn Hebrew has increased fourfold to reach 160 students per course since Israel began giving work permits in the last quarter of 2021.

"These courses allow anyone who gets a permit to read signs, documents written in Hebrew, and communicate with soldiers on Israeli checkpoints. If an employer speaks only Hebrew it enables the worker to deal with him," he said.

Some 2.3 million Gazans live in the narrow coastal strip, largely unable to leave to seek work abroad and squeezed by 15 years of restrictions imposed by Israel, which has fought four wars with Hamas and other armed groups since 2008. Gaza also borders Egypt, which imposes its own restrictions on crossings.

Before a Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000, some 130,000 Gazans worked in Israel. Palestinians said Israel had in 2005 barred laborers after pulling troops and settlers from Gaza. No one expects the cautious increase in the number of work permits to end the long-running conflict between Israel and Hamas, who fought four wars since the group seized Gaza's control in 2007.

But for the dozens of workers and merchants enrolled in the class at Nafha, the change offers the prospect of earning, in Israel, the equivalent of a week's wages in Gaza. "I came here today to learn Hebrew so I can handle things at my work inside (Israel) easily," Farra said.

Israeli liaison officer Col. Moshe Tetro said the new jobs would improve Gaza's economy and "would also serve calm and security stability."

Eassam Daalis, a senior Hamas official, said Israel was eventually expected to offer 30,000 work permits, which economists say could allow workers to earn an average of 500 shekels (\$156) a day, equivalent to what some can earn a week working in Gaza.

"Every week I go back home happy to my family with 2,000 shekels (\$625). I also give to my mother and my father," said Jamil Abdallah, 31, from Jabalya in northern Gaza.

Gaza economist Mohammad Abu Jayyab noted that the offer of permits was one of a series of economic steps agreed under a political settlement brokered by Egyptian, Qatari and UN negotiators following the May war.



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## [UAE's nuclear plant is 'well protected', says regulator](#)

Author:

Wed, 2022-02-23 23:28

DUBAI: The UAE's only nuclear power plant is "well-protected" against security threats, the regulator said on Wednesday, following a series of unprecedented drone and missile attacks on the Gulf state.

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis have claimed three drone and missile assaults on the UAE this year.

"The nuclear power plant is designed according to high security principles and we have issued regulations for physical and cybersecurity," Christer Viktorsson, director general of the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, said.

“The sensitive parts of the power plant are well protected for any event,” he told reporters.

The UAE overall has “robust security,” he added.

The plant in Abu Dhabi, one of the UAE’s seven emirates and the nation’s capital, is the Arab world’s first nuclear power station and part of the oil producer’s aim to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

Barakah will have four reactors with 5,600 megawatts of total capacity – equivalent to 25 percent of the UAE’s needs.

The first unit began delivering 1400 MW to the national grid in April 2021.

Unit 2, which was licensed to operate in March 2021, is undergoing testing and expected to contribute 1400 MW to the national grid soon, Viktorsson said.

FANR expects to issue Unit 3’s operating license later this year, once plant operator Nawah Energy demonstrates regulatory requirements are met.

Nawah can then start an 8-9 month testing phase followed by national grid connection.



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