

EXPLAINING TURKEY'S PARTNERSHIP WITH RUSSIA AND IRAN IN THE
POST-ARAB SPRING ERA

AS
36
2019
IR
.G53

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

International Relations

By

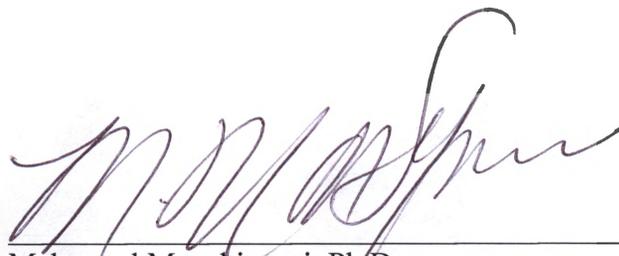
Colin Giacomini

San Francisco, California

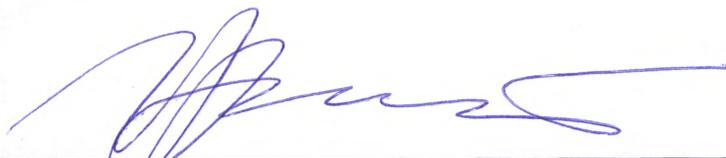
May 2019

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read EXPLAINING TURKEY'S PARTNERSHIP WITH RUSSIA AND IRAN IN THE POST-ARAB SPRING ERA by Colin Giacomini, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in International Relations at San Francisco State University.



Mahmood Monshipouri, Ph.D.
Chair of Department and Professor of International Relations



Andrei Tsygankov, Ph.D.
Professor of International Relations

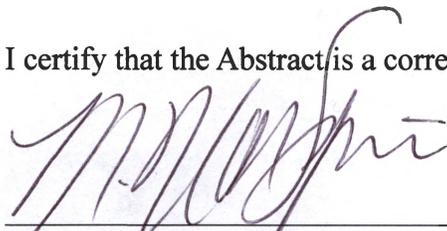
EXPLAINING TURKEY'S PARTNERSHIP WITH RUSSIA AND IRAN IN THE
POST-ARAB SPRING ERA

Colin Giacomini
San Francisco, California
2019

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explain why Turkey in the post-Arab Spring era pursued a strategic partnership with Russia and Iran. Through utilizing the theory of neoclassical realism, the results of this analysis indicate that Turkey's behavior can be attributed to fundamental changes in the regional structure that occurred around 2016, which precipitated a hostile environment that threatened Turkey's national security. During this time, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government faced a series of domestic problems that jeopardized the survivability of the ruling regime. The severity of this internal crisis significantly limited the foreign policy choices available to respond to external pressures, and effectively precluded Turkey's ability to rely on the United States for assistance. Forging a pragmatic and transactional partnership with Russia and Iran mitigated these complex threats. While the decision benefitted Turkey in the short-term, this study maintains that the three-country partnership is fragile and lacks longevity. In addition, while prospects of U.S.-Turkey rapprochement are slim, reconciliation in the medium-term is still possible.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For all the love and support that has allowed me to reach this point, I would like to thank my mother, my wife, my father, and the rest of my family. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Monshipouri and Professor Tsygankov for their invaluable advice, insightful comments, and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Part 1: Introduction	1
Part 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework.....	7
Part 3: Structure of the Regional System.....	19
Part 4: Turkey's Domestic Situation.....	33
Part 5: Methodology and Research Design.....	45
Part 6: Economic Cooperation.....	54
Part 7: Syria Collaboration.....	63
Part 8: Security Coordination.....	71
Part 9: Results and Conclusion.....	79
Works Cited.....	83

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Operationalization of Dependent Variable.....	46
2. Intervening Variables.....	50
3. Summary of Findings.....	79

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Neoclassical Realism.....	8
2. Map of Upper Euphrates River Situation 11/2018.....	30
3. Turkey's GDP in Billions (current US\$) 1980-2017.....	34
4. Turkey's Energy Pipelines 2016.....	56
5. Syria's De-Escalation Zones.....	64

Part I: Introduction

As the strategic environment of the post-Arab Spring era begins to take shape, countries in the Middle East are swiftly recalibrating their foreign policies. This unfamiliar arrangement that states are currently navigating is fundamentally different than what immediately followed 2011, as the threat of sweeping revolutions has been eclipsed by new dangers presented by peer competitors. The manner in which states are currently adapting to these systemic changes directly correlates to how they behaved during the preceding chaos, and whether the decisions they made during the Arab Spring uprisings elevated or weakened their geopolitical position. Countries that successfully reacted to the social upheaval now command greater power and capabilities, while those that failed to acknowledge changing realities on the ground must now simultaneously confront a diverse range of metastasizing problems in a much more hostile neighborhood. In this transitional period, the region is undergoing realignments and shifting alliances as states are reconsidering traditional foreign relations in an attempt to position themselves advantageously. Further complicating the strategic calculations of local actors is the United States' ambiguous commitment to regional affairs and its quasi-withdrawal as a predominant leader.

While all countries in the Middle East have made significant foreign policy revisions in recent years, Turkey has been the most transformative. When the Arab Spring uprisings broke out, Turkish elites seized the opportunity presented by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi to reconstruct regional power dynamics to their favor. This desire to overthrow the existing political order and weaken historical adversaries led Turkey to assertively champion populist movements abroad, and provide ideational,

financial, and military support to rebels. Initially, Turkey's strategy appeared to have successfully predicted and adapted to the course of developments, as revolutions evolved into new governments who then owed fealty to Turkey. At the same time, Turkey's relationship with the West remained strong, since the United States viewed Turkey as a model of Islamic democracy that could be exported to fledgling Arab Spring countries undergoing uncertain democratic transitions.

However, after what can be described as a failed bid for regional hegemony, Turkey faced a deteriorating position in 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood government was deposed in Egypt and uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen devolved into protracted civil wars. Not only did Turkey's actions draw ire from Sunni monarchies, but Russia's 2015 military intervention in Syria and the growing involvement of Iran in the region presented a formidable challenge to Turkey's regional ambitions. The severity of the situation was demonstrated in 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet resulting in retaliatory airstrikes by Russia against Turkey's aid convoys and proxy forces in Syria.¹ As hostilities reached crisis levels and predictions of a larger conflict proliferated, Turkey's foreign policy made an unprecedented pivot. Rather than tensions becoming inflamed, hostilities quickly dissipated as Turkey began to cooperate closely with Russia and Iran, while its relationship with the United States became increasingly combative. Even after the partnership appeared poised to break apart following the assassination of the Russian ambassador by a rogue Turkish police officer, the three countries chose to forge ahead with greater cooperation.

This development is exceptional, as ideological differences and geographic vulnerabilities have sustained centuries of animosity between Turkey, Russia, and Iran,

¹ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Why Russia and Turkey Fight: A History of Antagonism* (Foreign Affairs, 2016).

both in their modern and historical forms. In addition, given Turkey's long-term alliance with the United States and Turkey's perilous security situation after its failed Arab Spring strategy, rapprochement toward the United States never occurred. In fact, U.S.-Turkey relations only eroded further as Turkey initiated greater economic and diplomatic coordination with Russia and Iran, while it launched direct military campaigns against U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in Syria.

This unexpected shift requires closer examination and demands an answer to the question: why in the post-Arab Spring era did Turkey pursue a strategic partnership with Russia and Iran? I argue that beginning in 2016, the structure of the Middle East underwent a fundamental transformation that compelled Turkish elites to cooperate with Russia and Iran in the short-term to counter proliferating external and internal threats. More specifically, widespread regional backlash against Turkey's failed Arab Spring interventions, in conjunction with the withdrawal of U.S. support for Turkey precipitated a hostile climate that left Turkey in a strategically vulnerable position. During this same period, the Turkish economy began to falter, Kurdish political parties increased in popularity, and subversion by societal elements loyal to Fethullah Gülen posed significant challenges to President Erdoğan and his AKP government.

To overcome these structural and domestic threats, Turkish elites made the calculated decision to engage in a pragmatic and transactional partnership with Russia and Iran. This maneuver provided Turkey with three key advantages. First of all, it helped to stabilize the Turkish economy through allowing an influx of foreign investment and vital energy imports that weakened domestic grievances toward the AKP regime. Secondly, it allowed Turkey the ability to shape the outcome of post-war Syria to its

favor by establishing a buffer territory that limited the influence of Kurdish separatists. Finally, it established a rudimentary but essential interim security arrangement between the three countries, which was vital, as Turkey no longer had resolute allies in the region apart from Qatar.

Facing these complex external and internal predicaments, it would have been difficult for Turkey to request assistance from the United States. A series of international disputes that included the U.S. withdrawal of patriot missiles, the temporary termination of visa services between the two countries, high profile arrests of U.S. civilians in Turkey, the U.S. protection of Fethullah Gülen from extradition, the levying of economic sanctions, and the U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East all signaled to Turkey that the United States was an unreliable ally. In addition, Turkey could not approach the United States for assistance as it would have made President Erdoğan appear weak at a time when it was necessary to maintain a strong image for domestic support.

Much of President Erdoğan's legitimacy stems from a neo-Ottoman narrative that rests on a foundational belief that Turkey is an independent nation worthy of great power status. Making concessions to the United States to improve bilateral relations when Turkey was publicly facing internal and external crises would have diminished this legitimacy. The partnership with Russia and Iran resolved this dilemma, as the countries cooperated with Turkey more as a strategic equal, while Turkey was increasingly seen as a junior partner by the United States.

In order to substantiate these claims, I utilize neoclassical realism as my theoretical framework. Neoclassical realism is best suited for this research question because its unique perspective accentuates the complex interaction between the structure

of the international system, domestic influences on decision-making, and the resulting foreign policy choice that a state ultimately engages in. An explanation of Turkish behavior that exclusively looks at either structural or domestic factors would fail to capture important connections. My analysis shows that both the international structure and internal dynamics matter, and that the interaction between the two levels is what influenced Turkey's decision to partner with Russia and Iran.

I elaborate on these ideas in Part 2, as I explore in-depth the logic of neoclassical realism and examine relevant literature pertaining to its applicability to the study of international affairs. Part 3 will interpret the characteristics of the structure within the post-Arab Spring Middle East and how regional animosity against Turkey's failed interventionist strategy developed into inter-state disputes that threatened Turkey's security. Part 4 will explain the social and political events that were taking place within Turkey during this time. The core of this section will be to determine how President Erdoğan and AKP elites perceived the strength of their regime in the face of a deteriorating domestic situation.

In Part 5, I outline my methods and research design. Through a qualitative approach, three leading explanations of Turkey's foreign policy shift were extracted from the theory of neoclassical realism and applied systematically against specific manifestations of Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran. Utilizing the knowledge base established in Parts 3 and 4, this analysis will begin in Part 6 where I will examine economic cooperation between the three countries and the underlying reasons behind it. Part 7 will focus on post-Syrian Civil War collusion and why Turkey began working with Russia and Iran to resolve the crisis despite years of supporting the overthrow of Bashar

al-Assad. Part 8 will investigate Turkey's efforts to increase military coordination with Russia and Iran in defiance of its NATO allies. Following the analysis, the results will be presented in Part 9. Through interpreting the findings, I will assess whether Turkey's actions represent a fundamental departure from alignment with the United States or if cooperation with Russia and Iran is a temporary phenomenon. In addition, I will analyze the policy implications of this study and if a recourse is possible to improve U.S.-Turkey relations. The objective of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of Turkey's behavior since the end of the Arab Spring uprisings and to discern why the country has adopted such an unprecedented foreign policy.

Part 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

To achieve an understanding of how structural changes have affected Turkish foreign policy, it is necessary to first evaluate the theory of neoclassical realism and its assumptions, logic, scope, and contributions to the study of international relations. The theory was first presented in 1998 by Gideon Rose in his article, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.” Rose was interested in exploring discrepancies in neorealism and how the behavior of states did not always conform exactly to the distribution of material power within the system. While neorealism, both in its offensive and defensive variants, strongly rejects the inclusion of domestic variables, Rose believed that the inner characteristics of a state must be taken into consideration in order to accurately explain foreign policy. He asserted that “foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their perceptions of relative power that matter, not simply relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being.”² Through utilizing domestic variables, neoclassical realism attempts to explain why states with comparable power aggregates, but different internal configurations may behave differently.

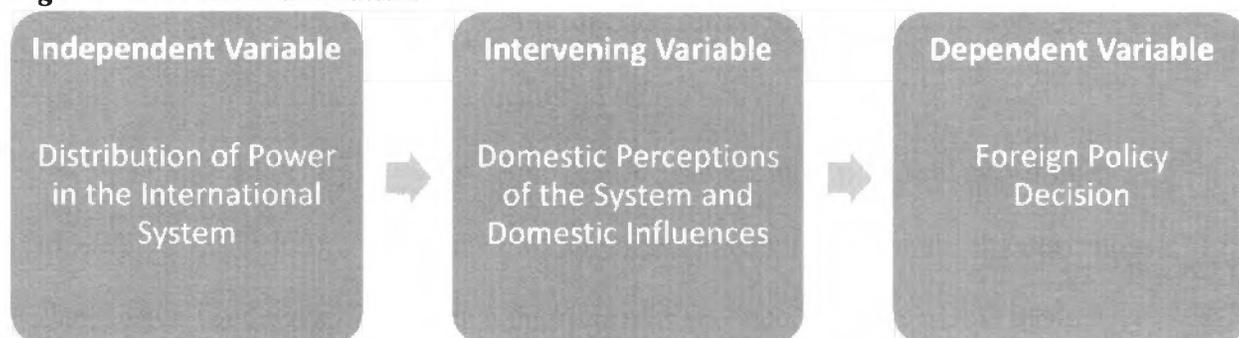
As a derivative of neorealism, however, the theory of neoclassical realism acknowledges the dominant role that the structure of the international system plays in determining state interactions. The distribution of material power in the system tends to shape the long-term direction of history by establishing “the basic parameters of a country’s foreign policy.”³ Neoclassical realism recognizes the same fundamental assumptions as neorealism, namely: the nature of the international system is anarchic,

² Gideon Rose, *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy* (Journal of World Politics Issue 51, 1998), p.147.

³ *Ibid*, p.146.

states are the most important actors, uncertainty surrounding intentions is inescapable, and states pay close attention to the relative distribution of power within the system. Neoclassical realism departs from neorealism by injecting an intervening variable between the independent variable (structure of the system) and the dependent variable (foreign policy decision). In the context of international relations research, an intervening variable can be defined as a factor that interacts with the independent variable while it simultaneously clarifies the causal connection between the independent and dependent variables.

Figure 1: Neoclassical Realism



As illustrated in Figure 1, the intervening variable in neoclassical realism represents domestic influences that impact how leaders view the structure of the system and the available foreign policy options they have to choose from given the internal characteristics of their state. Thus, systemic pressures filter through unit-level intervening variables to produce foreign policy. While the structure of the international system provides the initial input of information, state leaders react to and interpret that information based on a variety of domestic factors. The influence of these domestic elements ranges across time and from country to country. This intervening role of internal factors can mean that a state's foreign policy may not always be perfectly optimized to

the structure of the system. In this sense, state behavior is restrained by both external and internal considerations.

Types of Intervening Variables

While there are a multitude of intervening variables that can affect foreign policy decision-making, they can be distilled into three main types. The first category concentrates on how state leaders perceive the structure of the system and how they identify threats. Understanding the distinction between perception and reality is significant, as highlighting the difference can assist in resolving fundamental problems with neorealism. For example, neorealism holds the presupposition that the distribution of power within the system is transparent and that state behavior is predicated on the relatively smooth conveyance of structural information to leaders, who then make rational inferences of how a state should operate given the opportunities and pressures of the strategic environment.

In contrast, Rose argued that the information transmission belt “is often rough and capricious over the short and medium term.”⁴ The theory of neoclassical realism emphasizes the role of incomplete information, whereby decision-makers can never know the exact health of another state’s economy or the precise number of tanks, planes, and soldiers it possesses. Therefore, by piecing together announcements, interactions, and intelligence reports, state leaders construct foreign policy through highly educated, yet inherently subjective knowledge of another state’s capabilities, and this rarely reflects the true objective power of that state. This understanding explains the prevalence of

⁴ Ibid, p.158.

miscalculations and policy failures by countries as they act upon their incomplete information.

The second important category of intervening variables focuses on the structure of a state's government and its relationship with society. In the article, "Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," authors Steven Lobell et al. argue that state leaders are not free to make foreign policy decisions based on balance of power calculations alone. The executive of a state must also interact and "bargain with institutions, political parties, economic sectors, classes, and the general public in order to enact policy and extract resources to implement policy choices."⁵ Thus, foreign policy construction inherently involves the incorporation of a diverse range of social interests, and state leaders must make decisions that can best satisfy important actors. This presents complex problems to leaders, especially when interests collide. State bureaucracies may advocate for one policy as a means of increasing its organizational budget and relevancy, while heads of important industries may push for a different option that would better enhance economy prosperity. Checks and balances within the government also complicate the process, as an executive may be prevented from selecting a prudent foreign policy choice because of obstruction by the legislature. Consequently, these factors diminish the ability of a state to behave in a way that might be necessary to respond to changes in the balance of power within the system.

Just as the principal objective of a state is survival in the anarchic system, leaders and elites are primarily motivated to ensure regime survival. Efforts to appease the general public can thus have considerable influence on a country's behavior in the

⁵ Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.25.

international arena. Neoclassical realism holds that executives and top decision-makers have a reasonable conception of the external balance of power and its effect on the national interest. They will accordingly attempt to pursue foreign policies that they feel are appropriate given the strategic environment. The level of autonomy elites possess varies based on the internal characteristics of the state they govern. In democracies, executives are more prone to the effects of domestic factors, as the mechanism of the state makes them susceptible to being removed from office if their foreign policy decisions are unpopular.

How much influence the general public has on foreign policy fluctuates over time. Neoclassical realism posits that domestic actors have the greatest influence over foreign policy when the government is more vulnerable. For example, Norrin Ripsman asserts that “if the government expects that an electoral defeat, a military coup, or some other form of de-selection is potentially imminent, it will be far more likely to shore up its position by appealing to the public at large.”⁶ However, this notion must be clarified. The theory of neoclassical realism largely rejects the belief held by liberals and constructivists that domestic factors are the main driving forces of foreign policy. Neoclassical realism maintains a top-down approach, where the structure of the system is predominant and guides the direction of state behavior. The influence of domestic factors is secondary, and such elements primarily affect how the specifics of policies are carried out given the distribution of power within the system.

The third category of intervening variables emphasized by neoclassical realism centers on the ability of a state to extract raw resources and transform them into material power. Neorealists tend to predicate their arguments on large “n” studies that compare

⁶ Ibid, p.25.

positivist aggregates of manpower, GDP, and geographic size. While these inquiries have utility, examining numerical variations alone has frequently failed to explain why countries with similar values experienced drastically different foreign policy outcomes. To resolve this, neoclassical realism contends that the internal dynamics of states are not identical. States that do not have sufficient mechanisms to mobilize domestic resources for the purposes of implementing foreign policy will fail to respond appropriately to the structure of the international system.

The extraction ability of a state can largely be attributed to its institutions, level of nationalism, and ideology. According to Taliaferro, “a state can be considered strong when it has higher scores in each of these dimensions. Weaker states, by contrast suffer from fragmentation, penetration by interest groups, lack of revenue, and minimal responsibilities.”⁷ A country may possess vast quantities of latent resources, but if its institutions suffer from corruption and disorganization, the state would struggle to efficiently take advantage of its potential. Similarly, lack of a unifying ideology or a strong sense of nationalism can also affect a state’s ability to mobilize its population toward a foreign policy objective. Many countries in Africa and the Middle East suffer from such extraction problems, as they contain a diverse range of ethnic and tribal groups that are not loyal to the central government. This is primarily due to the artificial construction of many countries in these regions by colonial powers, who drew state borders without considering indigenous territorial boundaries. In this sense, determining power based on aggregates alone can be erroneous, as such a measure could not detect the percentage of people that would be willing to sacrifice their time, energy, and potentially their lives for the national interest.

⁷ Ibid, p.216.

Relationship Between Intervening Variables and Structure

One of the most important contributions that neoclassical realism makes to broaden the understanding of international relations is the accentuation of the gradual evolution of state behavior to reflect the structure of the international system. According to Taliaferro, “over the long term, international political outcomes generally mirror the actual distribution of power among states. In the shorter term, however, the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis.”⁸ The intervening variables of perceptions, domestic influences, and ideology that neoclassical realism identifies explains why states at times act contrary to how the distribution of material power would suggest. Yet, over time the successes and failures of foreign policy will improve the quality of information transmitted to a state and will ultimately facilitate a recalibration of state behavior to more closely match the structure of the system.

That said, this recalibration process is rarely peaceful and often inflicts disastrous effects on countries that did not behave appropriately to the distribution of power within the system. In the article, “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” Brian Rathbun argues that if a state’s foreign policy becomes too influenced by intervening domestic variables, it can lead to catastrophic outcomes. He explains that “the more a state comes to be captured by parochial actors, and the more elites come to believe in alternative social constructions of

⁸ Ibid, p.4.

reality different from the objective reality, the more severe the penalty.”⁹ To Rathbun, such social constructions include overconfidence in the placating power of international institutions and an ignorance of the reality that states continuously strive to attain power. These beliefs are commonly held by liberals and constructivists, and if leaders choose foreign policy based on these notions they will suffer at the hands of other states that adhere closely to power dynamics. Intervening variables are inherent and impossible to rid completely, but by willfully allowing domestic considerations to govern foreign policy it will decrease the ability of a state to make prudent international decisions.

Criticisms and Other Explanations of Turkish Foreign Policy

Neoclassical realism has been criticized for its inclusion of domestic considerations, as through a cursory glance it appears that the theory has shifted the role of the independent variable over to an intervening variable. In the context of Turkish foreign policy, such critics argue that behavior stems not from the interaction between the system’s structure and domestic factors, but rather directly from either an external or internal origin. For example, in the article “Erdoğan’s Grand Vision,” Hillel Fradkin attributes Turkey’s assertive foreign policy to Erdoğan’s worldview and bold personality.¹⁰ Similarly, in the article “Framework, Values, and Mechanisms,” Ibrahim Kalin utilizes a constructivist approach that places the AKP’s Islamic identity as the main independent variable that has determined Turkish behavior.¹¹ These explanations hold weight, as utilizing the individual level of analysis reveals insight into how Erdoğan’s

⁹ Brian Rathbun, *A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of structural Realism* (Journal of Security Studies, 2008), p.296.

¹⁰ Hillel Fradkin, *Erdoğan’s Grand Vision* (Journal of World Affairs, 2013).

¹¹ Ibrahim Kalin, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values, and Mechanisms* (International Journal, 2012).

personality allowed him to consolidate power and formulate a unique foreign policy.

Likewise, the AKP's embrace of Islam does account for why Turkey supported the Muslim Brotherhood and how the country rose to a leadership position within the Muslim world.

However, ignoring the predominance of the system's structure fails to explain important shifts in Turkish foreign policy and brings up important questions that must be answered. If Turkey's behavior is predicated solely on individuals or identity, why did Turkey remain a neutral mediating force during the 2000s and only adopted an assertive foreign policy during the structural upheaval associated with the Arab Spring? In the same manner, if Turkish behavior was generated primarily by an ideological desire to defend Islamic democratic movements, why did Turkey abandon its support for Syrian rebels to cooperate with Russia and Iran once structural conditions made such a goal harder to achieve? Neoclassical realism resolves these problems by clarifying the interaction between levels of analysis. The structure of the system provides opportunities, constraints, and threats that dictate available options. From this arrangement, intervening variables such as personality and identity then influence the particular course of action that a state takes. Thus, neoclassical realism's inclusion of domestic variables does not supersede structure, but instead illuminates the complex process of foreign policy construction.

Neoclassical Realism and Turkey

Having laid out the basic elements of neoclassical realism, a question remains: How has the theory been applied previously to Turkey? As a relatively new school in the

field of international relations, the theory has not been used frequently to explain phenomena in the region. In the section that follows, however, I will examine two seminal works that have made vigorous contributions to the understanding of Turkish foreign policy through utilizing neoclassical realism, which will provide a strong foundation of my thesis statement.

In the article, “The Limitations of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Activism,” Emre Iseri utilized neoclassical realism to explain how Turkey was navigating the early emergence of multipolarity and how system changes incentivized Turkey to increase its involvement in the Caucasus. Iseri argued that the rise of Turkey between 2001 and 2011 in conjunction with the decrease of U.S. hegemony led to Turkey’s desire to become a regional power that connected the East and West.¹² More specifically, during this time, Turkey increasingly pursued the establishment of an economic zone in Anatolia and the Caucasus, primarily to serve as a hub for energy trade. This material desire coincided with a growing ideological fascination in Turkey that the “Turkic world” was much larger than the confines of the modern nation state.¹³ The growing expansionist philosophy complemented the opportunity given by the structure of the system to generate a more outward-looking foreign policy.

Despite this ambition, Turkey was largely unsuccessful. In his article, Iseri identified two fundamental challenges that impeded Turkey’s ability to create a prosperous economic zone. The first was the prevalence of volatile disputes between Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The use of neoclassical realism was advantageous here, as by highlighting the role of domestic attitudes, it showed how animosity over the

¹² Emre Iseri, *The Limitations of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy Activism in the Caucasian Regional Security Complexity* (Journal of Turkish Studies, 2011), p.42.

¹³ Ibid.

Armenian Genocide (1915-1917) and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict prohibited state leaders from formulating a stable economic deal. The second hindrance was hostility between the United States and Russia, as both attempted to shape the economic zone and the flow of trade to benefit their own geopolitical goals. This article, which was published three months after the start of the Arab Spring uprisings, illustrates an accurate picture of how Turkey was situating itself at the time between Russia and the United States. In early 2011, Turkey was still actively attempting to maintain cordial relations with all nearby countries as part of its foreign policy doctrine dubbed “zero problems with neighbors.”¹⁴ This depiction will serve crucial to my analysis as I explore how Turkey’s relations toward the United States and Russia have evolved over time.

A more recent application of neoclassical realism to the case of Turkey is the article “Explaining Miscalculation and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East during the Arab Uprising” by Nuri Yesilyurt. This paper focuses on explaining why Turkey failed to quickly shift its foreign policy after suffering significant setbacks during the Arab Spring. Yesilyurt argues that even when structural changes had shifted against Turkey, key decisions-makers in the country continued to support rebel movements because of their affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁵ In addition, Yesilyurt asserts that Turkish foreign policy had become so internalized that it was difficult for leaders to change course, because in doing so, it would contradict the narrative they had been promulgating. For example, President Erdoğan had repeatedly used the atrocities committed by the al-Assad regime against Sunni Muslims as a means

¹⁴ Ali Askerov, *Turkey’s Zero Problems with Neighbors Policy: Was it Realistic?* (Contemporary Review Journal of the Middle East, 2017), p.149.

¹⁵ Nuri Yesilyurt, *Explaining Miscalculations and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East during the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective* (Ankara University, 2017), p.70.

to increase his own popularity.¹⁶ Abandoning this antagonistic rhetoric and withdrawing support for opposition groups in favor of a more cordial relationship with the Syrian government was difficult and took considerable time. This resulted in maladaptation by Turkey, as its behavior ran counter to the realities of the system's structure.

Yesilyurt examined Turkish behavior during the Arab Spring from 2011 to 2016. I intend to further Yesilyurt's theoretical inquiry by utilizing neoclassical realism to investigate how Turkey has navigated the post-Arab Spring environment. I argue that 2016 is critical point of departure that marks a transition in Turkey's strategy toward domestic and international affairs. In the next section, I will explore the characteristics of the regional structure in an effort to support the analysis beginning in Part 6.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.78.

Part 3: Structure of the Regional System

To establish a foundation for the analysis, this section will investigate the characteristics of the regional structure and the security environment that Turkey encountered in the post-Arab Spring era. The goal of this section will be to present a broad outlook of international developments that inherently impacted Turkey's geopolitical position. In accordance with neoclassical realism, detailing the structure will provide the initial input of information so that it can be observed as it filters through the domestic dynamics of Turkey that are covered in Part 4. Once this knowledge base has been constructed, the analysis will investigate the interaction between the two levels to determine why they synthesized in a manner that led to Turkey's decision to partner with Russia and Iran.

Strategic Failure in Egypt

After providing significant financial and ideational support for the fledgling Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, the 2013 counter-revolution that deposed Mohamed Morsi, the country's first democratically elected president, was the first sign that Turkey's Arab Spring strategy was beginning to falter. During the prior two years, Turkey along with Qatar had vigorously supported populist movements across the region, with a particular focus in Egypt due to its regional centrality and historical importance. In addition, the overwhelming nature of Egypt's 2011 uprising, its military's decision to side with protesters, and the existence of a well-organized Muslim Brotherhood opposition made Egypt an ideal candidate for Turkey's support, as it appeared that the necessary elements were already present to foster a relatively smooth transfer of power.

Once the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was elected in 2012, "Turkey committed to provide Egypt with \$2 billion, both to finance infrastructure projects and to contribute to foreign currency reserves."¹⁷ During this time, Turkey viewed Egypt as a potential partner that could assist in precipitating the "Turkish era." To advance this aim, Turkey sought to solidify its relationship with the new Egyptian government through diplomatic conferences, greater economic trade, and even the arrangement of large-scale joint-naval drills in the short tenure of Mohamed Morsi's rule.¹⁸

This ambition, however, was abruptly challenged by the 2013 coup led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. In a swift reversal, Turkey's geopolitical investments in Egypt were lost, as a secular nationalist came to power who was determined to aggressively eradicate the Muslim Brotherhood and limit the influence of external forces that opposed his rule. Almost overnight, a critical ally of Turkey transformed into a strategic competitor, and Turkey's Islamic democratic model that it was attempting to export throughout the region was publicly defiled. This contention resulted in the two countries expelling each other's ambassadors and officially ending joint military efforts.¹⁹ Since the events of 2013, relations have remained inimical, with President Erdoğan refusing to meet with President Sisi until imprisoned Muslim Brotherhood members are released.²⁰ In the larger regional scope, the breakdown of relations between Turkey and Egypt has drawn in Saudi Arabia and its Gulf client states.

¹⁷ Matt Bradley, *Turkey to Provide Egypt \$2 Billion in Aid* (The Wall Street Journal, 2012).

¹⁸ Reuters Editors, *Egypt and Turkey hold joint naval exercise* (Reuters, 2012).

¹⁹ Eyder Peralta, *Egypt, Turkey Expel Each Other's Ambassadors, Testing Ties* (National Public Radio, 2013).

²⁰ Middle East Monitor Editors, *Erdoğan: Will not meet Sisi until inmates are released* (Middle East Monitor, 2019).

Contention with Saudi Arabia

While the two countries' ancestors had a long historical feud over competing *de jure* claims to Sunni leadership, the modern conflict can be traced to the Arab Spring uprisings. Turkey's support for Islamic democratic movements affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood came into direct conflict with the Saudi-backed monarchies that embodied many of the characteristics that the revolutions sought to remedy, namely economic inequality, elite privilege, suppression of rights, and hereditary succession. Saudi Arabia aggressively opposed the uprisings at all levels. Domestically, Saudi Arabia enacted greater social programs to mitigate grievances, while internationally it sent troops to Bahrain to pacify protestors and provided financial assistance to support President Sisi's coup in Egypt.²¹ Once the threat of revolutions was tempered, Saudi Arabia turned its focus to combatting Iran and punishing Turkey and Qatar for its incitement of the uprisings.

In 2017, Saudi Arabia initiated an economic embargo against Qatar, one of Turkey's closest allies. The announcement of the blockade came only days after U.S. President Trump's first Gulf meeting, suggesting the United States coordinated with Saudi Arabia to suppress the Turkish-Qatari alliance.²² Following the announcement, Turkey deployed thousands of troops to its Tariq Bin Ziyad military base in Doha in order to deter Saudi Arabia from further escalation.²³ In the latest development, the 2018 Saudi killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the borders of Turkey has brought the countries again to the point of conflict. Shortly following the assassination, President

²¹ Bruce Riedel, *Saudi Arabia Cheers the Coup in Egypt* (Brookings Institute, 2013).

²² Mark Landler, *Trump Takes Credit for Saudi Move Against Qatar* (The New York Times, 2017).

²³ Al Jazeera Editors, *Turkey Sends more troops to Qatar* (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Trump announced that he will not seek to punish Saudi Arabia.²⁴ This event further demonstrated that Turkey could not rely on the United States and is effectively on its own when dealing with threats by foreign actors.

Hostilities in the Aegean Sea and Mediterranean Sea

While the Aegean and Mediterranean seas have always been contentious arenas that states have grappled over, the region has become particularly hostile in the post-Arab Spring era. This is primarily due to the presence of large natural gas reserves and disputed territorial claims. In the Aegean Sea, animosity dating back to the Ottoman Empire has routinely precipitated conflict between Turkey and Greece. Despite the fact that they are both NATO allies, the two countries have come close to war on numerous occasions, including during Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and the Imia/Kardak island confrontation in 1996.

Both sides frequently dispatch fighter jets to violate each other's airspace and this has resulted in numerous fatalities due to both mechanical failures and confirmed dogfights. Most recently, in 2018, a Greek pilot died attempting to intercept two Turkish F-16s that had entered Greek territory near the island of Lesbos.²⁵ This event resulted in heightened tensions and threats of escalation which has made both Turkey and Greece elevate their military postures in the region. Since both countries view their large coastline borders as a vulnerability, it makes them hyper-responsive over relative gains and this will likely sustain a belligerent environment in the foreseeable future.

²⁴ Paul Waldman, *Trump looks the other way on Khashoggi's murder* (The Washington Post, 2018).

²⁵ Hurriyet Editors, *Greek fighter jet comes down in deadly crash in Aegean* (Hurriyet Daily, 2018).

Both Turkey and Greece have sought on numerous occasions to reconcile differences and establish some semblance of stability in the important shipping lanes of the Aegean Sea. In quid pro quo deals, the two countries have acknowledged certain islands as part of the other's territory, and they have cooperated in resolving problems stemming from the recent influx of refugees. However, fundamental differences regularly obstruct these efforts. For example, hostility between the two countries has flared up due to Greece's refusal to hand over eight Turkish soldiers that sought Greek asylum after they participated in the 2016 coup attempt.²⁶ In response, Turkey suspended its bilateral migrant readmission deal in 2018 with Greece.²⁷ Despite efforts to improve relations, regular disputes prevent the formation of a more cordial relationship.

In the larger strategic environment of the Mediterranean Sea, Greece, Egypt, and Cyprus have worked together to confront Turkish activity. Following President Sisi's dual visit to Athens and Southern Nicosia in 2015, the three countries established the framework for a joint military exercise dubbed "Medusa" that has taken place each year since, and has involved the coordination of frigates, submarines, and special forces.²⁸ As all three countries have troubled relations with Turkey, it is clear who they have been attempting to target. To counter these provocations, Turkey has increased its military involvement in the Mediterranean and conducted its largest ever naval drill in February 2019. The "Blue Homeland" military war game included hundreds of ships, helicopters, fighter jets, drones, and thousands of soldiers.²⁹ The timing of the exercise was not arbitrary. Despite criticism, less than three weeks later, Turkey began sending drill ships

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hurriyet Editors, *Turkey suspends migrant readmission deal with Greece* (Hurriyet Daily, 2018).

²⁸ Shaul Shay, *Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus Conclude Joint Naval Exercise* (Israel Defense, 2018).

²⁹ Ragip Soylu, *Turkey conducts largest ever navy drill as tensions rise in Mediterranean* (Middle East Eye, 2019).

to extract hydrocarbon in disputed waters claimed by Cyprus.³⁰ As a country that possesses a large maritime border, Turkey has increasingly prioritized asserting its will in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas to prevent access by rival powers.

The Syrian Civil War and the Entrance of Iran and Russia

In the post-Arab Spring era, the Syrian civil war has had the greatest impact on the structure of the Middle East as well as Turkey's international security. When the uprisings first began in 2011, Turkish elites observed the pattern of the Arab Spring and believed that the opposition would swiftly and successfully depose Bashar al-Assad and his regime. Therefore, they seized the opportunity to support rebel groups in order to gain influence in Syria once a new government was formed. In the early years of the conflict, Turkey's support centered on the Syrian National Council, an opposition coalition that was formed in Istanbul in August 2011, and its armed-wing the Free Syrian Army (FSA).³¹ Initially, the FSA was highly organized and focused solely on a secular political transition. However, as the conflict drew on, the FSA's ranks were filled with more radical fighters and international jihadists. This development shifted the focus of the cause as well as the conflicts' level of destruction and violence.

As the civil war raged on, Turkey increasingly partnered with questionable actors in order to achieve its geopolitical aims. This took the form of supplying lethal and non-lethal aid to al-Qaeda-linked groups like Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaish al-Fatah, and Ahrar al-

³⁰ Daily Sabah Editors, *Turkey's second drillship Yavuz to begin hydrocarbon exploration in Mediterranean region* (The Daily Sabah, 2019).

³¹ Liam Stack, *In Slap at Syria, Turkey Shelters Anti-Assad Fighters* (The New York Times, 2011).

Sham, specifically in the Idlib and Aleppo provinces.³² In addition, after the infamous battle of Kobani in 2014, there were allegations that Turkey was supporting the Islamic State (ISIL). To what extent Turkey assisted ISIL is debatable, but it is clear that Turkey's reluctance to fortify its porous southern border indirectly benefited ISIL through facilitating the movement of jihadists to Syria and allowing Turkish companies to purchase stolen oil from ISIL at a discount.³³ In the wake of international criticism from these allegations and after the ISIL bombing of Ataturk airport in 2016, Turkey adopted a more proactive posture to eliminate ISIL activity.³⁴ This has included an increase in anti-ISIL airstrikes in Northern Syria as well as a move to incentivize local proxies to expel ISIL-affiliated fighters from their ranks.

In the context of Turkey's security outlook toward the Syrian battle space, the entrance of Iran and Russia to support al-Assad's regime and the growth of an autonomous Kurdish-controlled zone in the Northeast have been the two most important developments. Due to Iran's long-term objective to create a corridor of influence that extends to the Mediterranean Sea, the preservation of al-Assad's regime was of the utmost importance. This desire to establish a "Shi'a Crescent" led to Iran deploying its Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its subsidiary Quds Force to Syria shortly after protests broke out.³⁵ To combat the growing opposition, Iran also utilized its influence with Hezbollah, and by 2012, thousands of militants from Lebanon had crossed over to defend key strategic locations.

³² Joost Hiltermann, *The Syrian Conflict and International Support for Rebel Groups* (The International Crisis Group, 2018).

³³ Ben Taub, *The ISIS Oil Trade, From the Ground Up* (The New Yorker, 2015).

³⁴ Riccardo Dugulin, *The wider implications of ISIS' Istanbul bombing* (Global Risk Insights, 2016).

³⁵ Rick Gladstone, *U.S. Accuses Hezbollah of Aiding Syria's Crackdown* (The New York Times, 2012).

As the atrocities committed by ISIL became more widespread, Iran utilized sectarian strife to recruit persecuted Shi'as into organized pro-regime militias. While the majority of these paramilitary groups were established in Syria, many came from abroad through the help of Iranian logistics. Most notably, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (Iraq), Liwa Fatemiyoun (Afghanistan), and Liwa Zainebiyoun (Pakistan). In total, it is estimated that in 2016, there were approximately 25,000 foreign Shi'a fighters in Syria not including Hezbollah forces from Lebanon.³⁶ The multi-tiered nature of the pro-al-Assad coalition forces is a testament to Iranian management, as they were able to coalesce these groups and propel them toward a specific goal which demonstrates a high level of coordination and organizational maturity.

As of 2019, Iran and its proxies have recaptured territory and established strong roots in Syria; however, between 2011 and 2015, they were fighting a losing war. In mid-2015, the al-Assad regime controlled only 25% of the country and was on the verge of defeat.³⁷ After a formal request for assistance, Russia launched a major military intervention in September of that year to preserve the Syrian government and assist the Iranian forces. The initial invasion included an extensive airstrike campaign in rebel-controlled territory and was quickly followed by approximately 4,000 Russian soldiers, the deployment of S-300 air defense systems, and three warships off the coast of Russia's Tartus naval base in Syria.³⁸ Only three months after the start of the campaign, Russia began striking Syrian Turkmen close to the Turkish border which generated tension as Russian aircraft repeatedly violated Turkish airspace. This tension peaked on November

³⁶ Murat Sofuoglu, *Will pro-Iranian militias leave Syria after the American pull-out?* (TRT World, 2018).

³⁷ Ian Bremmer, *These 5 Facts Explain Bashar Assad's Hold in Syria* (TIME, 2015).

³⁸ Joseph Daher, *Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria* (Atlantic Council, 2018).

24, 2015 when Turkish F-16s shot down a Russian Su-24 after it briefly crossed into Turkey. In response to this, Russia immediately placed sanctions on Turkey and within 24 hours had bombed a Turkish aid convoy near the city of A'zaz.³⁹

Another crucial element of Russia's military intervention has been the widespread use of private military contractors (PMCs). Since 2015, Russia has deployed thousands of PMCs, primarily from Wagner Group and Moran Security Group.⁴⁰ While the extent of Russian PMC involvement has remained secretive, their presence was brought to light in 2018 after a violent engagement with U.S. soldiers in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour that left 200-300 Russian mercenaries dead.⁴¹ In spite of this military failure, Russian forces have been effective in the Syrian campaign. In March 2019, it was reported that al-Assad controlled 60% of Syria along with all major cities and a large majority of its population, with the Syrian opposition restrained almost exclusively to Idlib province and a fragile peace forming between the Syrian government and the Kurds.⁴² This military success stems from intricate coordination between all elements of the pro-al-Assad coalition and the ability of the combined forces to capture strategic cities, cordon off opposition activity, and quickly return essential services to captured territories.

Through its involvement in Syria, the Russian military has gained strategic experience that will increase its effectiveness in future endeavors. The Syrian intervention was Russia's first expeditionary campaign since the end of the Cold War, and it used the opportunity to provide exposure to its soldiers. According to Michael Kofman of the Wilson Center, "Russia rotated countless crews through the theater of

³⁹ Telesur Editors, *Russia Allegedly Strikes Turkish Convoy on Syrian Border* (Telesur, 2015).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Neil Haur, *Russia's Mercenary Debacle in Syria* (Foreign Affairs, 2018).

⁴² Eugene Kiely, *Pompeo Wrong on Assad Control in Syria* (The Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2019).

operations, giving ships and bombers the opportunity to fire cruise missiles...and countless officers were rotated through the campaign on three month stints to gain combat experience.”⁴³ While Russian began reducing the size of its presence in Syria starting in 2016, there is evidence that Russia will remain in the country for the long-term. In late 2015, Russia established the Khmeimim air base in the coastal city of Latakia to supports its air campaign, and in 2018, a deal was signed with the Syrian government to keep it operational for the next 40 years.⁴⁴ The establishment of such infrastructure indicates that Russia will continue to exert its influence in the region, and that it does not intend to relinquish the geopolitical gains it has made over the last few years.

The Syrian civil war allowed Iran and Russia to establish significant influence over the future of Syria. Their military forces and advisors are embedded at every level of the Syrian security apparatus and while they each have distinct interests; their interdependence presents a difficult challenge for regional states to negotiate terms on an individual basis. Furthermore, the influence of Russia and Iran is not constrained exclusively to military matters. Since their entrance into the country, they have become involved in national and local politics and they have immersed themselves in Syria’s economy. Both Russia and Iran seek to capitalize on the reconstruction process which will not only increase their leverage in Syria, but also provide them with substantial revenue.

⁴³ Michael Kofman, *What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?* (Army University Press, 2018).

⁴⁴ Kyle Rempfer, *Russia’s probably not leaving Syria anytime soon. Here’s why.* (The Military Times, 2018).

The Syrian Civil War and Turkey's Fight Against the Kurds

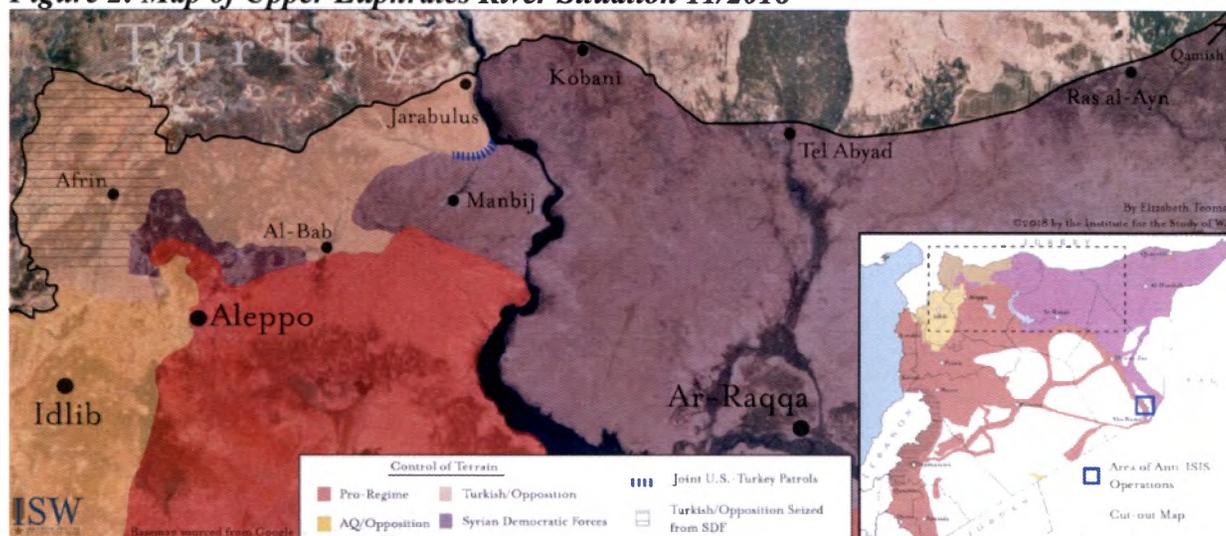
Returning back to Turkey's strategic outlook, the growth of Kurdish separatist movements during the chaos of the Syrian Civil war has greatly impacted Turkey's national security. The instability in Syria presented a unique opportunity for the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to capture large swaths of territory and create an autonomous zone similar to what was established in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s. While this expansion has elevated the power of Kurdish forces, their ability to preserve territorial gains is still in question. International recognition and support for the Kurdish independence movement has grown in recent years due to the brutality Kurds faced in the Syrian Civil War and the critical role they played in the anti-ISIL campaign.

However, the United States' willingness to continue backing the Kurds is highly uncertain. While the United States has provided substantial military, financial, and ideational support for the YPG and the more inclusive Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in January 2019, President Trump announced the withdrawal of the majority of U.S. troops from Syria. If this withdrawal is carried out, it would imperil Kurdish separatists, as they would have to face the combined forces of Turkey, Syria, and Iran alone. That being said, the YPG and SDF still possess an expansive domain and a battle-hardened military with a fierce nationalistic resolve, and this ensures that they will continue to pose a considerable challenge to any country that seeks to dispel them.

This is particularly true for Turkey, as it fears the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish zone near its southern border that could act as an operational base for Syrian Kurds to provide support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to carry out attacks domestically. To counter this threat, Turkey has sought to carve out a controlled enclave

in Northern Syria and dismantle U.S.-backed Kurdish networks operating in the area. This strategy has included two cross-border incursions to fight the Kurds, Operation Euphrates Shield 2016 and Operation Olive Branch 2018.

Figure 2: Map of Upper Euphrates River Situation 11/2018⁴⁵



In the ongoing Operation Olive Branch campaign, Figure 2 illustrates the significant progress Turkish forces and their FSA proxies have made in establishing a controlled zone. In this region, Turkey has actively facilitated a demographic transformation through displacing Kurdish inhabitants while resettling pro-Turkish Sunni refugees from the civil war.⁴⁶ While the enclave cannot be described as full annexation, it has been compared to the occupation of Northern Cyprus in 1974. Turkey has rebuilt infrastructure, established a governing administration, trained police forces, revitalized economic activity, and deployed large numbers of military units.⁴⁷ Turkey's buildup of military forces in this area and the commitment that it signaled can be linked to the

⁴⁵ ISW Editors, *Situation Along the Upper Euphrates River: November 8, 2018* (Institute for the Study of War, 2018).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

inaction of the United States, as it has repeatedly sat on the sidelines while its Kurdish proxies were overrun, especially in the city of Afrin.

The fact that two NATO allies are on opposite sides of the battlefield in Northern Syria demonstrates that the overarching structure guiding U.S.-Turkey interactions has changed. While both countries have sought to mitigate the possibility of escalation by coordinating joint patrols on the demarcation line near the city of Manbij there remains a high level of belligerency.⁴⁸ With the announcement of a potential withdrawal of U.S. forces in January 2019, Turkey appears to be preparing for a more extensive campaign east of the Euphrates river once U.S. soldiers are no longer embedded with the YPG and SDF.

Turkey's International Outlook

Regional blowback from involvement in the Arab Spring, tensions in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, the growing clout of Russia and Iran, and the expansion of Kurdish activity have all profoundly affected Turkey's security outlook. Without neglecting Turkey's military bases in Qatar, Somalia, and Sudan, when looking at the larger geopolitical picture, it appears that Turkey has increasingly reduced its strategic scope and is now prioritizing the situation along its border with Syria and the defense of its territorial waters. The objective of this section was to present a broad perspective of the structure of the regional system and the threats that Turkey faced in the post-Arab Spring era. In Part 4, the internal dynamics of Turkey will be discussed in order to gain a better understanding of what was occurring domestically during the time of these

⁴⁸ Carla Babb, *US, Turkey Conducts Second Joint Patrol in Manbij* (VOA, 2018).

international developments. Once this knowledge base has been established and the research design laid out in Part 5, the analysis will commence in Part 6.

Part 4: Turkey's Domestic Situation

This section will focus on a linear examination of how internal dynamics within Turkey have changed over time. While this part will focus on events in the post-Arab Spring era, it is important to also discuss the early years of Erdoğan and the AKP in order to understand the complex nature of Turkish politics. Analyzing how Erdoğan rose to power and why he became the most influential Turkish leader since Atatürk will bring attention to important domestic evolutions. In addition, through looking at how Erdoğan transformed Turkey, it will reveal the characteristics of his regime, the composition of his support base, and the societal actors that challenge his rule.

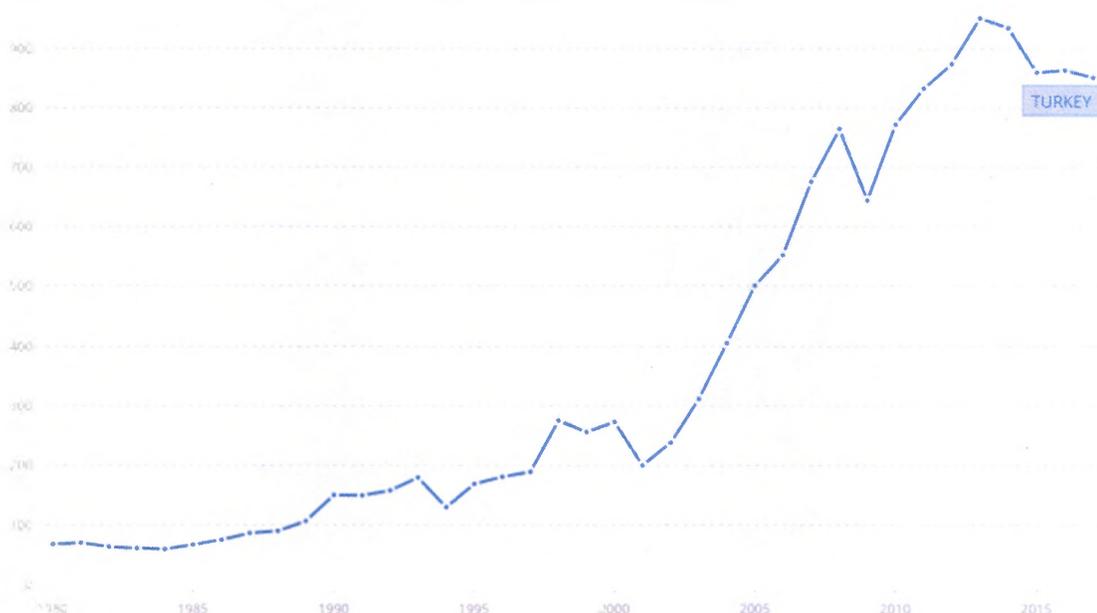
Popularly of Erdoğan and the AKP

In the decade leading up to the Arab Spring uprisings, then Prime Minister Erdoğan and his AK party presided over the largest expansionary period of the Turkish economy. When Erdoğan entered office in 2003, the economy was just beginning to recover from a financial crisis that took place 2001. Through building upon a series of IMF reforms that were initiated in 2002 by Minister of Economic Affairs Kemal Dervis, the AKP regime was able to rein in government spending, tackle public debt, reduce inflation, and significantly improve Turkey's export markets.⁴⁹ Another important contributor to Turkey's remarkable economic growth was reform initiatives connected to EU accession. During Erdoğan's first two terms as prime minister, he actively pursued EU membership and accordingly instituted policies that reduced trade barriers which

⁴⁹ Abdullah Akyuz, *Political Economy of Turkey: In Search of Stability Amid Domestic and Global Crises* (Brookings Institute, 2009).

created a business-friendly environment that led to a large influx of foreign direct investment.⁵⁰ As a result of these prudent actions, a strong framework was established in the early years of the AKP that facilitated economic prosperity.

Figure 3: Turkey's GDP in Billions (current US\$) 1980-2017⁵¹



In Figure 3 above, the success of Turkey's economic policies can be visualized. According to the World Bank, Turkey's GDP rose at an average rate of 6.8% from 2002 to 2007.⁵² While it temporarily declined during the 2008 recession, it quickly began expanding again at an average rate of 8.9% in the years after.⁵³ This historic economic growth transformed the lives of Turkish citizens, as Erdoğan utilized the country's new wealth to improve public services. According to Soner Cagaptay, a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Erdoğan restructured Turkey's small and

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² World Bank Data, *Turkey's GDP in Billions (current US\$) 1980-2017* (World Bank, 2019).

⁵³ Ibid.

malfunctioning welfare system, placing free healthcare and better education within reach of millions of people.”⁵⁴ By prioritizing these initiatives, “life expectancy jumped from 70 years in 2000 to 75.3 years in 2014, and the infant-mortality rate dropped from 33.7 per thousand live births to 16.5 in 2013.”⁵⁵ The success of these policies generated substantial support for Erdoğan and the AKP and bolstered their ability to enact greater social changes within Turkey.

Since coming to power, Erdoğan and AKP elites have passionately sought to dismantle Kemalist influences within the government and return Turkey back to its Islamic Ottoman heritage. Domestically, this has come in the form of removing religious restrictions that had been in place since the modern state was created, such as the ban on wearing the hijab in state institutions.⁵⁶ In addition, Erdoğan has prioritized introducing Islamic education back into school curriculums and ambitiously constructing over 9,000 mosques between 2005 and 2015.⁵⁷ This shift toward a more Islamic identity has not been limited to official government policies, but has diffused into pop culture. Popular TV shows such as *The Magnificent Century* and *Ertugrul* romanticize the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and have become well-known throughout the world, which has led to an increase in Turkey’s soft power.

Despite the positive effects of the economic reforms and a broad support base in the Muslim community, Erdoğan still faced significant challenges from Atatürk loyalists and members of the opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP). The republican nationalists viewed Erdoğan’s embrace of Islam as threatening to the secular ideals that

⁵⁴ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (I.B. Tauris & Co., 2017), p.92.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Humeyra Pamuk, *Turkey lifts generations-old ban on Islamic head scarf* (Reuters, 2013).

⁵⁷ Hurriyet Editors, *Turkey builds nearly 9,000 mosques in 10 years* (Hurriyet Daily, 2016).

the modern state was built upon. With their deep roots in the Turkish security apparatus, and the historical legacy of the Turkish military deposing executives that strayed too far from Kemalist values (1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), their influence limited the ability of Erdoğan and the AKP to fully achieve their civilizational ambitions. To counter obstructions from the CHP and military deep-state, Erdoğan utilized EU accession reform requirements that mandated that potential members improve their democracy by establishing civilian control of the military.⁵⁸ Under the justification of strengthening Turkey's ability to join the EU, Erdoğan inflicted a serious blow to the military establishment as he reduced the once powerful National Security Council to a consultative role, placed friendly civilian appointees in charge of the military budget, and removed hundreds of military officials from key bureaucratic positions.⁵⁹ This effectively consolidated Erdoğan's power over Turkish politics and laid the groundwork for Turkey's gradual slide into authoritarianism.

Through this success, Erdoğan was able to further his particular brand of neo-Ottomanism both domestically and internationally as he empowered AKP elites to forge greater ties with the East. This strategy was primarily orchestrated by Erdoğan's Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009-2014) Ahmet Davutoglu, who sought to enhance Turkey's political influence through building friendly relations with Muslim countries. Before the Arab Spring, this strategy remained largely diplomatic, such as through cultural exchange programs, economic projects in the Caucasus, and humanitarian aid initiatives in Africa. When the uprisings broke out in 2011, Davutoglu's famous "Strategic Depth" doctrine took a more assertive role by directly assisting the Muslim Brotherhood in revolutions

⁵⁸ Lisel Hintz, *Take it outside! National identity contestation in the foreign policy arena* (European Journal of International Relations, 2016), p.349.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

across the region. Accompanying this cultural and strategic shift toward the Muslim world, Erdoğan and AKP elites increasingly espoused anti-West rhetoric and publicly criticized the United States and Israel.⁶⁰ Increased complications with Erdoğan's bid for EU accession only accelerated this trend, as he used the stalled reforms to deflect internal criticism.

Social Problems Begin

In the first half of 2013, Erdoğan and the AKP appeared to have established a strong position, as foreign policy initiatives in the Arab Spring were largely going well, the economy was continuing to perform above expectations, and political power remained effectively consolidated. However, dissatisfaction was beginning to proliferate throughout Turkish society regarding the regime's increased adoption of moralistic policies, use of state violence, and implementation of widespread censorship. In a seemingly insignificant decision, it was announced on May 1st 2013 that Gezi Park in Istanbul was to be demolished in order to rebuild the Ottoman-Era Taksim Military Barracks, which would house a large shopping mall and luxury apartments.⁶¹ Shortly after protestors established a peaceful sit-in camp to prevent the move. As tensions increased, the crisis reached a boiling point on May 13th when local police used tear gas and rubber bullets to violently remove the demonstrators.⁶² In the following days, protests erupted throughout Turkey, as the initial focus of the demonstration evolved to fixate on broad opposition to Erdoğan and the authoritarian policies of the AKP.

⁶⁰ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, p.100.

⁶¹ Constanze Letsch, *A year after the protests, Gezi Park nurtures the seeds of a new Turkey* (The Guardian, 2014).

⁶² Ibid.

According to official government estimates, over the multi-week demonstrations that resulted in the suspension of the construction project, approximately 3.6 million people took part in the Gezi Park protests.⁶³ In total, eight protestors and one police officer were killed, and over 5,000 were injured including 104 who sustained serious head wounds and 11 who lost an eye from rubber bullets.⁶⁴ The extensive turnout for the protests revealed the general public's dissatisfaction with the direction of Turkey. To frame the events of Gezi Park in the context of Turkey's larger political situation, less than two months after the protests, the Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt was overthrown, which signaled the beginning of Turkey's failed foreign policy strategy during the Arab Spring.

The two events combined to create significant problems for Erdoğan and the AKP, but through utilizing economic prosperity to reduce grievances and appealing to the Muslim community, the regime was able to remain in favor. Restricted by AK party rules to seek a fourth term as prime minister, Erdoğan ran for and was elected president of Turkey in 2014. While Erdoğan was able to remain in power, he had won by a slim majority of 51.95% and the election was criticized for its low voter turnout.⁶⁵ Less than one year following this electoral success, the AKP's popularity began to deteriorate once again, as the economic expansion that had supported the regime since 2003 had run its course.

In 2015, Turkey's economy suffered from a weakening lira, reduced exports, a decline in tourism, and increased government debt. According to Craig Bonfield, a

⁶³ Daren Butler, *Turkey revives ghosts of Gezi protests as elections loom* (Reuters, 2018).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kemal Kirisci, *Yet Another Election Victory for Erdoğan – What's Next for Turkey?* (The Brookings Institute, 2014).

research associate at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, “the Turkish Lira lost 25% against the U.S. dollar during the year...and Turkish export levels averaged over a billion dollars less per month than in 2014.”⁶⁶ This was largely due to a decline in exports to Russia due to growing tensions and a large decrease in tourists because of the instability in nearby Syria. According to data from the Turkish Central Bank, 258,000 less tourists visited Turkey in 2015, which prompted then newly-elected Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to announce a “97.6 million-dollar loan relief package for the tourism sector.”⁶⁷ Such welfare programs increasingly took a toll on government expenditures and the decline in the lira only made it more difficult for the Turkish government to pay off foreign debt.

Frustration over Turkey’s economic performance led to the AKP losing its governing majority in the June 2015 parliamentary elections. Since 2002, the AKP had always maintained a single-party government, but the growing popularity in the south-east of the pro-Kurdish left-wing Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) took away important votes.⁶⁸ However, the hung parliament did not last long, as President Erdoğan called for a snap election that took place in November 2015 that saw the AKP recapture their majority in the parliament.

Apart from widespread claims of voter fraud, the AKP’s success can be attributed to the desire of Turkish citizens for stability and familiarity. In the short five-month period between the elections, the Turkish government’s ceasefire with the PKK collapsed which generated an increase in violence and ISIL terrorists detonated bombs in Ankara

⁶⁶ Craig Bonfield, *The Turkish Economy in 2015* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2016).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Umut Uras, *Ruling party loses majority in Turkey elections* (Al Jazeera, 2015).

killing 90 people.⁶⁹ Even though President Erdoğan and the AKP regime continued to adopt more authoritarian policies, the general public increasingly valued societal security over greater freedoms.

In the background of these authoritarian changes and rapid fluctuations in support of President Erdoğan, top bureaucrats and military officers involved with the Gülen movement began plotting the overthrow of the AKP. Once strong allies, Erdoğan and Fethullah Gülen worked closely during the 2000s, with Erdoğan appointing many Gülenists in positions of power during his bid to reduce the influence of secular Kemalists. While Gülen had lived in the United States since 1999, his political/religious movement possessed a vast global network of businesses, charities, and schools that greatly assisted Erdoğan in Turkey's soft power expansion.⁷⁰

Strong ideological differences and competition over control of key government posts, however, ruptured the partnership around 2013. According to M. Yavuz, while they both advocated for a greater role of Islam in government, "Gülenists were more pro-West, believed in elite education and leadership and were skeptical of the masses... while the AKP emphasized leadership derived from mass politics and democracy with a more Eastern looking stance."⁷¹ As tension built between the two factions, bureaucratic competition evolved into a military confrontation in the streets of Istanbul in Ankara.

⁶⁹ Zack Beauchamp, *Why Turkey's election results shocked all the experts* (Vox, 2015).

⁷⁰ Jillian Kestler, *Dissecting Turkey's Gülen- Erdoğan relationship* (Middle East Eye, 2016).

⁷¹ M. Yavuz, *The Gülen Movement vs. The State* (Journal of Middle East Policy, 2016), p.139.

The 2016 Coup Attempt

On the night of July 15th, 2016, rogue Turkish military forces affiliated with the Gülen movement orchestrated a multi-pronged coup attempt to overthrow Erdoğan and the AKP. In the first few hours, they had shut down key bridges in Istanbul, occupied the Turkish State Media Agency, and sent small teams to capture key AKP leadership.⁷² Skirmishes erupted in strategic locations including the parliament building and Atatürk Airport, while fighter jets and helicopters clashed over Ankara. President Erdoğan was on vacation at the time, but promptly made his way to Istanbul via plane under heavy security escort. En route, Erdoğan famously appeared on CNN and asked for Turkish citizens to take to the streets to thwart the coup. Through an overwhelming response by the public and swift action by loyal military forces, rogue coup participants began surrendering throughout the cities. By the morning of July 16th, less than twelve hours after fighting began, the short-lived coup was officially deemed a failure.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt, President Erdoğan aggressively sought to reprimand anyone connected to the events of July 15th. Between 2016 and 2018, 77,000 people including journalists, police officers, teachers, civil servants, and judges were arrested on terrorism-related charges.⁷³ In addition, over 150,000 public sector workers were fired, as President Erdoğan strove to purge anyone associated with Fethullah Gülen.⁷⁴ Due to Gülen residing in the United States and his movement's close links with the West, President Erdoğan blamed the United States for being involved in the coup attempt.

⁷² Al Jazeera Editors, *Here's how the coup attempt unfolded* (Al Jazeera, 2016).

⁷³ Umar Farooq, *Turkey lifts state of emergency after two-year purge, but will anyone even notice?* (The Los Angeles Times, 2018).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Tensions quickly rose as official requests to extradite Gülen to Turkey for trial were repeatedly denied by the United States, leading to a series of international disputes between the two countries. In highly publicized incidents, Turkey arrested locally employed U.S. State Department staff, as well as Andrew Brunson, an American evangelical pastor. Furthermore, despite being NATO allies, both the United States and Turkey temporarily suspended visa services for citizens in October 2017. While the U.S.-Turkey relationship had been strained for years, these events further downgraded relations, especially when placed in the context of the United States' support for Kurdish forces in Syria. This led President Erdoğan to increasingly view the United States as an unreliable ally, which only increased his use of anti-West rhetoric.

Enjoying a sharp spike in popularity through the “rally around the flag effect,” Erdoğan was able to push through important constitutional reforms in a referendum in the year after the coup attempt. The new constitution abolished the position of prime minister in Turkey, giving the president full control as the sole executive.⁷⁵ In addition, the new constitution significantly reduced the power of the parliament and granted Erdoğan the ability to run for three additional terms in office, which could allow him to stay in power until 2034.⁷⁶ These new powers were officially granted to Erdoğan after the June 2018 general election as he entered his second term as president of Turkey.

⁷⁵ Sinan Ekim, *The Turkish constitutional referendum, explained* (The Brookings Institute, 2017).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Domestic Problems Remain

While Erdoğan was elected with 52.5% of the presidential vote, the AKP lost its majority once again in the parliament.⁷⁷ This could largely be attributed to growing disapproval with the regime's handling of the economy. In 2018, the unemployment rate hit 11% and the lira lost 24% of its value after the United States imposed sanctions for the arrest of Andrew Brunson.⁷⁸ While some sanctions were lifted after Turkey released the pastor in late 2018, the damage had already been done as Turkey officially entered a recession in early 2019.⁷⁹ In the latest check on President Erdoğan and the AKP's authority, the March 2019 local elections signaled deep resentment by the Turkish people. In a sweep of key cities, the CHP won the mayoral races in both Ankara and Istanbul.⁸⁰ Historically, these have been important cities for the AKP because their large populations translate to significant tax revenue that the party has used to fuel its patronage network. In addition, the win by the CHP was symbolically problematic for the AKP, as Erdoğan had first started his career as mayor of Istanbul.

Turkey's Domestic Outlook

While President Erdoğan and the AKP remain popular within the conservative Muslim community, their position in Turkish society is becoming increasingly challenged. Domestic divisions generated by the secular CHP and the growing prominence of the left-wing HDP threaten to undermine the ruling regime. Erdoğan's

⁷⁷ Haaretz Editors, *Erdoğan Proclaimed Winner of Turkey's Presidential Election* (Haaretz, 2018).

⁷⁸ Market Watch Editors, *Turkish lira drops to all-time low after U.S. imposes sanctions* (Wall Street Journal, 2018).

⁷⁹ Cagan Koc, *Turkey Enters First Recession in a Decade as Elections Loom* (Bloomberg, 2019).

⁸⁰ Kaya Genc, *Why Turkey's Election Results Test Erdoğan's Grip on Power* (The New Yorker, 2019).

embrace of authoritarian policies and his continued purge of political enemies within the Turkish government signals that he does not feel his position is secure. As the economy continues to deteriorate, the use of financial aid to placate domestic frustrations has become harder, and this will only serve to push away longtime supporters. This section's goal was to trace important developments within Turkey in order to set the stage for the analysis. In the next part, the methods and research design will be presented in order to accurately investigate the reasons behind Turkey's foreign policy shift in the post-Arab Spring era. Given the complex security threats in the regional structure and the proliferation of problems domestically, it is clear that Turkey had to adapt its foreign policy, but why that assumed the form of partnering with Russia and Iran is still to be determined.

Part 5: Methodology and Research Design

The objective of this analysis is to understand why Turkey forged a strategic partnership with Russia and Iran in the post-Arab Spring era. As neoclassical realism posits, the structure of the system has the greatest influence over state behavior, but intervening variables within a state have a significant impact in determining available options and how specific policies are carried out. Therefore, by concentrating the focus of this study on distinguishing which intervening variables were the most robust, it will reveal the nature of the partnership and the underlying reasons behind it.

This section will proceed by first outlining the components of the research design and its applicability to the research question. Next, the dependent, independent, and intervening variables will be operationalized in order to achieve an accurate comprehension of the process at work. Finally, the potential limitations of this examination will be discussed.

As this research question pertains to a specific place and time frame, a single case study approach is most appropriate. According to political scientist Robert Yin, a case study can be defined as “an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”⁸¹ Through focusing attention on a specific historical development, a case study method is able to effectively trace connections and reveal nuances that more large-scale quantitative approaches fail to detect.

⁸¹ Ben Willis, *The Advantages and Limitations of Single Case Study Analysis* (Leeds University, 2014).

Unlike quantitative or cross-case studies, a single case study approach allows not only to determine if an event occurred, but why it occurred when it did, and in the way that it did. Thus, to Oxford professor John Gerring, a single case study methodology is “rightly identified with holistic analysis and with a notion akin to Clifford Geertz’s thick description of events.”⁸² In terms of the type of case study used in this paper, this case is characterized as deviant due to the fact that Turkey collaborated with historical adversaries and adopted an aggressive stance toward a long-term ally. Turkey’s behavior defies theoretical explanations of how a state should act given its membership in a mutual-defense pact.

Dependent Variable

Since Turkey’s collaboration with Russia and Iran is the phenomenon in question, this partnership will serve as the dependent variable. In order to draw out the specific manifestations of cooperation between the countries, I have operationalized the dependent variable into three categories - economic cooperation, involvement in post-War Syria negotiations, and security coordination. These categories were chosen as they represent the most salient features of Turkey’s partnership with Russia and Iran.

Table 1: Operationalization of Dependent Variable

1. Economic Cooperation (Energy Trade and Direct Investment)
2. Post-War Syria Collaboration (Astana Peace Talks)
3. Security Coordination (Military Procurement Deals and Joint Operation)

The first category of the dependent variables comprises all economic activity between the three countries, primarily energy trade and foreign direct investment. While economic cooperation between the three countries has existed for decades, since 2016

⁸² John Gerring, *The Case Study: What it is and What it Does* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

there has been a significant expansion in activity. According to Turhan Dilmac, in 2017, Russia became Turkey's third largest trading partner, with a \$22.2 billion trade volume and the largest market for Turkish construction companies.⁸³ In the same year, Turkish-Iranian trade reached \$11 billion despite obstruction by U.S. sanctions.⁸⁴ The extent of this relationship becomes more apparent when looking at energy, as Turkey imports 53% of its natural gas from Russia and approximately 30% from Iran.⁸⁵ This evidence indicates that economic ties are maturing, which necessitates a closer examination of the causal mechanism behind the growth.

Participation in the Astana Peace talks have been another important feature of the partnership. Turkey began cooperating with Russia and Iran to establish a resolution to the Syrian Civil War in 2017. This forum has drawn significant criticism from the United States, as it stands in direct confrontation to U.S.-led peace negotiations.⁸⁶ Turkey's willingness to join the alternative roadmap was an exceptional development, as it required Turkey to abandon its long-standing position that any settlement to the crisis had to include the removal of Bashar al-Assad.

Since joining the Astana peace process, Turkey has boosted its coordination with Russia and Iran, which has benefited Turkey's effort to shape post-war Syria to its advantage. For example, once Turkey acknowledged the legitimacy of the Syrian government, Russia green-lighted Turkey's Operation Olive Branch in 2018. This is substantiated by Russia allowing Turkish forces to enter the country and even the

⁸³ Turhan Dilmac, *Turkey and Russia: From Shared History to Today's Cooperation* (Perceptions Journal, Summer 2018).

⁸⁴ Mehr News Agency, *Iran-Turkey trade volume expected to reach \$12 billion by March* (Mehr News Agency, 2018).

⁸⁵ Tuncay Sahin, *Is Turkey becoming an energy hub?* (TRT World, 2017).

⁸⁶ Markar Esayan, *The Astana peace talks' impending triumph in Syria* (The Daily Sabah, 2019).

removal of Russian military units out of towns in the north.⁸⁷ While Turkey, Russia, and Iran hold diverging strategic interests in the country, participation in Syria has been a major avenue of cooperation.

The final category of the dependent variable is security coordination. This has primarily revolved around Turkey's decision to purchase Russia's advanced S-400 missile defense system.⁸⁸ The mixing of Russian and NATO military assets is unprecedented, which makes Turkey's foreign policy shift so unique. Despite condemnation by the United States, Turkey has expedited the agreement with Russia and has begun constructing infrastructure to accommodate the new platform, with the S-400 system slated to become operational in 2019.⁸⁹ Security cooperation has also expanded in the form of joint military patrols in Syria, with Turkish, Russian, and Iranian forces participating in mounted convoys in Kurdish-controlled territory.⁹⁰ Security cooperation is the most recent development in the partnership and while it is still in its infancy, it indicates a growing level of trust between the three countries.

Independent Variable

From a neoclassical realist perspective, the independent variable is the structure of the system within the Middle East. In the context of Turkey's strategic outlook, I identify three main developments that have impacted the regional structure in the post-Arab Spring era: (1) the relative withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East, (2)

⁸⁷ Metin Gurcan, *Deciphering Russia's delivery of Tell Fifaat to Turkey* (Al-Monitor, 2018).

⁸⁸ Christopher Woody, *Turkey says it has bought Russia's most sophisticated missile-defense system* (Business Insider, 2017).

⁸⁹ Amanda Macias, *Turkey begins constructing site for Russian missile system* (CNBC, 2018).

⁹⁰ Reuters Editors, *Turkish, Russian forces carry out patrols in Kurdish-controlled Syrian region* (Reuters, 2019).

expanded Russian and Iranian involvement in the region, and (3) an increase in inter-state disputes. As briefly mentioned earlier, the structure of the system is considerably different than what was in place during the Arab Spring. Between 2011 and 2016, states chose to covertly duel through the medium of non-state actors rather than direct engagements. While proxy forces remain integral, now that the threat of sweeping revolutions has comparatively subsided, explicit competition between countries has unfolded.

In the post-Arab Spring environment, these structural changes necessitated Turkey to respond. However, the specific manifestation of Turkey's response and its ultimate decision to partner with Russia and Iran inherently depended on unit-level intervening variables. It is for this reasons that the core of this analysis will focus on determining the robustness of intervening variables and how they affected the behavior of Turkey given the structure as an initial input.

Intervening Variables

From the literature on neoclassical realism, three distinct intervening variables have been extracted to explain why Turkey decided to partner with Russia and Iran. These variables will serve as separate hypotheses that I will examine to determine the level of influence they had on the foreign policy shift. The variables are not mutually exclusive, as they all arguably had an effect on the decision-making process and how Turkish leaders reacted to changing structural conditions. However, I intend to evaluate their significance in order to reveal the intrinsic character of the partnership. This will not only allow for a greater understanding of why the partnership manifested, but if the

intention behind cooperation is distilled, it will also serve to convey how durable the partnership is, which factors would be likely to reinforce it, and what occurrences could potentially dissolve it. Additionally, by exposing the foundational structure of Turkey's cooperation with Russia and Iran, it will clarify if the rapport in relations is a temporary affair or if the partnership signals the beginning of Turkey's disengagement with the West in favor of alignment with its new Eastern allies.

Table 2: Intervening Variables

<i>H1</i>	Turkey is partnering with Russia and Iran because leaders perceived a hostile strategic environment and sought new allies to bolster security
<i>H2</i>	Turkey is partnering with Russia and Iran because of ideological similarities among elites who hold a growing aversion toward the West
<i>H3</i>	Turkey is partnering with Russia and Iran because domestic threats to regime survival necessitated immediate assistance from outside sources

In Table 2, the three intervening hypotheses are presented. Following the logic of neoclassical realism, they concern perception of the structure, elite ideology, and domestic considerations. To ascertain to what extent the intervening variables influenced Turkey's foreign policy, I will employ a qualitative metric that will gauge significance. More specifically, these hypotheses will be applied systematically against the three operationalized aspects of the dependent variable. While I have made substantial adaptations and formulated a unique benchmark for the purpose of this thesis, the research design was derived from Sophie Van Dam's article "Pipeline Blues: Explaining the German Support of Nord Stream II."⁹¹ After analyzing the interaction between the intervening variables and each operationalized aspect of the dependent variable, I will utilize this framework to qualify each hypothesis as either a hard confirmation, soft confirmation, hard disconfirmation or soft disconfirmation. This will allow for the

⁹¹ Sophie Van Dam, *Pipeline Blues: Explaining the German Support of Nord Stream II* (Radboud University Nijmegen, 2017).

influence of the intervening variables to be accentuated so that important conclusions can be drawn from their individual level of magnitude.

Analysis Criteria

External Threats

H1 can be confirmed if Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran increased its security framework. A hard confirmation would be evidence that a foreign policy threat identified by Turkey was alleviated through a specific collaborative effort with Russia and Iran. If an aspect of cooperation between the three countries was not explicitly undertaken to overcome a direct external threat, but it assisted in improving the overall strength of Turkey against peer-competitors, H1 would be softly confirmed. In contrast, a hard disconfirmation of H1 requires direct evidence that Turkish leaders expected that an aspect of the partnership would negatively impact Turkey's strategic power, but proceeded forward as they were confident in Turkey's overall security. A soft disconfirmation of H1 would entail evidence from scholars or think tanks that Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran could jeopardize Turkey's ability to defend itself against external threats.

Ideological Similarities

A hard confirmation of H2 would require an explicit statement by Turkish elites that cooperation with Russia and Iran was intended to establish an alternative bloc in opposition to regional involvement by the United States and its European allies. H2 would be considered softly confirmed if Turkish elites strove for greater integration with the East without expressing a desire to simultaneously withdraw Turkey's cooperation

with the West. Correspondingly, a hard disconfirmation of H2 would be if Turkish elites explicitly opposed collaborating with Russia and Iran over ideological differences, but ultimately endorsed cooperation for material gains. H2 would be softly disconfirmed if indirect evidence exists that would indicate ideological consideration were present, but not significantly underlying the decision-making process during an aspect of the partnership.

Domestic Threats

Utilizing the information regarding Turkey's domestic situation presented in Part 4, H3 would be strongly confirmed if Turkish leaders utilized cooperation with Russia and Iran to alleviate a specific public grievance against the AKP regime. A soft confirmation of H3 would entail evidence that a foreign policy effort was not explicitly chosen to reduce threats to the regime, but still assisted in improving the AKP's approval domestically. In contrast, H3 would be strongly disconfirmed if Turkish leaders proceeded to cooperate with Russian and Iran while knowing that it would inflame an existing grievance against Erdoğan or the AKP. H3 would be softly disconfirmed if disapproval of a policy did not exist prior to a specific collaborative effort but could be extrapolated from literature on domestic preferences of Turkish citizens.

Limitations

Condensing complex human interactions such as war, peace, and diplomacy into the framework of a scholarly examination will always involve limitations that can affect the accuracy of the findings. While I argue that applying the hard and soft

(dis)confirmation structure to investigate Turkey's foreign policy decision will establish a detailed comprehension of underlying motivations, a level of reductionism will inherently be present in the research. To best overcome this limitation, this thesis will draw from existing theories and an array of primary and secondary sources to create a big picture of the events without sacrificing the aim of identifying causal mechanisms.

In addition, because Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran is an ongoing phenomenon, new developments occur every day that can drastically change our understanding of what has happened and what is likely to occur in the future. This limitation is present in every research design, but is more prevalent in cases where the dependent variable has manifested itself recently. However, this limitation does not preclude a researcher from attaining valuable knowledge and drawing meaningful conclusions. Building a comprehension of complex developments must begin somewhere, and through simultaneously drawing from past work while contributing new layers of insight, our ability to understand the course of history will improve.

Part 6: Economic Cooperation

As the earliest manifestation of their partnership, economic cooperation between Turkey, Russia, and Iran will be the first aspect of the dependent variable to be analyzed. After a brief dissection of relevant economic arrangements, the three intervening hypotheses that were extracted from the theory of neoclassical realism will be evaluated for their explanatory power. The objective of this section will be to determine the motivations behind Turkey's decision to expand its economic connection to Russia and Iran in the context of their larger strategic partnership.

Turkey's Economic Relationship with Russia

While Turkey and Russia have gradually developed strong economic ties since the end of the Cold War, their relationship has become significantly more sophisticated in the post-Arab Spring era. Due to Turkey's lack of natural energy resources, their economic relationship has primarily centered around energy trade, but also includes a considerable exchange of tourists and mutual foreign direct investment (FDI). Perhaps the most prominent feature of Turkish-Russian economic ties is their ability to cooperate in large transnational projects. This was first demonstrated with the 754-mile-long Blue Stream pipeline that was completed in 2003 through collaborative efforts between the state-owned energy companies of Russia's GAZPROM and Turkey's BOTAS.⁹² With an average annual volume of 16 billion cubic meters (BCM) of natural gas flowing through the pipeline each year (of which 9 BCM is directly imported by Turkey), the Blue Stream pipeline was incredibly influential in fulfilling Turkey's energy demands during its

⁹² Ole Austvik, *Turkey in the Geopolitics of Natural Gas* (Harvard Kennedy School, 2016), p.4.

economic expansion in the 2000s.⁹³ Despite the success of Blue Stream, disagreements regarding infrastructure costs and gas prices between Russia and Turkey resulted in the termination of the proposed Blue Stream II and largely prevented further joint efforts over the next decade.

The first steps toward cooperation did not occur until 2014, when Russia pulled out of the proposed South Stream pipeline with the EU and instead turned to Turkey to begin work on the more advanced TurkStream pipeline. Their vision was to implement two parallel pipelines, with one delivering natural gas directly to Turkey while the other would move onward to Europe.⁹⁴ However, after Turkey shot down the Russian jet in 2015, the plan was terminated. Following the reconciliation of Turkey and Russia in mid-2016, the plan was restarted and construction resumed in 2017. The TurkStream pipeline currently has a scheduled completion date in late 2019, at which point 31.5 BCM of natural gas (double Blue Stream's capacity) will begin flowing through.⁹⁵ The establishment of advanced pipeline networks has furthered Turkey's desire to become a major energy hub and critical transit point of trade between the East and West.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nikos Tsafos, *The TurkStream Opportunity* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2018).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Figure 4: Turkey's Energy Pipelines 2016⁹⁶

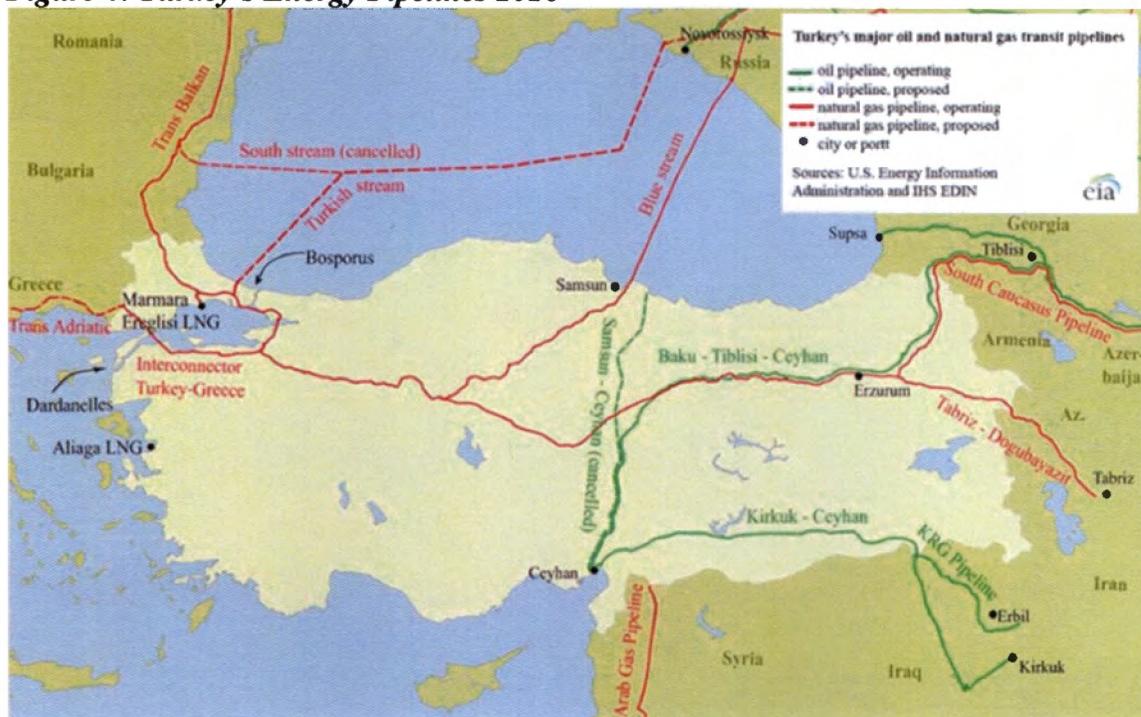


Figure 4 illustrates the growing network of natural gas and oil pipelines flowing through Turkey toward Europe. Although it has little natural gas of its own, Turkey's economic cooperation with Russia has allowed it to capitalize on the energy trade. This has not just come in the form of discounted natural gas from Russia to support Turkish citizens and keep energy prices low, but it has also positively impacted Turkey's economy through the creation of jobs and revenues collected from pipeline transit. According to the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), the TurkStream pipeline alone "will create approximately 13,500 jobs, add around \$100 million to household income, and contribute \$546 million to Turkey's GDP."⁹⁷ The extent of these figures exemplifies the benefits that Turkey has gained from cooperation with Russia.

⁹⁶ Austvik, *Turkey in the Geopolitics*, p.11.

⁹⁷ Sinan Ulgen, *TurkStream: Impact on Turkey's Economy and Energy Security* (Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, 2017).

The latest example of economic coordination between the two countries is Russia's development of Turkey's first nuclear power plant. In 2018, Russian company Rosatom began construction of the Akkuyu nuclear reactor in southern Turkey. Set to become operational in 2023, it is projected to provide around 10% of Turkey's total electricity needs. According to John Daly, a fellow at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, "Akkuyu's estimated \$20 billion cost represents the largest investment in a single project by Turkey and is the most obvious element in a deepening relationship with Russia."⁹⁸ Due to the controversy surrounding nuclear energy, coordination in the realm of nuclear technology is highly significant and demonstrates the growing seriousness of the partnership.

Turkey's Economic Relationship with Iran

Turkey's economic cooperation with Iran is much less comprehensive than with Russia, but due to their shared border, the two countries enjoy considerable economic relations. While Turkey imports the majority of its natural gas from Russia, it still receives a large amount of natural gas and the bulk of its crude oil from Iran. In 2017, Iran supplied 30% of Turkey's natural gas and 45% of Turkey's entire crude oil imports.⁹⁹ Despite the United States re-imposing sanctions on Iran after leaving the JCPOA, Turkey actively fought to preserve its economic ties. When these sanctions were announced, President Erdoğan asserted that "We will absolutely not abide by such sanctions. These are steps aimed at unbalancing the world. We don't want to live in an

⁹⁸ John Daly, *The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant and Deepening Turkish-Russian Relations* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2018).

⁹⁹ Andrew Wilks, *Turkey faces hike in oil prices as US thwarts Iran oil sales* (Al Jazeera, 2019).

imperialist world.”¹⁰⁰ Through applying pressure on the United States, Turkey was granted a six-month waiver that allowed the continuation of its energy trade with Iran. However, with the termination of the waiver in May 2019, Turkey faces serious economic costs should it continue to purchase Iranian energy products.

Apart from energy, Turkey and Iran have also expanded bilateral trade. In 2016, trade between the two countries stood at \$9.7 billion, and only one year later in 2017, it reached \$11.7 billion.¹⁰¹ Turkey primarily exports steel, automotive vehicles, fiberboard, and synthetic threads to Iran, while it imports plastics, metals, and a large number of agricultural products. The uncertainty surrounding impending sanctions has prevented the two countries from establishing more sophisticated economic cooperation in the post-Arab Spring era. However, following the 2018 Meeting of the High Council for Iran-Turkey Strategic Cooperation, President Hassan Rouhani and President Erdoğan made a joint pledge to promote trade mechanisms to reach an annual trade volume of \$30 billion.¹⁰² This indicates an eagerness to expand cooperation and develop a more complex economic relationship.

H1: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Structural Threats

Soft Confirmation

Neoclassical realism holds that a state’s economy represents the basis of latent power and is directly connected to a state’s ability (or lack thereof) to possess sufficient

¹⁰⁰ Gulsen Solaker, *Turkey says it will not abide by renewed sanctions on Iran* (Reuters, 2018).

¹⁰¹ Mohammed Ayoob, *The regional factors bringing Turkey and Iran together* (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2018).

¹⁰² Tehran Times Editors, *Iran, Turkey pledge to promote economic ties to reach \$30 billion trade target* (Tehran Times, 2018).

military hard power. Not discounting apprehension over relative gains, efforts to increase economic prosperity can generally be seen as stemming from a desire to increase competitiveness in the anarchic international system. In this context, Turkey's hostile relationship toward its two largest energy providers during the Arab Spring and the effects of Russian sanctions in 2015 jeopardized Turkey's economic capacity to maintain its military force. In addition, since Turkey also relies heavily on oil imports from Iraq, the expansion of Kurdish activity on Turkey's southern border threatened to further obstruct the flow of necessary energy. Therefore, Turkey's decision to reconcile with Russia and Iran in 2016 and expand economic cooperation in the post-Arab Spring era can be connected to perceived threats stemming from the regional system.

It is important to consider, however, that Turkey's growing assertiveness to take control of natural gas deposits in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas signals that Turkey desires to reduce its energy dependence on Russia and Iran. Turkey's large military drills and frequent intrusions into territory held by Greece and Cyprus demonstrates the seriousness of this aspiration. As a result, Turkey's behavior potential indicates that it views its economic cooperation with Russia and Iran as a temporary necessity until it can become more energy independent. Since Turkey's economic partnership with Russia and Iran improved its overall strength against peer-competitors, H1 can be softly confirmed.

H2: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Ideological Similarities

Soft Confirmation

As a principle intervening variable recognized by neoclassical realism, ideological similarities among elites can facilitate closer relations between states in the international

arena. Erdoğan and the AKP regime have long sought to increase Turkey's economic integration with the East and alternative blocs outside the U.S.-dominated trade system. Such examples include Turkey's close coordination with BRICS, its increased involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and its membership in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Decades of failed bids to join the EU have only furthered this divergence, as AKP leadership have grown skeptical that Turkey will ever attain full membership.

Turkey's transition toward the East has also been accelerated by international criticism. In recent years, Erdoğan, Putin, and Rouhani have all been accused of implementing authoritarian policies by the West, which has cultivated an affinity among them due to their ostracization. In addition, Turkey, Russia, and Iran have all been targets of U.S. sanctions in the post-Arab Spring era, which has only encouraged greater cooperation between them. This rapport can be demonstrated in 2018, after the three countries agreed to use local currencies in trade instead of U.S. dollars to bypass restrictions.¹⁰³ As a result, the roots of the partnership have deepened, as they continue to seek alternative avenues for economic arrangements.

Nevertheless, Turkey's economy remains fundamentally linked to the West. Even with U.S.-Turkey relations deteriorating in 2018, Turkey sold \$8.3 billion exports to the United States, while only \$3.4 billion was sold to Russia and \$2.4 billion to Iran.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, 57% of Turkish exports were delivered to European countries, with Germany being Turkey's largest trading partner.¹⁰⁵ Even though Turkey remains dependent on

¹⁰³ Middle East Monitor Writers, *Turkey, Russia, Iran to replace US dollar with local currency in trade* (Middle East Monitor, 2018).

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Workman, *Turkey's Top Trading Partners 2018* (World's Top Exports, 2019).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Russia and Iran for energy, profits extracted from Turkey's pipelines are contingent on European markets, as they largely remain the final destination for delivery of oil and natural gas. While President Erdoğan regularly criticizes the EU for its obstruction, in 2018 he stated: "As Turkey, we have been continuing on our way with the goal of full membership despite all the mines that were planted on our path and barriers in front of us. Today, membership in the European Union remains a strategic goal for us."¹⁰⁶ This evidence suggests that on an ideological level, Turkey is not attempting to replace its economic connection to the West with its new partnership with Russia and Iran but is only seeking to develop additional economic relationships. As a result, H2 is softly confirmed.

H3: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran because of Threats to Regime Survival

Hard Confirmation

The theory of neoclassical realism asserts that a state's foreign policy is most susceptible to the intervening variable of domestic influences when the executive faces threats to regime survival. Utilizing this logic, it is clear that there is a strong connection between the July 2016 coup attempt to overthrow President Erdoğan and Turkey's reconciliation with Russia and Iran in the months after. Besides grievances pertaining to Erdoğan's authoritarian policies, domestic anger surrounding the declining economic situation in Turkey were leading reasons for the AKP's parliamentary losses in 2015 and 2018, as well as its widespread failures in the 2019 local elections.

¹⁰⁶ Associated Press Editors, *Turkey's Erdoğan: EU membership remains strategic goal* (Associated Press, 2018).

Rising energy costs associated with the decreasing purchasing power of the lira has been a particularly contentious issue that has aggravated Turkish citizens. This growing frustration has only made the AKP leadership feel more insecure following the United States' decision to re-impose sanctions on Iran. President Erdoğan has attempted to appeal to Turkish citizens by proclaiming in front of parliament that "We cannot freeze our people in the cold."¹⁰⁷ Any reduction in energy imports from Iran will have a considerable effect on the Turkish economy and will only serve to drive up inflation and increase domestic threats to the AKP regime. Through partnering with Russia and Iran, President Erdoğan and the AKP have attempted to restore the economic expansion that fueled their popularity in the 2000s, which indicates that H3 can be strongly confirmed.

¹⁰⁷ Solaker, *Turkey says it will not abide*.

Part 7: Syria Collaboration

Building upon their successful economic cooperation, Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran evolved to include collaboration over the future of post-civil war Syria. After years of supporting rebel groups, Turkey's decision to work with the Syrian government marked a clear departure from its previous foreign policy. The objective of this section is to evaluate the reasons behind this shift and what it signals regarding Turkey's loyalty to its new strategic partnership.

Astana Peace Process

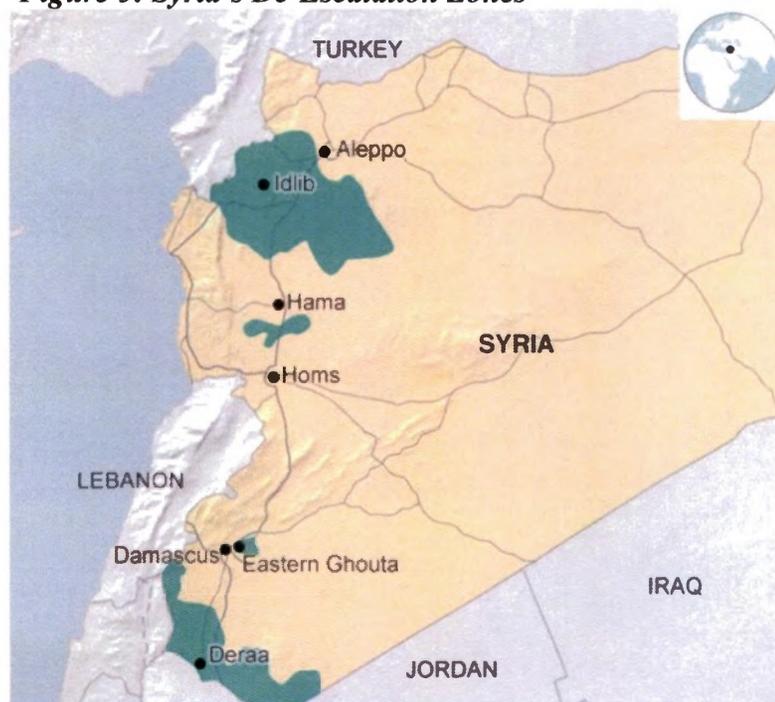
In December 2016, Erdoğan, Putin, and Rouhani made a joint statement that they had agreed to a general ceasefire in Syria and would be initiating a new peace initiative that would be separate from the U.N.-brokered negotiations in Geneva that were heavily influenced by the United States. The first meeting that would come to be known as the Astana peace process was held a month later in January 2017. Representatives from the three countries along with rebel commanders were present, although due to a stipulation by Turkey, no delegates from the Kurdish YPG or SDF were allowed to attend.¹⁰⁸ While the summit began with sharp tension and debate due to Turkey's insistence on the removal of al-Assad, an agreement reinforcing the ceasefire was ultimately reached.¹⁰⁹ Under the agreement, the three countries would use their respective influence over Sunni rebels, the Syrian government, and Shi'a militias to ensure that a breach of the ceasefire would not occur.

¹⁰⁸ Patrick Wintour, *Sponsors of Syria talks in Astana strike deal to protect fragile ceasefire* (The Guardian, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Over the next few months, repeated rounds of talks led to an expansion of the ceasefire and the establishment of four de-escalation zones. As illustrated in Figure 5, these zones include Idlib province, the Rastan and Talbiseh enclave in northern Homs province, the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, and the rebel-controlled areas along the Jordan border that span parts of Deraa and Quneitra provinces.¹¹⁰ In these zones, military operations were explicitly forbidden, with only humanitarian aid missions allowed to be conducted inside. While the ceasefire has official remained in place, there have been repeated breaches of the agreement by all sides.

Figure 5: Syria's De-Escalation Zones¹¹¹



The de-escalation zone in Idlib province remains the most unstable, as Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government have threatened to launch a large-scale offensive to wipe out rebels there who have largely consolidated under Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaeda-linked rebel group formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra. From Turkey's

¹¹⁰ BBC Editors, *Homs Ceasefire Deal Announced* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

perspective, the preservation of stability in the Idlib de-escalation zone is of utmost importance. Apart from units involved in Turkey's Olive Branch Campaign northeast of Idlib, the province contains a large number of FSA proxy forces that are critical in Turkey's strategy to defeat Kurdish militants and create a controlled enclave in Northern Syria.

In addition, Turkey fears the possibility of a new wave of refugees that would flood north if fighting in the province resumes. In 2018, UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, asserted that if a new offensive took place, "an estimated 800,000 refugees would be created of the total 3 million civilians living Idlib."¹¹²

Correspondingly, Turkey has increased its diplomatic efforts with Russia and Iran to defuse the situation. After a diplomatic meeting in January 2019, Putin expressed his frustration over terrorist activity in Idlib, after which Erdoğan pledged "to do more" in disarming and removing HTS fighters in accordance with an agreement signed at the 6th round of Astana peace talks back in September 2017.¹¹³ The Astana peace process has achieved mixed results, but it has been the most successful initiative to resolve the Syrian conflict in comparison to others deals brokered by the U.N and the United States. While significant disagreements remain among the Turkey-Russia-Iran partnership, their concerted effort to establish a diplomatic framework signifies a meaningful progression in relations.

¹¹² Patrick Wintour, *UN special envoy on Syria warns against bombing rebel enclave* (The Guardian, 2018).

¹¹³ Al Jazeera Editors, *Russia, Turkey agree to take steps to stabilize Syria's Idlib* (Al Jazeera, 2019).

H1: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Structural Threats

Hard Confirmation

The Syrian government's July 2016 victory over FSA forces in the symbolic and strategic city of Aleppo marked a turning point in Turkey's approach to the conflict. In the context of the larger regional situation, the defeat in Syria proved that Turkey had failed to induce any lasting change through promoting revolutions during the Arab Spring. As its proxy forces were routed, the expanded presence of Russia and Iran in conjunction with the substantial increase in Kurdish activity created a dangerous environment that threatened Turkey's national security.

From a neoclassical realist perspective, the structure of the regional system had clearly changed, which necessitated Turkey to formulate a new approach to the Syrian conflict. Through President Erdoğan's consolidation of power and expanded control over institutional decision-making, he was able to take swift action to adjust Turkey's foreign policy. Rather than surrendering all of the gains that Turkey had made during the course of the civil war, President Erdoğan initiated Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016 to secure a 56-mile stretch of land across Turkey's border with Syria. Through deploying Turkish military units and FSA proxy forces whose ranks were filled with fleeing fighters from Aleppo, Turkey was able to push ISIL and Kurdish militants back and carve territory away from Syria. According to Goktug Sonmez, a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, the major success of Operation Euphrates Shield was that "Turkey was able to secure itself a seat at the negotiating table over Syria's future."¹⁴ As a result of

¹⁴ Goktug Sonmez, *A Scorecard for Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield* (The Jamestown Foundation, 2017).

Turkey's agency, it gained valuable leverage before it established the Astana peace process only four months later in December 2016.

Turkey utilized this leverage to pressure Russia and Iran to support its effort to create a controlled enclave to improve national security. This is substantiated in the weeks following the first round of the Astana peace process in January 2017, as Russia began providing air-support to Turkish forces as they pushed forward in Operation Euphrates Shield.¹¹⁵ Since Turkey faced a series of complex threats stemming from Syria in 2016, but was able to improve its security through partnering with Russia and Iran, H1 can be strongly confirmed.

H2: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Ideological Similarities

Hard Disconfirmation

There remain fundamental ideological divisions within the Turkey-Russia-Iran partnership when it comes to post-civil war Syria cooperation. While Turkey has shifted course and has worked with the Syrian government in the context of the Astana peace process, President Erdoğan has still refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of al-Assad as president of Syria. Despite working with al-Assad's two biggest supporters to restore stability in the war-torn country, Erdoğan has regularly declared his desire for regime change and even proclaimed his support for President Trump's airstrikes (both in 2017 and 2018) against the Syrian government after allegations that the regime had used

¹¹⁵ Can Kasapoglu, *Operation Euphrates Shield: Progress and Scope* (Al Jazeera, 2017).

chemical weapons.¹¹⁶ Following the 2018 U.S. airstrike, President Erdoğan spoke at a AK party rally where he asserted, “the Syrian regime received the message that its massacres wouldn’t be left unanswered. The innocent Syrian people should have been defended long ago.”¹¹⁷ The fact that this statement was made almost two years after the start of the Astana peace process indicates that Turkey’s decision to cooperate with Russia and Iran in Syria was not predicated on ideological affinity.

In addition, sectarian disagreements between Sunni Turkey and Shi’a Iran have and will continue to be a force of division within the strategic partnership. This conflict is less robust among top leadership, as both Erdoğan and Rouhani share ideological animosity against Israel and Saudi Arabia. However, the two countries have partnered with more radical proxy actors in the region who remain diametrically opposed. As the FSA and Shi’a militias regularly exchange gunfire along the Idlib de-escalation zone, they could potentially spark a new round of intense fighting that would necessitate the involvement of their patron states to ensure their survival. If such an event occurred, it would generate significant tension that could rupture the partnership’s fragile cooperative efforts in Syria. Since there is no evidence that an ideological connection influenced Turkey’s decision to work Russia and Iran in Syria, H2 is strongly disconfirmed.

¹¹⁶ Ece Toksabay, *Turkey’s Erdoğan welcomes Western attack on Syria, says operation a message to Assad* (Reuters, 2018).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

H3: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran because of Threats to Regime Survival

Hard Confirmation

President Erdoğan's decision to cooperate with Russia and Iran in the Astana peace process occurred five months after the July 2016 coup attempt. As it became increasingly clear that Turkey's strategy in Syria had failed, President Erdoğan opted to recuperate some losses by engaging diplomatically in the post-civil war framework. At the time, the AKP regime was simply facing too many internal threats to maintain an assertive and independent foreign policy in Syria. While it was difficult for Erdoğan to shift Turkey's political sentiment toward the Syrian Civil War due to his long-standing position on regime change, he was able to appease his domestic audience by participating in the Astana peace process without acknowledging the legitimacy of al-Assad. As a result of Erdoğan's decision to collaborate with Russia and Iran, Turkey was able to achieve two important objectives that increased regime security domestically.

One, through reorienting Turkey's strategy in Syria from prioritizing regime change toward removing Kurdish networks, Turkey was able to reduce the influence of Kurds at home. Through his campaign, Erdoğan used nationalist fervor to diminish the popularity of the pro-Kurdish HD party (which had first risen to prominence in 2015) for their connection to the PKK and YPG. Two, by initiating Operation Euphrates Shield 2016 and Operation Olive Branch 2018 under the umbrella of Russian assistance (evidenced by Russian air support and the removal of Russia soldiers out of towns in the north), Turkey was able to create a controlled enclave in northern Syria to resettle

refugees.¹¹⁸ Erdoğan has long been blamed by Turkish citizens for taking in 3.58 million refugees since 2011. In a November 2017 poll, 79% of Turkish citizens viewed Syrian refugees negatively, primarily because the large influx of refugees was seen as contributing to the declining economic situation in the country.¹¹⁹ By resettling refugees in the controlled enclave in 2016, the AKP has begun to remedy these grievances, and has successfully relocated 300,000 people as of January 2019.¹²⁰ Since Turkey's cooperation with Russia and Iran in the Astana peace process allowed it to directly reduce domestic grievances toward the AKP regime, H3 is strongly confirmed.

¹¹⁸ Leonid Issaev, *Why Is Russia helping Turkey in Afrin?* (Al Jazeera, 2018).

¹¹⁹ Alan Makovsky, *Turkey's Refugee Dilemma* (Center for American Progress, 2019).

¹²⁰ Andrew Wilks, *Syria safe zone: A long-term problem rather than a solution* (Al Jazeera, 2019).

Part 8: Security Coordination

As the most recent manifestation of the partnership, Turkey has increasingly cooperated with Russia and Iran to procure military hardware and coordinate joint military operations. This aspect of the partnership has been the most controversial, as NATO has vehemently condemned Turkey's actions and has initiated measures to punish Turkey for its unconventional foreign policy. The objective of this section is to assess the robustness of the Turkey-Russia-Iran partnership in the realm of security cooperation in order to better understand which intervening variables had the greatest impact on decision-making.

Turkey's Military Cooperation with Russia

While Turkey is a member of NATO, the United States and EU countries have increasingly reduced their military support for the country. In 2017, "the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands declined to renew their patriot-missile deployments in southern Turkey."¹²¹ A long-range air defense system has long been recognized as fundamental to any country's overall security umbrella. This is especially true for Turkey, as it is situated in such a geopolitically volatile location. The removal of the patriot-missiles, which are generally freely available to NATO allies, was a clear signal that Turkey could not rely on its traditional partners. This provoked Turkey to purchase Russia's advanced S-400 missile defense system for \$2.5 billion in December 2017 as a means of ensuring the country's protection.¹²² Fearing Turkey would drift too far from

¹²¹ Woody, *Turkey says it has brought Russia's most sophisticated missile-defense system.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

NATO, the United States submitted an offer to sell patriot missiles to Turkey for \$3.5 billion in December 2018.¹²³ However, President Erdoğan denied the deal and reconfirmed his commitment to buying Russian military equipment by expediting the delivery of the platform, with an operational timeframe set for late 2019. In a joint statement with Putin in April 2019, Erdoğan asserted: “On the issue of the S-400s, we have determined our road map. Those who tell us to give up our plans, those who make recommendations do not know us. If we sign a deal on an issue, that’s a done deal. This is our sovereign right, this is our decision.”¹²⁴

Apart from the higher cost, the primary reason that the American offer was denied was because it did not contain a technology sharing provision, which the S-400 deal with Russia includes. As part of Turkey’s larger objective to indigenously produce its own military hardware, Turkey desires the technology behind the missile defense system to be available, so it can construct its own platform in the future.

In retaliation to Turkey’s decision, in August 2018, the U.S. congress passed the new National Defense Authorization Act that included a stipulation halting the sale of weapons to Turkey, including the delivery of the next-gen F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Jet. The F-35 has been in construction since 2004 through the combined efforts of NATO members. Turkey was primarily involved in creating parts of the F-35’s fuselage, landing gear, and cockpit display.¹²⁵ After the suspension was announced, the United States began to look for alternative NATO allies that would continue the development of parts that Turkey was previously responsible for. The United States fears Turkey’s use of both

¹²³ Hurriyet Editors, *Russian S-400 system done deal, says Erdoğan* (Hurriyet Daily, 2019).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Mike Stone, *U.S. halts F-35 equipment to Turkey, protests its plans to buy from Russia* (Reuters, 2019).

American and Russian military equipment as it increases the possibility that critical intelligence regarding the F-35 would be leaked to the Kremlin.

Following the F-35 ban, in May 2019, Russia announced that it would be willing to sell Turkey their fifth-generation Su-57 fighter jets. Speaking directly to Turkey's demand for technology access, Sergey Chemezov, head of Rostec, the state-owned company that creates the Su-57, declared, "We would gladly evaluate any Turkish suggestions for localization or transfer of technologies...we are ready to support Turkey's desire to develop its own defense industry."¹²⁶ Through acknowledging requests for technology and offering replacement weapon systems, Russia has increasingly exemplified itself as an attractive military partner to Turkey.

Moving from military procurement deals, Turkey and Russia have expanded cooperation through joint military drills and patrols. In March 2019, the two countries cooperated in a naval exercise dubbed "Blue Motherland" in the Black Sea, which was conducted less than a month after "Blue Homeland," Turkey's largest naval drill in history.¹²⁷ While the military exercise was comparably small, it still included a variety of ships and dozens of soldiers, which indicates a growing network of military reciprocity. Occurring simultaneously, Turkey and Russia participated in joint patrols along the Idlib de-escalation zone in Syria.¹²⁸ Russia had previously assisted Turkey's military operations through air support, but coordinated patrols on the ground was a clear progression in military relations. Following the success of these joint efforts, Erdoğan and Putin met in Moscow in April 2019 and stated their desire "to deepen their military

¹²⁶ Hurriyet Editors, *Russia ready to cooperate to sell Turkey Su-57 fighter jets* (Hurriyet Daily, 2019).

¹²⁷ Ahval Editors, *Turkey, Russia ramp up military cooperation with joint drills in Black Sea* (Ahval, 2019).

¹²⁸ Al Jazeera Editors, *Turkey and Russia hold joint patrols in Syria's Idlib* (Al Jazeera, 2019).

ties.”¹²⁹ As military cooperation increases, it is clear that the partnership is becoming more sophisticated.

Turkey’s Military Cooperation with Iran

When compared to Russia, Turkey’s military cooperation with Iran is much less significant. Between 2016 and 2018, their coordination primarily revolved around intelligence sharing to assist each other’s independent missions. This can be demonstrated in 2017, after Iranian Chief of Staff General Mohammed Bagheri visited Ankara and revealed locations of PKK fighters in Iraq.¹³⁰ Utilizing this information, Turkey carried out a series of airstrikes to eradicate PKK networks in the area. Building upon intelligence sharing, Turkey and Iran conducted their first joint military operation in March 2019. The military operation targeted PKK militants on the border between the two countries and was subsequently proclaimed as “groundbreaking” by the Turkish interior minister, Suleyman Soylu.¹³¹ While military cooperation between Turkey and Iran is still in its infancy, their shared animosity against Kurdish separatists has laid the groundwork for the two countries to coordinate on a wider scale.

¹²⁹ Deutsche Welle Editors, *Erdoğan and Putin seek to deepen their military ties* (Deutsche Welle, 2019).

¹³⁰ Daily Sabah Editors, *Turkey, Iran on same page for military cooperation against PKK* (Daily Sabah, 2017).

¹³¹ Dorian Jones, *Turkey, Iran Join Forces Against Kurdish Rebels* (VOA, 2019).

H1: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Structural Threats

Hard Confirmation

As Turkey continued to face complex threats stemming from the regional system, the withdrawal of military support by the United States only expedited Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran. Neoclassical realism presumes that state leaders largely have an accurate sense of what it takes to ensure national security, so as a rational actor, President Erdoğan sought alternatives to the air-defense system and fighter jets that were denied by the United States. Furthermore, Turkey's dangerous security situation in the post-Arab Spring era necessitated assertive action, and this manifested in the form of a partnership with Russia and Iran. Through increasing military drills and joint patrols, Turkey was able to stabilize the volatile security situation that it faced along its borders.

However, as with its desire to decrease dependence on energy imports, Turkey has actively sought to reduce its reliance on foreign military hardware. In recent years, Turkey has ambitiously established its own defense manufacturing sector in an attempt to become self-sufficient. In 2017, Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Isik stated that "by 2023, we aim to do away with any dependency on foreign systems and subsystems."¹³² Turkey has made quick progress toward this goal, as former Prime Minister Binali Yildirim asserted in 2017 that "three-quarters of the weapon systems and equipment used in Operation Olive Branch are domestically produced."¹³³ This figure roughly matches the national procurement aggregate, as approximately 65% of military equipment used by

¹³² Burak Bekdil, *Going it Alone: Turkey Staunch in Effort For Self-Sufficient Defense Capabilities* (Defense News, 2017).

¹³³ Yan She, *Turkey Defense Industry Shows Muscles in Afrin Operation* (Zinhuanet, 2018).

Turkey's armed forces is indigenously manufactured.¹³⁴ This concerted effort indicates that Turkey does not view its military cooperation with Russia and Iran as a long-term solution to hardware complications with the United States, but rather an interim agreement until it can create its own military equipment. Regardless, since Turkey's partnership with Russia and Iran was directly instituted to resolve security threats, H1 is strongly confirmed.

H2: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran Because of Ideological Similarities

Hard Disconfirmation

Despite tensions with NATO and complications over patriot missiles and F-35s, Turkey remains a committed member of the Western alliance. As the second largest army in NATO, Turkey continues to support combined operations across the world alongside its allies and has been a principal contributor to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.

While it has faced criticisms for its deepening military ties with Russia and Iran, in March 2019, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced, "we are not choosing between Russia and any other allies... We don't see our relations with Russia as an alternative to our relations with others."¹³⁵ This sentiment is further supported by a previous declaration by Turkey's U.S. Ambassador Serdar Kilic, who wrote an op-ed in 2018 that stated, "we stand by our NATO allies during this challenging time and proudly

¹³⁴ Hurriyet Editors, *Turkey using 65 percent indigenous defense industry products* (Hurriyet Daily, 2018).

¹³⁵ Daily Sabah Editors, *Turkey not choosing between Russia, other allies, no turning back on S-400 deal: FM Cavusoglu* (Daily Sabah, 2019).

stand on guard at the front lines to face future threats to our collective security.”¹³⁶ These assurances by top AKP leadership indicate that on an ideological level, Turkey still regards its connection to NATO as highly important. Although Turkey has clearly increased its military connection to the East, Turkish leaders understand that Russia and Iran could never offer a military alliance structure that provides comparable benefits to NATO, which indicates a hard disconfirmation of H2.

H3: Turkey Partnered with Russia and Iran because of Threats to Regime Survival

Soft Confirmation

Challenging the United States and exploring the expansion of military ties with Russia and Iran has assisted President Erdoğan’s popularity domestically. While the purchase of the S-400 anti-air defense system is major foreign policy move, the current arrangement only covers the delivery of two S-400 batteries, which will represent an insignificant part of Turkey’s overall defense apparatus.¹³⁷ Turkey’s deal with Russia can be seen from the domestic level as a symbolic move that highlights President Erdoğan’s ability to engage with and confront great powers. According to Edward Stafford, a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer, “the proposed acquisition of the Russian system reminded Erdoğan’s supporters that he was a strong leader, fully independent of the United States.”¹³⁸ Appearing tough against the United States has been critical to President

¹³⁶ Serdar Kilic, *Turkey is and Has Been a Reliable NATO Member* (The Wall Street Journal, 2018).

¹³⁷ The Economist Editors, *Turkey is soon due to take delivery of its Russian missiles* (The Economist, 2019).

¹³⁸ Edward Stafford, *Turkey and United States may have a way out of S-400 and F-35 dispute* (Ahval, 2019).

Erdoğan's legitimacy after U.S. connections to Fethullah Gülen were publicized following the July 2016 coup attempt.

Through these assertive actions, the AKP has been able to reinforce its civilizational narrative that Turkey is worthy of great power status, which assists in diminishing grievances against the regime. Since Turkey's decision to engage in military cooperation with Russia and Iran increased the popularity of the AKP regime against internal threats, a soft confirmation of H3 is warranted.

Part 9: Results and Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to achieve an understanding of why Turkey initiated such an abrupt foreign policy shift in the post-Arab Spring era by establishing a partnership with Russia and Iran. Through breaking cooperation down to economic affairs, the Syrian peace process, and joint military efforts, the specific manifestations of the partnership were evaluated. Three intervening hypotheses were extracted from the theory of neoclassical realism and applied to the partnership to determine to what extent they interacted with the structure of the regional system to produce Turkey's foreign policy. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Summary of Findings

	Economic	Syria	Security
H1: Structural Threats	Soft Confirmation	Hard Confirmation	Hard Confirmation
H2: Ideological Similarities	Soft Confirmation	Hard Disconfirmation	Hard Disconfirmation
H3: Domestic Threats	Hard Confirmation	Hard Confirmation	Soft Confirmation

As the overview illustrates, H1: perceptions of a threatening security environment and H2: domestic threats to regime survival had the greatest influence over Turkey's decision-making, while H3: ideological similarities, was much less robust. These findings suggest that the year 2016 was a critical juncture point that infused external and internal considerations to generate a new direction for Turkey's foreign policy. Following regional blowback from Turkey's failed interventionist strategy during the Arab Spring uprisings and the withdrawal of military support by the United States, President Erdoğan and the AKP leadership viewed the system's structure as highly threatening. Occurring simultaneously, a variety of domestic threats stemming from frustration over Turkey's

economic decline, Erdoğan's authoritarian policies in the wake of the Gezi Park protests, and the AKP's embrace of an Islamic identity combined to endanger the survival of the ruling regime. To overcome these complex threats, Erdoğan and the AKP decided to establish a strategic partnership with Russia and Iran as it was seen as the best course of action in the short-term to both preserve domestic stability and national security.

While ideological similarities facilitated closer economic ties between the three countries, the results of this analysis indicate that the partnership lacks a strong ideological foundation. So far, this deficiency has not ruptured cooperation; however, in the long-term, the partnership is highly susceptible to disintegration due to fundamental disagreements over issues such as the future of Syria and military coordination.

Although Turkey now appears to be more interested in stability in Syria rather than regime change, President Erdoğan's frequent diatribes against al-Assad and his protection of opposition forces in Idlib province are likely to cause friction within the partnership. In addition, while Turkey has increased its military cooperation with Russia and Iran, mistrust and apprehension over relative gains stemming from geographic vulnerabilities will remain present. Such concerns are what made Turkey's alliance with the United States and NATO so strong during the 20th century, as it sought an outside guarantor of security to offset the dangers of being in close proximity to the U.S.S.R. The reality of this contentious geography may further support the theory of neoclassical realism if Turkey adopts a more hostile stance toward Russia and Iran in the future, as the theory presumes that in the long-term, a country's foreign policy will calibrate to structural conditions.

This study finds that within the partnership, Turkey has a much stronger connection to Russia rather than Iran. Utilizing the understanding that Turkey was primarily concerned with material gains, this notion makes sense. Cooperation with Russia offered more tangible domestic and international benefits, while more intricate coordination with Iran was highly precarious due to its status as a pariah state.

Additional evidence that Turkey views its partnership with Russia and Iran as a pragmatic and short-term association is its assertive efforts to resolve the problems that had originally prompted Turkey to establish the partnership in the first place. Turkey has actively sought to decrease its dependence on energy imports by the two countries through securing oil and natural gas resources in the Mediterranean Sea and constructing its own nuclear power plant through assistance from Russia. This will ensure that Turkey can supply its own energy to its population to reduce economic grievances against the AKP regime. In the same way, Turkey is actively building its own indigenous defense industry so that it does not have to rely on military hardware from oscillating outside powers. Through demanding that procurement deals with the United States and Russia contain technology sharing provisions, Turkey is steadily moving toward its goal of full independence.

Policy Implications

From the perspective of the United States, the results of this analysis reveal that solutions are available to resolve the recent breakdown of relations with Turkey. Since the Turkey-Russia-Iran partnership lacks an ideological connection, through assisting in resolving Turkey's external and internal threats, the United States can once again

establish a strong rapport. Turkey has been an indispensable ally since it joined NATO in 1952, and despite its domestic and foreign policy shifts, it remains one of the United States' closest partners in the region. While the United States should not condone Erdoğan's embrace of authoritarianism, it should recognize that Turkey is located in a dangerous geopolitical location and take steps to acknowledge the legitimate fears that the AKP regime has regarding Kurdish separatists and subversive forces associated with Fethullah Gülen.

It is clear that Russia is actively seeking to break Turkey away from its association with the West, so the United States should strive to counter this through greater integration rather than disengagement. As the second largest army in NATO and an active participant in NATO-led missions throughout the world, it would be a true loss if a rupture in the alliance occurred. With Turkey poised to continue forging a more independent foreign policy, it would be prudent for the United States to shift from interacting with the country as a junior partner, and instead seek avenues for more balanced collaboration. Turkey's decision to cooperate with Russia and Iran in the post-Arab spring era is a significant development, but through a concerted effort by the United States, their partnership can remain only a temporary phenomenon in the greater timeline of close U.S.-Turkey ties.

WORKS CITED

- Ahval Editors. (2019). *Turkey, Russia ramp up military cooperation with joint drills in Black Sea*. Ahval. <https://ahvalnews.com/russia-turkey/turkey-russia-ramp-military-cooperation-joint-drills-black-sea>
- Akyuz, Abdullah. (2009). *Political Economy of Turkey: In Search of Stability Amid Domestic and Global Crises*. Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/03_turkey_akyuz.pdf
- Al Jazeera Editors. (2016). *Here's how the coup attempt unfolded*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/turkey-timeline-coup-attempt-unfolded-160716004455515.html>
- Al Jazeera Editors. (2017). *Turkey Sends more troops to Qatar*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/171227051912500.html>
- Al Jazeera Editors. (2019). *Russia, Turkey agree to take steps to stabilize Syria's Idlib*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/russia-turkey-agree-steps-stabalise-syria-idlib-190123184024543.html>
- Al Jazeera Editors. (2019). *Turkey and Russia hold joint patrols in Syria's Idlib*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/turkey-russia-hold-joint-patrols-syria-idlib-190308113441646.html>
- Askerov, Ali. (2017). *Turkey's Zero Problems with Neighbors Policy: Was it Realistic?* Contemporary Review Journal of the Middle East. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2347798917694746>
- Associated Press Editors. (2018). *Turkey's Erdoğan: EU membership remains strategic goal*. Associated Press. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-5544863/Turkeys-Erdogan-EU-membership-remains-strategic-goal.html>
- Austvik, Ole. (2016). *Turkey in the Geopolitics of Natural Gas*. Harvard Kennedy School. https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/mrcbg/files/66_final.pdf
- Ayoob, Mohammed. (2018). *The regional factors bringing Turkey and Iran together*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-regional-factors-bringing-turkey-and-iran-together/>
- Babb, Carla. (2018). *US, Turkey Conducts Second Joint Patrol in Manbij*. VOA. <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-turkey-conduct-second-joint-patrol-manbij/4650428.html>
- BBC Editors. (2017). *Homs Ceasefire Deal Announced*. British Broadcasting Corporation. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40812382>
- Beauchamp, Zack. (2015). *Why Turkey's election results shocked all the experts*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/world/2015/11/2/9659540/turkey-election-november-2015>
- Bekdil, Burak. (2017). *Going it Alone: Turkey Staunch in Efforts for Self-Sufficient Defense Capabilities*. Defense News. <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2017/04/24/going-it-alone-turkey-staunch-in-efforts-for-self-sufficient-defense-capabilities/>
- Bonfield, Craig. (2016). *The Turkish Economy in 2015*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkish-economy-2015-0>
- Bradley, Matt. (2012). *Turkey to Provide Egypt \$2 Billion in Aid*. The Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390444517304577653852418813354>

- Bremmer, Ian. (2015). *These 5 Facts Explain Bashar Assad's Hold in Syria*. TIME. <http://time.com/4039940/these-5-facts-explain-bashar-assads-hold-in-syria/>
- Butler, Daren. (2018). *Turkey revives ghosts of Gezi protests as elections loom*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-gezi/turkey-revives-ghosts-of-gezi-protests-as-elections-loom-idUSKBN1OG1GI>
- Cagaptay, Soner. (2017). *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*. I.B. Tauris & Co.
- Daher, Joseph. (2018). *Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria>
- Daily Sabah Editors. (2017). *Turkey, Iran on same page for military cooperation against PKK*. Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2017/11/09/turkey-iran-on-same-page-for-military-cooperation-against-pkk>
- Daily Sabah Editors. (2019). *Turkey not choosing between Russia, other allies, no turning back on S-400 deal: FM Cavusoglu*. Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2019/04/03/turkey-not-choosing-between-russia-other-allies-no-turning-back-on-s-400-deal-fm-cavusoglu>
- Daily Sabah Editors. (2019). *Turkey's second drillship Yavuz to begin hydrocarbon exploration in Mediterranean region*. The Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2019/03/04/turkeys-second-drillship-yavuz-to-begin-hydrocarbon-exploration-in-mediterranean-region>
- Daly, John. (2018). *The Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant and Deepening Turkish-Russian Relations*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/603-the-akkuyu-nuclear-power-plant-and-deepening-turkish-russian-relations.html>
- Deutsche Welle Editors. (2019). *Erdoğan and Putin seek to deepen their military ties*. Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-and-putin-seek-to-deepen-their-military-ties/a-48257387>
- Dilmac, Turhan. (2018). *Turkey and Russia: From Shared History to Today's Cooperation*. Perceptions Journal. <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/sf-1-6.pdf>
- Dugulin, Riccardo. (2016). *The wider implications of ISIS' Istanbul bombing*. Global Risk Insights. <https://globalriskinsights.com/2016/07/implications-isis-istanbul-bombing/>
- Ekim, Sinan. (2017). *The Turkish constitutional referendum, explained*. The Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/04/13/the-turkish-constitutional-referendum-explained/>
- Esayan, Markar. (2019). *The Astana peace talks' impending triumph in Syria*. The Daily Sabah. <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/02/21/the-astana-peace-talks-impending-triumph-in-syria>
- Farooq, Umar. (2018). *Turkey lifts state of emergency after two-year purge, but will anyone even notice?* The Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-turkey-emergency-lifted-20180718-story.html>

- Fradkin, Hillel. (2013). *Erdoğan's Grand Vision*. Journal of World Affairs. https://www-jstor-org.jp11net.sfsu.edu/stable/pdf/43556162.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fdefault-2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3Afa049a287dab90cfb7afbb2a76e27a70
- Genc, Kaya. (2019). *Why Turkey's Election Results Test Erdoğan's Grip on Power*. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-turkeys-elections-results-test-erdogans-grip-on-power>
- Gerring, John. (2011). *The Case Study: What it is and What it Does*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604456-e-051>
- Gladstone, Rick. (2012). *U.S. Accuses Hezbollah of Aiding Syria's Crackdown*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/11/world/middleeast/us-officials-say-hezbollah-helps-syrias-military.html>
- Gurcan, Metin. (2018). *Deciphering Russia's delivery of Tell Rifaat to Turkey*. Al-Monitor. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/turkey-syria-russia-turkish-army-besiege-tell-rifat.html>
- Haaretz Editors. (2018). *Erdoğan Proclaimed Winner of Turkey's Presidential Election*. Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/turkey-votes-polls-open-in-pivotal-elections-1.6200454>
- Haur, Neil. (2018). *Russia's Mercenary Debacle in Syria*. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2018-02-26/russias-mercenary-debacle-syria>
- Hiltermann, Joost. (2018). *The Syrian Conflict and International Support for Rebel Groups*. The International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/syrian-conflict-and-international-support-rebel-groups>
- Hintz, Lisel. (2016). *Take it outside! National identity contestation in the foreign policy arena*. European Journal of International Relations. <https://journals-sagepub-com.jp11net.sfsu.edu/doi/pdf/10.1177/1354066115588205>
- Hurriyet Editors. (2016). *Turkey builds nearly 9,000 mosques in 10 years*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-builds-nearly-9000-mosques-in-10-years--103950>
- Hurriyet Editors. (2018). *Greek fighter jet comes down in deadly crash in Aegean*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/greek-fighter-jet-comes-down-in-deadly-crash-in-aegean-130189>
- Hurriyet Editors. (2018). *Turkey suspends migrant readmission deal with Greece*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-suspends-refugee-readmission-deal-with-greece-132955>
- Hurriyet Editors. (2018). *Turkey using 65 percent indigenous defense industry products*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-using-65-indigenous-defense-industry-products-erdogan-137117>
- Hurriyet Editors. (2019). *Russia ready to cooperate to sell Turkey Su-57 fighter jets*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-ready-to-cooperate-to-sell-turkey-su-57-fighter-jets-143123>

- Hurriyet Editors. (2019). *Russian S-400 system done deal, says Erdoğan*. Hurriyet Daily. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-and-putin-praise-bilateral-relations-142515>
- Iseri, Emre. (2011). *The Limitations of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Activism in the Caucasian Regional Security Complexity*. Journal of Turkish Studies. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/jpllnet.sfsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=7f721d30-1242-4468-bfe1-e2667626916a%40pdc-v-sessmgr02>
- Issaev, Leonid. (2018). *Why Is Russia helping Turkey in Afrin?* Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/russia-helping-turkey-afrin-180125122718953.html>
- ISW Editors. (2018). *Situation Along the Upper Euphrates River: November 8, 2018*. Institute for the Study of War. <http://iswresearch.blogspot.com>
- Jones, Dorian. (2019). *Turkey, Iran Join Forces Against Kurdish Rebels*. VOA. <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-iran-join-forces-against-kurdish-rebels/4839951.html>
- Kalin, Ibrahim. (2017). *Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values, and Mechanisms*. International Journal. https://www.jstor-org.jpllnet.sfsu.edu/stable/pdf/23265962.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fdefault-2%2Fcontrol
- Kasapoglu, Can. (2017). *Operation Euphrates Shield: Progress and Scope*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/02/operation-euphrates-shield-progress-scope-170201133525121.html>
- Kestler, Jillian. (2016). *Dissecting Turkey's Gulen- Erdoğan relationship*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/analysis-dissecting-turkeys-gulen-erdogan-relationship>
- Kiely, Eugene. (2019). *Pompeo Wrong on Assad Control in Syria*. The Annenberg Public Policy Center. <https://www.factcheck.org/2019/04/pompeo-wrong-on-assad-control-in-syria/>
- Kilic, Serdar. (2018). *Turkey is and Has Been a Reliable NATO Member*. The Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/turkey-is-and-has-been-a-reliable-nato-member-1534698112>
- Kirisci, Kemal. (2014). *Yet Another Election Victory for Erdoğan – What's Next for Turkey?* The Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/yet-another-election-victory-for-erdogan-whats-next-for-turkey/>
- Koc, Cagan. (2019). *Turkey Enters First Recession in a Decade as Elections Loom*. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-10/debt-catches-up-with-turkey-as-recession-ends-boom-and-bust-run>
- Kofman, Michael. (2018). *What Kind of Victory for Russia in Syria?* Army University Press. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2018/Rojansky-Victory-for-Russia/>
- Landler, Mark. (2017). *Trump Takes Credit for Saudi Move Against Qatar*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/world/middleeast/trump-qatar-saudi-arabia.html>
- Letsch, Constanze. (2014). *A year after the protests, Gezi Park nurtures the seeds of a new Turkey*. The Guardian.

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/29/gezi-park-year-after-protests-seeds-new-turkey>
- Lobell, Steven, Ripsman, Norrin, and Taliaferro, Jeffrey. (2009). *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfsu/reader.action?docID=412786>
- Macias, Amanda. (2018). *Turkey begins constructing site for Russian missile system*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/06/turkey-begins-constructing-site-for-russian-missile-system.html>
- Makovsky, Alan. (2019). *Turkey's Refugee Dilemma*. Center for American Progress.
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/03/13/467183/turkeys-refugee-dilemma/>
- Mankoff, Jeffrey. (2016). *Why Russia and Turkey Fight: A History of Antagonism*. Foreign Affairs. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2016-02-24/why-russia-and-turkey-fight>
- Market Watch Editors. (2018). *Turkish lira drops to all-time low after U.S. imposes sanctions*. Wall Street Journal. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/turkish-lira-drops-to-all-time-low-after-us-imposes-sanctions-2018-08-01>
- Mehr News Agency (2018). *Iran-Turkey trade volume expected to reach \$12 billion by March*. Mehr News Agency. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/139586/Iran-Turkey-trade-volume-expected-to-reach-12-billion-by-March>
- Middle East Monitor Editors. (2018). *Turkey, Russia, Iran to replace US dollar with local currency in trade*. Middle East Monitor.
<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180910-turkey-russia-iran-to-replace-us-dollar-with-local-currency-in-trade/>
- Middle East Monitor Editors. (2019). *Erdogan: Will not meet Sisi until inmates are released*. Middle East Monitor. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190224-erdogan-will-not-meet-sisi-until-inmates-are-released/>
- Pamuk, Humeyra. (2013). *Turkey lifts generations-old ban on Islamic head scarf*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-headscarf-ban-idUSBRE99708720131008>
- Peralta, Eyder. (2013). *Egypt, Turkey Expel Each Other's Ambassadors, Testing Ties*. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/11/23/246916247/egypt-turkey-expel-each-others-ambassadors-testing-ties>
- Rathbun, Brian. (2008). *A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of structural Realism*. Journal of Security Studies.
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/jpllnet.sfsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=24ca89d9-9d43-4bb0-be14-3aab095cab13%40sessionmgr4007>
- Rempfer, Kyle. (2018). *Russia's probably not leaving Syria anytime soon. Here's why*. The Military Times.
<https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2018/07/27/russias-probably-not-leaving-syria-anytime-soon-heres-why/>
- Reuters Editors. (2012). *Egypt and Turkey hold joint naval exercise*. Reuters.
<https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFBRE8970V120121008>
- Reuters Editors. (2019). *Turkish, Russian forces carry out patrols in Kurdish-controlled Syrian region*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria->

- [turkey-russia/turkish-russian-forces-carry-out-patrols-in-kurdish-controlled-syrian-region-turkish-ministry-idUSKCN1R71M4](#)
- Riedel, Bruce. (2013). *Saudi Arabia Cheers the Coup in Egypt*. Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/saudi-arabia-cheers-the-coup-in-egypt/>
- Rose, Gideon. (1998). *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*. Journal of World Politics Issue 51. [https://www.jstor-org.jpllnet.sfsu.edu/stable/pdf/25054068.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Abdf170b41e07db162e7a3c23e8019750](https://www.jstor.org/jpllnet.sfsu.edu/stable/pdf/25054068.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Abdf170b41e07db162e7a3c23e8019750)
- Sahin, Tuncay. (2017). *Is Turkey becoming an energy hub?* TRT World. <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/is-turkey-becoming-an-energy-hub--11912>
- Shay, Shaul. (2018). *Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus Conclude Joint Naval Exercise*. Israel Defense. <https://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/36567>
- She, Yan. (2018). *Turkey's Defense Industry Shows Muscles in Arin Operation*. Zinhuanet. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-02/03/c_136945402.htm
- Soylu, Ragip. (2019). *Turkey conducts largest ever navy drill as tensions rise in Mediterranean*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-conducts-largest-ever-navy-drill-tensions-rise-mediterranean>
- Stack, Liam. (2011). *In Slap at Syria, Turkey Shelters Anti-Assad Fighters*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/28/world/europe/turkey-is-sheltering-antigovernment-syrian-militia.html>
- Stafford, Edward. (2019). *Turkey and United States may have a way out of S-400 and F-35 dispute*. Ahval. <https://ahvalnews.com/us-turkey/turkey-and-united-states-may-have-way-out-s-400-and-f-35-dispute>
- Sofuoglu, Murat. (2018). *Will pro-Iranian militias leave Syria after the American pull-out?* TRT World. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/will-pro-iranian-militias-leave-syria-after-the-american-pull-out-22682>
- Solaker, Gulsen. (2018). *Turkey says it will not abide by renewed sanctions on Iran*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-sanctions-turkey/turkey-says-it-will-not-abide-by-renewed-sanctions-on-iran-idUSKCN1NB0VI>
- Sonmez, Goktug. (2017). *A Scorecard for Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield*. The Jamestown Foundation. <https://jamestown.org/program/scorecard-turkeys-operation-euphrates-shield/>
- Stone, Mike. (2019). *U.S. halts F-35 equipment to Turkey, protests its plans to buy from Russia*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-turkey-f35-exclusive/u-s-halts-f-35-equipment-to-turkey-protests-its-plans-to-buy-from-russia-idUSKCN1RD316>
- Taub, Ben. (2015). *The ISIS Oil Trade, From the Ground Up*. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-isis-oil-trade-from-the-ground-up>
- Tehran Times Editors. (2018). *Iran, Turkey pledge to promote economic ties to reach \$30 billion trade target*. Tehran Times. <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/middleeast/top-stories/iran-turkey-pledge-to-promote-economic-ties-to-reach-dollar30bn-trade-target/ar-BBRglZC>
- Telesur Editors. (2015). *Russia Allegedly Strikes Turkish Convoy on Syrian Border*. Telesur. <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Russia-Allegedly-Strikes-Turkish-Convoy-on-Syrian-Border-20151125-0048.html>

- The Economist Editors. (2019). *Turkey is soon due to take delivery of its Russian missiles*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/03/14/turkey-is-soon-due-to-take-delivery-of-its-russian-missiles>
- Toksabay, Ece. (2018). *Turkey's Erdoğan welcomes Western attack on Syria, says operation a message to Assad*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey/turkeys-erdogan-welcomes-western-attack-on-syria-says-operation-a-message-to-assad-idUSKBN1HLOW9>
- Tsafos, Nikos. (2018). *The TurkStream Opportunity*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkstream-opportunity>
- Ulgen, Sinan. (2017). *TurkStream: Impact on Turkey's Economy and Energy Security*. Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies. <http://edam.org.tr/en/turkstream-impact-on-turkeys-economy-and-energy-security/>
- Uras, Umut. (2015). *Ruling party loses majority in Turkey elections*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/ak-party-leads-turkish-parliamentary-polls-150607161827232.html>
- Van Dam, Sophie. (2017). *Pipeline Blues: Explaining the German Support of Nord Stream II*. Radboud University Nijmegen. https://theses.uibn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/123456789/4623/Dam_van%2C_Sophie_1.pdf?sequence=1
- Waldman, Paul. (2018). *Trump looks the other way on Khashoggi's murder*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2018/11/20/in-bizarre-statement-trump-looks-the-other-way-on-khashoggis-murder-time-for-some-oversight/?utm_term=.345429d6a17a
- Wilks, Andrew. (2019). *Syria safe zone: A long-term problem rather than a solution*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/syria-safe-zone-long-term-problem-solution-190130081549394.html>
- Wilks, Andrew. (2019). *Turkey faces hike in oil prices as US thwarts Iran oil sales*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/devastating-effect-turkey-thwarts-iran-oil-sales-190424201131496.html>
- Willis, Ben. (2014). *The Advantages and Limitations of Single Case Study Analysis*. Leeds University. <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantages-and-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/>
- Wintour, Patrick. (2017). *Sponsors of Syria talks in Astana strike deal to protect fragile ceasefire*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/24/syria-talks-astana-russia-turkey-iran-ceasefire>
- Wintour, Patrick. (2018). *UN special envoy on Syria warns against bombing rebel enclave*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/04/un-special-envoy-on-syria-warns-against-bombing-rebel-enclave-idlib?utm_source=NEWS&utm_medium=email&utm_content=2+sec+3+link&utm_campaign=HQ_EN_therefugeebrief_external_20180905
- Woody, Christopher. (2017). *Turkey says it has bought Russia's most sophisticated missile-defense system*. Business Insider. <http://www.businessinsider.com/turkey-says-it-has-bought-russias-s-400-missile-defense-system-2017-9>
- Workman, Daniel. (2019). *Turkey's Top Trading Partners 2018*. World's Top Exports. <http://www.worldstopexports.com/turkeys-top-import-partners/>

- World Bank Data. (2019). *Turkey's GDP in Billions (current US\$) 1980-2017*. World Bank.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2017&locations=TR&start=1980>
- Yavuz, M. (2016). *The Gülen Movement vs. The State*. Journal of Middle East Policy.
https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/50698915/Yavuz_and_Koc-1.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1555802918&Signature=imY6oDxrU4hpac7r7TN40V2bm60%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DThe_Turkish_Coup_Attempt_The_Gulen_Movem.pdf
- Yesilyurt, Nuri. (2017). *Explaining Miscalculations and Maladaptation in Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Middle East during the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Perspective*. Ankara University.
<http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/312061>