

## Soft Power of Turkey in Afghanistan

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**Annotation:** This article highlights the soft power of Turkey, which was able to create a unique phenomenon in Afghanistan by combining elements of historical, religious, cultural and ethnic affinity, and the structures that implement it. TIKA, Yunus Emre Institute, Maarif Foundation and Turkish films play a major role in spreading Turkey's soft power. Today, Turkish films are among the most watched world films in Afghan society. Turkey, paying attention to the Islamic identity, is also effectively using the diplomacy of mosques in Afghanistan.

**Key words:** Turkey, cultural diplomacy, soft power, TIKA, scholarship, Turkish-Afghan schools, mosques.

**Introduction.** Among the topics of modern international relations, the issue of "soft power" is one of the most studied current topics. The processes taking place in the system of international relations show that today the tasks of influencing people's world view, penetrating deep into the internal cultural roots of societies, and making effective use of the large-scale power of the media are important conditions for conducting foreign policy. In addition, the increasing importance of "soft power" in the modern world forces the participants of international relations to adapt to the new rules of the game, in particular, these actions are also an issue related to the increasing activity and influence of non-governmental non-profit organizations. In today's world, where access to information is increasing, the most effective strategy is to turn the common ideas of the people into information, turning it into a force that shows cultural achievements and lifestyles that attract an international audience. Given that the use of "hard power" mechanisms is financially and politically expensive in the current globalization environment, "soft power" in this regard does not require large resources. Joseph Nye, the author of the concept of "soft power" himself, said, "The role of hard power after the Second World War, the development of science and technology, the desire of the people of post-industrial democracies not for power, but for well-being, and the achievements of modern communication, begin to demand a serious moral justification for the use of military force", he explained about the difficulty of using brute force[1].

### The main part

Turkey's soft power potential is largely determined by its history, culture and geography. It is the historical heritage and close cultural ties with the neighboring countries that ensured a high level of dynamism of relations with them. Even before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, which covered three continents, existed for 600 years, and in the eyes of the Muslim world, it appeared as the center of religious power - the caliphate. Despite the fact that Turkey's relations with Afghanistan do not have direct territorial boundaries according to the historical and cultural parameters, Turkey considers Afghanistan as a country with which it should establish close relations. On the one hand, Turkey's interest in Afghanistan is based on cultural and historical evidence. On the other hand, since Turkey considers Central Asia as a strategically important region, it considers neighboring Afghanistan as a part of its regional policy in its foreign affairs. For this reason, we have considered in the first chapter that he closely followed the changes in Afghanistan and took a direct part in them. In addition, Afghanistan is the key that opens the way to the gates of South Asia for Turkey.

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In general, historical and cultural aspects have a large share in the debate on Afghanistan in Turkey. Almost any comment by an official Turkish analyst begins with a reference to the brotherly ties and deep friendship between the two countries, and ends with an emphasis on the fact that Turkey has honored the task of helping Afghanistan in the formation of state institutions since the establishment of this country.

Looking at Turkey's foreign policy in Afghanistan and Central Asia in recent years, we can see that it uses soft power mechanisms more effectively than hard power. The ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet va Kalkınma Party - AKP), which has been in power since the end of 2002, has demonstrated humanitarian diplomacy as one of the main factors of its foreign policy, along with its increasing role in humanitarianism. Former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009-2014) was the first to use the term humanitarian diplomacy to describe Turkey's foreign policy at the center of the fifth Ambassadors' Conference held in January 2013 as part of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process. Used as a topic [2]. During its rule, the AKP tries to show Turkey's "true identity" by emphasizing its place in Islamic civilization and its great past under the Ottoman Empire. In the relations with Afghanistan during the AKP era, we can observe the increase in the activity of Islamic non-governmental non-profit organizations in humanitarian diplomacy in addition to economic structures [3]. While "soft power" technologies are being used in Turkey's foreign policy, in addition to non-governmental non-profit organizations, several foundations have become active at the international level and engaged in humanitarian diplomacy. Although these non-governmental organizations are independent from the state on paper, they cooperate with the AKP government in practice. Ankara has decided to use a combination of "soft power" and less "hard power" strategies, each with its own strengths and weaknesses in Afghanistan's complex security environment. Although Turkey still aims to present itself as a "big brother" on Afghan soil, it means that it has to show itself on many fronts, mainly relying on soft power policy to improve the security, health, education and other social infrastructures in Afghanistan 1, 1 billion US dollars invested[4].

**Turkey's Soft Power Mechanisms in Afghanistan** In addition to institutions and organizations established for this purpose, such as TIKA, Yunus Emre Institute, Institute of Public Diplomacy, and AFAD, soft power instruments that emerged independently of the state such as TV series, economic structures, and foundations it is permissible to emphasize separately. Thus, as a concept of soft power, it allowed the AKP to strengthen its domestic identity and restructure state-society relations by empowering Islamic NGOs and creating a space for them in foreign policy.

Turkey was the only Muslim member of NATO that participated in the US-led global war on terror in Afghanistan and was able to operate freely throughout the country. Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Abdul Basit, one of the foreign researchers who emphasized that Turkey has developed a unique approach to the issue of Afghanistan based on the concept of "soft power" while being part of NATO, "While fulfilling its non-combat role as a member of NATO, Turkey emphasized a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to transform Afghanistan from conflict to a peaceful society and peaceful state. As a result, between 2003 and 2006, Ankara closely assisted in the organization of various dialogues between Kabul and Brussels, as well as NATO forces and the Afghan people. In fact, while carrying out its mission in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Forces led by NATO, Turkey, taking into account its historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan, we can say that it served as a bridge that helps to overcome cultural barriers and misunderstandings at the lower level. possible Turkey has played a major role in allaying the concerns of ordinary Afghans by communicating that foreign troops are not here to invade Afghanistan, but to help fight religious extremism. We can say that this explanation definitely paid off. During the 1979 "visit" of the Soviets to Afghanistan, the absence of such a moderator greatly influenced their defeat.

Although Turkey has not adopted Islamic leadership in its foreign policy approaches for various reasons, it is evoking a feeling of love among brotherly and related communities due to its Muslim foundation, historical and cultural heritage, and democratic attitude to internal and external problems. This is evident from relations with Afghanistan. On the other hand, it can be seen that according to the third article of the Turkish-Afghan Treaty of Friendship signed between the secular Turkish regime



and Kabul on March 1, 1921, Afghanistan recognized Turkey as the leader of the Islamic world[6]. Turkey is skillfully using its "cultural diplomacy" by building a number of mosques, madrassas and religious schools in Afghanistan. Over the years, he restored dozens of mosques, including the Pul-e-Khshiti mosque in Kabul. In 2018, the opening of a mosque for 1,500 people at the Army Officers Academy in Kubul, named after the martyred Turkish colonel Faruk Sungur, created the phenomenon of "mosque diplomacy" in Turkey [7]. Amir Ali Shernvai Mosque, which is considered the largest mosque in Juzjan region, was also built in 2017 with Turkish funds.

Turkey's IDDEF charity fund is one of the leaders in building and repairing mosques and madrassas abroad. It is known that dozens of socially significant objects were built by the foundation in different parts of the world, including Africa, Europe, Central America, the Middle East and Asia. This fund continues to operate in Afghanistan even after representatives of the Taliban take power in 2021. The Foundation managed to sign an agreement with the interim government of the Taliban, according to which it is planned to build five madrassas in different regions of Afghanistan. It is planned to have mosques near each complex.

According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) report published in 2016, Turkey ranked 6th in the 2015 soft power index and 1st in terms of GDP. According to AFAD's Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Turkey provided \$6 billion in humanitarian aid in 2016, second only to the United States, which provided \$6.3 billion. Analyzing Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, it can be seen that Afghanistan has received the most aid from Turkey since 2005. Because Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, in addition to its general nature, paid more attention to Turkic groups such as Uzbeks and Turkmens. Apart from the capital, Kabul, where Turkish aid is mainly concentrated, it can be seen that more attention is paid to the north-western regions has been controlled for several years by military commander General Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek who served as vice president from 2014 to 2020 and has close ties to Turkey.

TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) organization occupies a special place in Turkey's foreign policy as a "soft power" mechanism. This organization was established by the 1992 law and in recent years has become a high-level institution that can coordinate Turkey's "soft power" policy. The organization is doing important work in many fields, from education to health care, from culture to art, from history to archeology [9]. Although TIKA opened its first office in Kabul in 2004, its activity officially began in January 2005. Afghan President Hamid Karzai signed the relevant protocol during his official visit to Turkey in January 2006. Today, TIKA has branches in Kabul, Mazari Sharif (administrative center of Balkh province) and Herat.

The health sector is one of the leading projects implemented by TIKA in Afghanistan. To date, the health care projects implemented in various regions have created a very good image in the minds of the Afghan public. From 2005 to 2014, TIKA participated in the construction of a total of five hospitals and 22 new multidisciplinary clinics in Afghanistan, and undertook the renovation of several existing ones. In the 17-year period from 2005 to 2017, TIKA provided medical services to nearly 13 million Afghans in northern Afghanistan, which shows how much Turkey is paying attention to the Afghan issue. For a country with poorly developed medical services and an empty infrastructure, these numbers are unimaginably positive and have a huge influence as Ankara's "soft power". There are serious medical shortages in Afghanistan. There is a shortage of hospitals and clinics. TIKA's 2007 activity report states that there is only 1 doctor for every 700 people. Poverty, unemployment, low standard of living cause patients to turn to medical institutions late. This issue shows that there is a high need for professional development of medical workers, nurses and midwives[10].

Taking into account the above problems, Turkey has proposed its solution to some of the problems of improving the health sector of Afghanistan. Turkey's Minister of Health, Professor Recep Akdag, said that the problems in the medical field in Afghanistan can be solved by quickly training nurses and doctors in short-term training courses[11]. In addition, Turkey supports Afghanistan within the framework of international organizations. In 2005, at the meeting of the World Health Organization in Geneva, the special representative of WHO for the fight against poliomyelitis, Dr. A meeting with David Heyman was held. Dr. David Heyman announced his support for polio research in Afghanistan.



At this meeting, the representative of Turkey stated that Afghanistan needs Turkey's support in the fight against poliomyelitis. Turkey announced its readiness to help with the necessary technical equipment, personnel and consultations. In the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Turkey announced that it will not spare its help in this matter.

It can be seen from the number of medical institutions built with its participation that Turkey is a country of special importance in the field of healthcare in Afghanistan. Such medical departments include Afghan-Turkish Mother and Child Health Center in Taliqon, Afghan-Turkish Children's Hospital in Shibirgan, Afghan-Turkish Friendship Hospital in Maimana, Khoja Bahauddin Afghan-Turkish Hospital. Maternal and Child Health Center, Atatürk Children's Hospital in Kabul can be included. It is noteworthy that these organizations were implemented by TIKA. In addition, we are not limited to construction and restoration works, but also supply them with special medical equipment and quality pharmaceutical products [12].

Some of the hospitals and medical centers built by Turkey are located in remote mountainous areas and are significant for the fact that they are the only facilities for the local population. For example, Afghanistan-Turkey Friendship Children's Hospital in Juzjan region is one such hospital and has 110 beds. The hospital in question is the only children's hospital in northern Afghanistan with a pediatric surgery department. The project, implemented in order to "contribute to the elimination of the shortage of qualified medical personnel in Afghanistan", was implemented to train health workers. In this regard, 154 Afghan health professionals, consisting of doctors, nurses, technicians and laboratory workers, have improved their skills in various topics at the Turkish Ministry of Health and Ankara hospitals. So far, 2 million 986 thousand patients have been treated in the hospital. In 2021 alone, 1,278 surgical operations were performed at the hospital, and medical services were provided to 250,000 people.

While performing an important task in the field of "soft power", TIKA also carries out important work under the slogan "a single historical space - common ancestors". Another project of his in this direction in Afghanistan was the restoration of the house where Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi was born. This historic house, located in the northern city of Balkh in Afghanistan, had become old and in need of repair over the years. The restoration of the house where Maulana was born, which is a symbol of the common value of the two countries, was financed from the fund allocated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and will be carried out by the chairmanship of TIKA. In 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, Salahuddin Rabbani, in a meeting with TIKA's agent for Afghanistan, R. Kilinch, praised the important activities of TIKA in Afghanistan and said that starting the restoration work of this house means that the historical commonality of the two countries will continue in the future reported[13].

As a country contending for the center of global power, Turkey is one of the leaders in the world in accepting foreign students, and the number of foreign students per year exceeds 100,000. Turkey's scholarship projects are divided into such types as Turkic-speaking countries project, Balkan scholarship project, Black Sea scholarship project, "Turkey-Africa" scholarship project, Harran scholarship project. Afghan students can study in Afghanistan mainly on the basis of the Harran project. Young people who have graduated from Turkish schools in Afghanistan with excellent grades will be given the opportunity to continue their studies in Turkey. A large number of young Afghans study in Turkey through the "Ihlas Foundation" and "Diyanet Foundation". The total number of Afghan students studying in Turkey on a special scholarship has exceeded 4,000 in 2018 alone.

It is natural for Turkey to try to promote the Turkish language and literature while implementing educational programs in Afghanistan. Yunus Emre Foundation was established in May 2007 in order to effectively use the cultural potential of Turkey in foreign policy. This fund promotes the Turkish language, history, culture and art as a tool of "soft power", provides opportunities for those who want to study in the fields of Turkish language, culture and art abroad, foreign universities and NGOs. It aims to implement joint projects with organizations, increase cultural exchange and develop friendship between Turkey and other countries. This institution has several programs in this regard. Examples include sending Turkish professors to teach Turkish language in different countries, establishing



specialized Turkish libraries, providing digital resources for organizing Turkish language and literature courses, and establishing cooperation protocols with universities.

Yunus Emre Institute was opened in Afghanistan in 2013. A cooperation protocol was signed between Kabul University and Yunus Emre Institute [14]. As of September 20, 2019, Yunus Emre Institute has implemented about 400 projects in the field of education in different regions of Afghanistan. For example, hundreds of Afghan women learned to read and write as part of the "Literacy Campaign" held in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. According to the 2020 reports of the institute, as of 2013, 5,000 people studied the Turkish language in Turkology departments and other courses. Among the countries that benefited from the activities of the Yunus Emre Institute, Afghanistan took the second place after Azerbaijan. In addition, Turkish has become the second most popular and useful foreign language in Afghan universities after English[15]. Faculties of Turkology, which work to popularize the Turkish language, are not limited to Kabul universities, but also operate in Balan, Balkh, Juzjan, Sari-Pul, Faryab and Tohar regions of Afghanistan[16].

Turkish films and TV series are of particular importance in spreading the propaganda of Turkey's foreign policy. In Afghanistan, Turkish serials are considered to be the leaders and have overtaken India in this regard. More than 200 Turkish films have been shown on the TV screens of Afghanistan and have penetrated deeply among all layers of the society. Turkish films such as "Kashqirlar Makon" (Kurtlar Vadisi), "Muhtasham Yuzyil" (Muhtesem Yüzyıl), "Priceless Time" (Öyle bir Geçer Zaman ki) are very popular among Afghans. Historical and religious proximity makes Turkish films popular in Afghanistan. If Afghan textile manufacturers are increasing their sales by depicting the characters of Turkish films on their clothes, the fact that some restaurants have opened under the names of Turkish films can be concluded that Turkey's "soft power" policy in this regard has fully justified itself.

**In conclusion**, it can be noted that in the system of modern international relations, "soft power" is the most widely used mechanism and gives priority to increasing the international prestige of countries. The fact that Turkey ranks high in the International "soft power" index makes it necessary to study its foreign policy concept in this field. Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy has been particularly effective in Afghanistan. Today, the Turkish language is the second most studied language in Afghanistan, and the fact that the largest number of migrants in Turkey in recent years are Afghans can be explained by the influence of Turkey's "soft power". Turkey is successfully using TIKA, Yunus Emre Institute, Diyanet Foundation and a number of other state and non-state organizations as well as Turkish language, literature and films for the effective operation of "soft power" in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been at the top of the list of countries that receive foreign aid from Turkey for more than ten years. Turkey has gained a positive place in the hearts of Afghans by implementing many projects in Afghanistan, educating thousands of young people, and having access to qualified medical services for many more people. Turkey's cooperation with Afghanistan in the social, economic and humanitarian spheres continues despite today's complicated situations.

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