

Bilal Bahadır KARACA

Prague University of Economics and Business
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2065-3626>

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Berk KÖKSAL

independent researcher
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9092-6533>

THE ANALYSIS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN SYRIA: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The activities of Turkish foreign policy have been indicative of its geopolitical weight more profoundly after the Syrian Civil War has moved from being a domestic issue towards a conflict arena of international politics. As its foreign policy started to encompass and engage larger group of actors through various mediation grounds (not only peace negotiations e.g. Astana and Geneva but also at the intergovernmental level), Turkish domestic conditions have become more prominent and fluctuant (Murinson, 2012: 23–25). Although those conditions uphold a larger role in Turkish foreign policies, relevant analyses often lack theoretical frameworks by which they can be systematically conducted. This is surely critical for Syrian peace negotiations as well as they are for broader international politics (Aydın and Dizdaroğlu, 2018: 89–103).

In this regard, we attempt to interpret Turkish foreign policies in the Syrian Civil War from a structured neoclassical realist perspective which include domestic factors in the state-level analysis. Our research begins with asking the question of “how do Turkish external and internal dynamics explain its foreign policy in Syria?”. In order to do so, the following research is particularly aimed at utilizing those domestic factors which are clarified by neoclassical realism on the following section. The theoretical framework from realism to its sub-branch neoclassical realism is explained by their relevant features and inadequacies. Our theoretical methods are subsequent to these sections where independent, intervening and dependent variables are respectively accounted for within the period of 2011–2020.

By taking the case of Syrian conflict from the onset in 2011 until the Operation Spring Shield in late March 2020, we aim to explain dynamics of the Turkish foreign policy. In this regard, we firstly mention key aspects and initial stages of the civil war as external factors and then relevant civil war conditions such as parties, proxies and their positioning and international dynamics which have been influential on the course of events are clarified. The section continues with the interpretation of Turkish foreign policy with regard to her domestic factors. By taking these steps, we aim to demonstrate the impact of the intervening variables (i.e., domestic factors) which are

drawn by neoclassical realism on the next chapter. Our analysis is conducted by the interpretation of Turkish foreign policies using the following four factors: leader image, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions. We assert that difference in Turkish positioning after her involvement in the Syrian Civil War arose from the impact of these four domestic factors – where each has different salience on Turkish foreign policies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realist approaches to international relations are focused on taking states as primary actors who seek to enhance their security within the anarchical international system. Neither the international intuitions nor regimes carry means to overcome negative consequences of anarchy which, as a result, make states to prioritize their own national security above all factors (Baldwin, 1993: 3–28). In neorealism, systemic factors are emphasized more than the actors. As a part of the neo (systemic) realism, defensive realists work on the assumption that states prioritize maintaining their own status quo due to insecurity arising from the pessimistic perspective on cooperation. This leads scholars such as Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt to attribute importance to balance of power/threats among states where capabilities play the crucial role for deciding alliance tendencies (Walt, 1993: 3–43). Distribution of those capabilities determines the relative strength of parties that are competing in a rational zero-sum framework.

As the general assumption of realists relies on the role of states in the international system and their material power capabilities, foreign policy analysis of states is the reflection of the top-down concept, which means that the system level plays a primary role. On the other hand, some states may change their foreign policy strategy in a specific period. The general assumption of realists relying on merely external drivers is insufficient to analyse why some states have different balancing strategies even though they face similar external dynamics.

Neoclassical realism accepts that the international system and material power capabilities of states are the initial factors for foreign policy behaviours. In this regard, this theoretical approach takes a position within the realist tradition. On the other hand, the impact of the international system is indirect and complex as the pressures arising from it are translated by the domestic dynamics at the state level. Foreign policies of states come up as an outcome of the interaction between external and internal dynamics. It is the reason why this approach is denominated as neoclassical (Rose, 1998: 146–147).

In the perspective of neoclassical realists, decision-makers do not have unconstrained authority for foreign policy choices. Perceptions of decision-makers on material power capabilities of states are not the sole determinant for their foreign policies; domestic dynamics are also effective on the foreign policy motivation of states (Lobell, 2009: 44–45). Different responses of states under similar systematic pressures can be explained by their domestic factor-motivated foreign policies rather than the systematic factors (Schweller, 2004: 159–201). Although foreign policy actions of state leaders can be found on the system level, they also try to influence the internal level with these foreign policy actions. Internal pressures which are created by the interest

groups, society and domestic political oppositions are essential for the political survival of the state leaders apart from the systematic pressures. The domestic pressure and possible power dissipation constitute a threat for the state leaders, and this domestic threat perception also drives foreign policy strategies of states (Lobell, 2009: 47–52).

In the light of the above-mentioned aspects, fundamentally, the neoclassical realist approach analyses foreign policy strategies of states by considering two-level structure (external and domestic). According to the theoretical and methodological perspectives of neoclassical realism, the international system (i.e., the external dynamics) are accepted as the independent variable and it plays the main and the most important role for foreign policies of states. The reason is that the pressure coming from the international level triggers the foreign policy reaction of states. In this direction, the comprehensive analysis of Turkish foreign policy towards Syria (which is based on our independent variable) needs to address the power relations in the international system, reflections of these power relations on the Syrian Civil War, and the security threats aiming Turkey as an outcome of this civil war.

The outcomes of the foreign policy are accepted as the dependent variable but determining the domestic factors stands out for the success of analysis. Therefore, these factors are divided into four main categories in neoclassical realism. These are leader images, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions. The factor of leader images reflects beliefs and character of decision-makers which are effective in perceptions of decision-makers about their foreign policies. Strategic culture focuses on the political ideologies, and the military's bureaucratic role in a country. State-society relations indicate the political and social cohesion between the government and society. The public support or public opposition to the foreign policy of a government can be seen in this regard. Domestic institutions focus on policy formation in a state. It reflects the role of the domestic actors who are essential to shaping state policies (Ripsman et al., 2016: 58–80).

In this study, the qualitative analysis of the Turkish foreign policy on Syria will utilize those four domestic factors. As for the leader images, the beliefs and character of Davutoğlu and Erdoğan, who are the main decision-makers of the Turkish foreign policy, will be analysed. For the strategic culture, Turkish strategic culture in the context of Kemalist and Islamist ideologies will be evaluated. State-society relations will be described by considering the Turkish public opinion on Syrian policies of Turkey. Lastly, the political positions of major political parties in the Turkish parliament and their effects on Syrian policies will be addressed and the political role of the Turkish Army will be analysed under the title of domestic institutions.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN SYRIA

1. The Civil War

The initial period of Syrian Civil War is primarily represented with dynamic field conditions alongside static peace tracks that couldn't impact the increasing ripeness

of the conflict (Lundgren, 2016: 273–288).¹ Various opposition parties emerged as a result of the “the Arab Spring” turmoil. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) was organized as an overarching platform in a decentralized structure for those who not only stood against the Ba’ath rule by taking up arms but also on the political grounds. Its control of vast territories across Syria created incentives for competing state actors to patronize different opposition factions to further their own regional policies (Dobbins, Gordon and Martini, 2017: 1). Furthermore, the international community led by western actors acknowledged this institutional body as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people to overcome their legitimacy problem due to the veto power of Russia and China on United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

After the initial success of the opposition both on the field and international politics, the rapid metastasis of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) caused the first stalemate in 2014, and the Russian intervention on September 2015 started to reverse the dynamics on behalf of the Assad regime. As the conditions substantially changed, Iranian proxy groups brought into the country under the influence of extremist Shiite ideology were successful to halt the advance of the Syrian opposition by providing the manpower that was needed for filling the gaps (Smyth, 2015).² Russian aviation, weaponry and technical support to Syrian Arab Army (SAA) along with political backing in international arena combined with Iran-backed militia proved to be highly effective in direct combat against their foes and representation of diplomatically isolated Assad regime (Lavrov, 2018: 52–55). As the conflict reached its peak, tendencies to enter localized dialogues emerged in order to create room for maneuvers for both parties. However, comprehensive negotiating tables were only formed in December 2016 after Turkish military actions started. As the typology of civil war was changed by official involvement of Russia, Turkish intentions followed a similar pattern in directly engaging in combat against *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD) & Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG)* and ISIS. The first of the ground operations was initiated on August 24, 2016 on the western bank of Euphrates River against ISIS as well as to prevent YPG in Manbij pocket linking up with their militia in Afrin district so that the YPG corridor from Iraqi border to Turkish Hatay province cannot be established (Dobbins, Gordon and Martini, 2017: 7). Following the operation, Turkish authorities started to restructure the opposition under a new name, Syrian National Army (SNA), which attempted to legitimize the armed factions in the upcoming peace negotiations by allowing them to be represented as a monoblock that is officially guaranteed by Turkey. On January 20, 2018, these groups supported by the Turkish army started the operation Olive Branch which lasted less than 2 months to capture Afrin pocket west of Euphrates Shield territory. The SNA factions handed down the town centers to a newly formed police force and local councils that are unaffiliated with any other group to prevent escalation among factions within the populated areas (al-Hilu, 2021: 9–12).

The frontline became static after the operation Olive Branch ended and Turkey started to exaggerate pressures both to Russia and the US to cut off ties with PYD/

¹ Annan, Brahimi and De Mistura as three consecutive UN Envoys to Syria in this period who failed to prevent the conflict to reach violent phases.

² Lebanese Hezbollah, Afghan *Fatemiyoun Brigade*, Iraqi *Harakat al-Nujaba* and *Badr Brigades*, Iranian *IRGC* and its *Quds Forces*.

YPG. As the talks were inconclusive, Turkish army supported by SNA consisting of three corps started the Operation Peace Spring on the east of Euphrates River, between towns Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. After the capture of territory with a length of 120 km and width of 30 km, similar administrative structure was established based on local councils and police force while the SNA factions are largely located on countryside (al-Hilu, 2021: 4–5). Separate agreements reached by Russia and the US secure this area on negotiations table as Russian military police conduct patrols on SNA-YPG frontline while Trump's policies enabled this operation on the territory that is under joint YPG-US control (Baresh, 2019: 7–9). More recently, Operation Spring Shield against SAA troops that attempted to overrun Idlib pocket allowed Turkey to establish itself in this area after causing huge losses to SAA and Iran-backed militia. Also, through the Russian-Turkish ceasefire agreement, Turkish presence is legitimized with tens of newly established military bases.

2. Effects of the Civil War on Turkish Foreign Policy

From the point of Turkish foreign policy under Davutoğlu from August 2014 to May 2016 aimed to take advantage of the instability caused by the civil war factions in order to deepen its strategic interests in Syria. Establishing ties with these groups by use of shared affinities in demographics and politics was how initially Turkish participation took place without actual presence of troops on the field. Furthermore, its state preferences were fixed on western counterparts' interests who were heavily advocating for a regime change. The Ba'athist state structure not only created obstacles against liberalization of Syrian economy but also prevented political engagement of the West with pro-Russian Syrian Arab Republic (Bar, 2006: 370–374). Therefore, Turkish efforts to overthrow the Ba'ath regime required political alignment and pragmatism with the West by use of Syrian opposition factions to vitiate Assad's rule over Syria. In this regard, we see Turkey engaging in activities such as hosting the political bodies of Syrian opposition and advocating for their legitimacy in international arena to legitimize its own actions while, at the same time, allowing anti-ISIS coalition to use İncirlik Base as a main logistics point and allowing Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga cross through Turkey to defend the border town Ayn al-Arab from ISIS attacks in 2014.

In the light of these events, four external factors are driven that correspond to four domestic factors. The first one is the new leadership type that has come into prominence after 2015. Migration from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to Europe drove societies and consequently their elected leaders to adopt more protectionist and nationalist images. This is the case not only for Europe but also for the US as the example of successful "Build the Wall" campaign from Republicans indicates. Right wing populism gained seats all over the world as conservatives in the UK firstly with Theresa May and then with Boris Johnson, Hindu nationalists in India with Narendra Modi, EU countries such as Poland, Hungary, Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Greece; and the countries that were already being ruled by conservatives such as Turkey and Russia adopted a less cooperative and more challenging measures. Therefore, its implications for Turkish domestic policy-making cannot be overlooked.

Secondly, strategic cultures of those states which Turkish policies compete within Syrian arena create complexity in determining its policies. Specifically speaking, EU's strong stance on influential autonomy directly challenges Turkish perspective of "unitary Syria" as federalist legacy entails so. The American vision of MENA which is heavily shaped by energy politics and Israeli security concerns allows Turkey to take advantage of the former and affects adversely for the latter since Turkey is a major transition bridge between Russia, Iran and Gulf energy resources while Palestinian conflict hinders any close cooperation with Israel from a moral politics perspective. Being direct adversaries, on the other hand, doesn't prevent Russia and Turkey to continue communicating while targeting each other's assets and interests in the conflict field. Russian "near-abroad" policy is not only a foreign policy decision but more of a strategic perspective that clashes with Turkish view on post-Ottoman areas. However, including Iran in this dialogue platform whose primary attitude has been utilizing Shia minorities in the region hinders any further compromise apart from "agreeing to dialogue."

As for the state-society relations, external factors such as migration and transborder crises played a substantial role. However, their long-term effects surpass what was acutely emerged in the initial phases of the conflict. Both these events put a heavy burden on the Turkish economy since transborder economic activities with Iraq and Syria dropped significantly and migration in itself required billions of dollars to be sustained throughout the years. As a result, the relationship between the Turkish state and its public is marginalized. Increased nationalism we witnessed across the world gained its seat in Turkey as Erdoğan government aligned itself with nationalist parties and adopted a similar political discourse while the opposition from different ideologies started to gather around with a single agenda of voting him of his post.

At last, domestic institutions of Turkey (mainly the national assembly and army) were affected less by from external events but contrarily by secondary effects of domestic controversies. This is to say that Gülenist infiltration into state in every regard including politics, judiciary and military which peaked during 2016 had more impact on Turkish state-society relations than any external event occurred in this period. Moreover, as the lack of a comprehensive resistance against this infiltration became obvious, that very connection between the state and public is harmed intensively. Exploiting this damaged bond, the group seized the opportunity for a coup d'état. Coincidentally, most of the Turkish-Syrian border is captured by YPG which led to a major reaction right after the failed coup in summer 2016. Therefore, the Turkish military involvement into Syria has to be taken together with this domestic turbulence.

DOMESTIC FACTORS IN TURKEY

1. Leader Images

Leader images consist of master beliefs (philosophical belief on world politics, perceptions about enemies and power) and characters of the decision-makers who are playing a critical role in making state foreign policies. A change in master belief of

leaders is not easy; therefore, it is one of the essential elements for the foreign policy-making of a state. But, on the other hand, the character of leaders also has a determining role in their reactions towards external stimuli, which partakes in international politics (Ripsman et al., 2016: 63–64). In this direction, the analysis of Turkish foreign policy on Syria after 2011 has to consider the master beliefs and characters of two influential political figures of Turkey: Ahmet Davutoğlu and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Davutoğlu held the office as a chief foreign policy adviser of Erdoğan, minister of foreign affairs, and prime minister of Turkey. During his period in office, he structured the Turkish foreign policy according to the strategic depth doctrine that was theorized by himself. In this sense, strategic depth reflects the philosophical belief and foreign policy strategy of Davutoğlu (i.e., his master belief).

Strategic depth aimed to bring a new vision to Turkey's foreign policy, contrary to the old Turkish foreign policy which was status-quo oriented. According to the doctrine, Turkey has to realize its historical (as a part of Ottoman legacy) and geographical depth (geopolitical influence as a part of its historical depth) (Murinson, 2006: 951–952). Turkey's foreign policy mindset which relies on its territorial borders disappears with this doctrine while engaging with its neighbours by remembering past cultural and religious ties as a legacy of the Ottoman Empire (Aras, 2009: 129). Therefore, Turkey developed economy and security policies regarding its neighbours and pursued multi-dimensional foreign policy. "Zero problems with neighbours" policy echoed Turkey's effort to enhance its sphere of influence in the region. On the other hand, the master belief of Davutoğlu points out a crucial obstacle for Turkey's pivotal role. From his perspective, states founded upon Arab nationalism in the Middle East are controlled by the Western powers – giving an excellent manoeuvre space to those Western states. For this reason, rise of Islamic movements in the region and elimination of leaders such as Assad, who deepen the disintegration in the Muslim community, must be supported by Turkey. In this way, Turkey can apply its grand strategy independently to become a regional power (Davutoğlu, 1996).

The civil uprising in Syria against the Assad regime and the opposition of West to Assad was a political opportunity for Turkey to raise the Islamic identity in Syria and the success of the Turkish grand strategy in the region. In light of the master beliefs of Davutoğlu and Erdoğan, Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict, along with its Western allies, can be evaluated as a pragmatic approach that relies on the Turkish grand strategy about the future of the Middle East. On the other hand, the appearance of new actors and negative developments in Syria created external pressures for Turkey.

At this point, the personality of Erdoğan comes to the forefront. Although his master belief overlaps with Davutoğlu's strategic depth doctrine, Erdoğan's self-confidence and capability to take risks are higher as compared to Davutoğlu's. In this comparison, he is assertive and unpredictable in foreign policy-making (Kesgin, 2020: 15). He can make substantial changes in his policies if he realizes foreign policy outcomes can harm his political power and the national interest of Turkey. Therefore, he has the flexibility in his political moves to achieve (Derman and Oba, 2016: 58). Besides the external factors, Erdoğan's capability to take risks and his flexibility to make tectonic changes in foreign policy has led to certain Turkish Syrian policy changes in 2016, especially after the failed military coup attempt.

2. Strategic Culture

In broad terms, a state's strategic culture involves decision-makers and society's beliefs, worldviews, and expectations. In other words, strategic culture reflects collective consciousness, which shapes states' grand strategies in the international arena. The strategic culture can be reconstructed over time by the impact of historical events or the conscious actions of governments (Ripsman et al., 2016: 66–68). Although the strategic culture of Turkey transformed after the fall of the Ottoman Empire by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's philosophy, which is called Kemalism, the reconstruction of Turkish strategic culture comes to the forefront again with the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) government. In this context, Turkey's foreign policy, including its involvement in the Syrian conflict, responds to external stimuli in line with this reconstructed strategic culture.

The main elements of Turkey's strategic culture, which Kemalism constructs, are the creation of a new national identity, which relies on "Turkishness," creating the homeland perception that is bound to territorial borders and the foundation of a nation-state with an idea of Westernization. In this direction, Turkey's approach to the Middle East was not out of these boundaries. By the end of the Cold War, even though there is a tendency to change on Turkish strategic culture, which does not rely on traditional Kemalism under Turgut Özal's (8th President of Turkey) administration, significant changes have taken place under the AKP governance (Danforth, 2008: 88–89). Islamic values have shaped the national identity; the homeland perception has been reconstructed with Ottoman legacy, and Westernization has given its place to Islamization.

Kemalism has shaped the national identity, i.e. "Turkishness," in the line of a shared history, shared cultural legacy, and common expectations. Islam has an instrumental role in this cultural legacy. On the other hand, the national identity, which was reshaped during the AKP period, puts Islamic values at the core of the national identity, which diverges from the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that was developed in the 1970s by Turkish nationalists. This synthesis points out that Islam is the basis of being a Turk, whereas this basis cannot be strengthened without the positive value of Turkishness (Şen, 2010: 61). The national identity during AKP period presents Islam as a core and unifying factor for all ethnic identities living within the boundaries of Turkey without discrimination. In other words, the overarching identity has been transformed from Turkishness to Islam. In this regard, the homeland and history concepts have been reconstructed with this Islamic identity. That enables the unification of all Islamic communities within the national borders of Turkey and the region. Therefore, in the reshaped strategic culture under the AKP governance, the homeland concept is not constrained with the territorial borders of Turkey. The historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire determines the homeland concept by considering the Muslim communities and the region that they live (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, 2015: 310–313).

Although Turkey's new strategic culture was reconstructed with Islamic values, this new strategic culture's progress, in particular, has accelerated since 2010. When AKP came to power in the first years, it is seen that its political language emphasized pluralistic democracy, secularism, and embracing all segments of the society without considering Islamic religious values (Doğanay, 2007: 70–71). AKP accepted the glob-

al power relations, and it did not deny the political achievements of previous Turkish governments with the West. Especially in 2005, AKP supported the harmonization efforts with the European Union in political, cultural, and economic terms. However, the systematic disagreements and the prolongation of this harmonization process led AKP to a more conservative understanding and distance itself from the West (Özer, 2019: 56). Also, as AKP consolidated its power in the domestic political arena and won the struggle with Kemalist values (with the support of the public), the implementation of the strategic culture that was reconstructed on Islamic values was reflected in foreign policy (Nebati, 2014: 199). Turkey's Syria policy cannot be separated from the new Turkish strategic culture context.

3. State-Society Relations

The cohesion between a state's government making foreign policy decisions and its public is vital for prosperous foreign policies. Yet, lack of public support puts the government into a weak governmental position; and Schweller argues that weak governments have limited foreign policy choices as they cannot be sufficient to assess the external dynamics correctly. In this regard, they fail to control and allocate national resources for foreign policymaking toward their aspirations (Schweller, 2004: 174). Therefore, to avoid becoming a weak government, the government in power can change its foreign policy choices by considering public support.

The public survey, which was held by Ankara University in 2010 (before Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict), demonstrated that 61.33 percent of the Turkish public supported the AKP's foreign policy (Çağrı et al., 2010: 22). In other words, even though AKP received 46.58 percent of the votes in the 2011 general elections, public support was higher to its foreign policy strategies. However, after the failure of Turkish foreign policy in Syria between 2011–2016, the public support for AKP has declined more than by half. The ratio of people finding the AKP foreign policy successful was 25.1 percent in 2013 and 23.8 percent in 2015 (Kadir Has Üniversitesi, 2019). It meant that the Turkish public was dissatisfied with the Turkish foreign policy in this period. In this period, the reasons why the Turkish people were uncomfortable with the Turkish foreign policy in Syria can be explained mainly as the uncontrolled influx of migration to Turkey from Syria and the economic and security problems caused by this.

After starting the civil war in Syria, Syrian refugees were scattered in most neighbouring countries, and Turkey ranked first by accepting nearly 3.5 million refugees (UNHCR, 2021). Such a large number of refugees have entered the country has put the country in a difficult situation in economic terms. According to the data of 2015, Turkey has spent \$ 5.6 billion on refugees (Altundeğer & Yılmaz, 2016: 296). Even in his statement in 2019, Erdogan claimed that the government of Turkey had spent \$ 40 billion for Syrian refugees (BirGün, 2019). Syrian refugees work illegally without a work permit for low wages, which has led to unemployed Turkish citizens working legally. According to statistics, employers could employ ten Syrian refugees with less salary than six Turkish employees; in 2016, the unemployment rate in Turkey rose to

11.3 percent (Kuyumcu and Kösematoğlu, 2017: 81–82). Also, the arrival of many refugees in the country caused an increase in housing prices. Housing rents increased by 5.5 percent on a country basis. However, it is remarkable that house rents in affluent and safe neighbourhoods increased by 11 percent. It shows that, with the arrival of Syrian refugees, Turkish citizens moved to safe neighbourhoods with security concerns (Tumen, 2016: 459). The terrorist attacks in Turkey between 2015–2016 affected tourism negatively and became another factor that blew the economy.

Because the Turkish people's trust in the AKP has waned, a change in foreign policy in Syria was an irresistible necessity for the AKP to strengthen its public support in domestic politics. In this context, to meet the Turkish public's demand, the AKP started to follow an active foreign policy after 2016, which includes the fight against terrorist organizations in Northern Syria (using the Turkish Army) and aiming at the return of Syrian refugees their lands.

Public surveys after 2016 demonstrated that the changes have worked out. Turkish public's support of AKP's foreign policy increased again. Adil Gür (founder of A&G research company) claims that the vast majority of the Turkish public supports Turkey's military operations in the Syrian territory (Sputniknews, 2018). Overlapping with Gür's claim, Kadir Has University's research displays that the public support for AKP's foreign policy increased to 41.7 percent in 2018 (Kadir Has Üniversitesi, 2019) after the Turkish military intervention in Syria. In this context, the change of Turkish foreign policy in Syria not only responded to the external dynamics but also assisted the AKP in strengthening its public support to avoid becoming a weak government.

4. Domestic Institutions: Grand National Assembly of Turkey and Turkish Army

The institutions in democratic states shape foreign and security policies. National parliaments and political parties' positions directly affect grand foreign policy strategies. By endorsing this perspective, Schweller states that consensus or disagreement among elites determine a state's response to external dynamics. However, he adds that if elites' perception has a serious divergence, foreign policies tend to follow status quo; since political moves by which governments propose to change the status quo can be vetoed by opponents during the decision-making process (Schweller, 2004: 170–172). The political parties in the Turkish Parliament are divided into two sides in terms of their positions on Turkey's foreign policy towards Syria.

As the main opposition party, CHP's (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) perception of Turkish foreign policy and Syria is completely contrary to the government. Its foreign policy perception focuses on preserving the status quo. From CHP's perspective, the only solution to the Syrian conflict is the territorial integrity of Syria under Assad's administration (CHP, 2019). In this regard, İYİ Party's (İyi Parti), which was founded by former members of MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi), perception also overlaps with CHP in terms of preserving the status quo in Turkish foreign policy. Similarly, HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi) stands against Turkey's policy in Syria. In contrast to CHP and İYİ Party, HDP does not pay attention to the territorial integrity of Syria or

the continuation of the Assad regime. It supports the redesign of Syria by considering the achievements of PYD/YPG and rejects any political role of Turkey at the redesign of Syria (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2018). As a result, despite not having the same foreign policy perceptions, CHP, İYİ Party, and HDP constitute the opposition side.

On the other hand, MHP's foreign policy approach towards Syria shows similarities with AKP. They accept Assad as the primarily responsible persona for the instability in Syria. Also, according to MHP, new actors came off due to the power vacuum in Syria must be eliminated by Turkey if they pose a threat to state interests (Bayezit, 2016: 100). AKP and MHP constitute the other side in the Turkish Parliament regarding Turkish foreign policy. Although there is a serious divergence in foreign policy perceptions, AKP was able to apply its foreign policy strategy in Syria between 2011 and 2016— which was nonaligned with the status quo. That indicates a contradiction with Schweller's claim that was mentioned above. However, Ripsman argues that strong governments have a degree of political autonomy, and they can pursue their foreign policy strategies even though they face strong opposition (Ripsman et al., 2016: 78).

AKP has preserved its strong government position by having the absolute majority in the Parliament since 2002. In this regard, even though AKP has faced strong opposition, it has easily overcome it. On the other hand, in the general election on June 7, 2015, it lost the absolute majority in the Parliament for the first time (*7 Haziran*, 2015). However, this did not lead to changes in Turkey's Syria policy in the direction of opposition. Political support of MHP to the AKP government after June 7 and the decreasing political influence of the Parliament after the change of the political system in 2017 due to the referendum (transition from the parliamentary system to the presidential system) have strengthened the strong government position of AKP again. However, AKP's political dependence on MHP increased after 2015. Therefore, change in Turkish foreign policy and their reaction to external dynamics in Syria have been shaped by the perceptions of AKP and MHP. The foreign policy of Turkey has taken on a more nationalist tone. Even though MHP plays an influential role in the Syrian Policy of Turkey after 2016, the effects of the other political parties in the Turkish Parliament on Turkish foreign policy are close to zero.

Apart from the Parliament, the Turkish Military also has an influential role in constructing and implementing the strategic culture in Turkey. Turkish Military has engaged with politics since the republic's foundation and has intervened in Turkish politics more than once by ignoring its position under the elected governments with military coups (Kadercan & Kadercan, 2016: 86). In this regard, the new strategic culture and foreign policy's entrenchment depends on overcoming this military domination. The year 2016 was significant in terms of overcoming that. Following the failed coup attempt of some members of the Turkish Armed Forces (officers affiliated to the Gülen Movement, according to the official statements of the Turkish State), Turkish Army was placed under the authority of the elected government. Many soldiers affiliated with the Gülen Movement in the Turkish Army were purged (Sözcü, 2016), and the Army was revised. Thus, the AKP government gained full authority over the Army. As a result, the obstacle to the active use of the Turkish Army in the Syrian field was removed after 2016.

In our analysis, we focused on Turkish foreign policy in Syrian Civil War from a neoclassical realist perspective. The first part is dedicated to external dynamics and assessed the conditions in which Turkey has taken part, their relevant effects on its actions and how its foreign policy is shaped as a result of these dynamics. During the period of Davutoğlu's prime ministry, we witness a collaborative Turkish foreign policy with western actors – which stands as an extension of his strategic depth doctrine. In his period, Turkish actions in Syria were highly pragmatic against the Ba'ath administration and short-dated not because they didn't encompass a broad strategy but they were unsuccessful to finalize their aims. Four Turkish ground operations since August 2016 resulted not from those collaborative policies but from independent policies after his resignation which prioritize the integrity of Syrian state instead of overthrowing Assad from his rule. In this regard, taking actions against SAA is not a policy priority as we see Turkey constantly showing reconciliation tendencies with Russia who represents Assad. Even though those actions are cooperative, parties also strive for exerting their influence on the territories they control. Bi/trilateral agreements are crucial in this regard. Due to this fact, Astana process among Russia, Turkey and Iran started to affect the conflict more profoundly after Davutoğlu.

As a result of the ensuing analysis conducted by considering four domestic factors, we conclude that Turkish foreign policy in years 2011–2016 was shaped significantly by leader images of Davutoğlu and Erdoğan. Despite the fact that they share the same basis for foreign policymaking (shaped around strategic depth doctrine and highly pragmatist), timeline demonstrates a difference in application of it. It is correct that the main goal is to make Turkey an influential actor on her old geographical arena following the Ottoman legacy and elimination of pan-Arab nationalists such as Saddam and al-Asad. However, Davutoğlu followed a more cooperative pragmatist approach siding with the Western actors as compared to Erdoğan who often adopted sharp and major political changes in order to preserve his own domestic political power and Turkish state interests.

Secondly, it cannot be waved aside that abovementioned Ottoman legacy has a substantial influence on Turkish state's strategic culture especially beginning with the onset of the Arab Spring. The new "concept" prioritizes broader Islamic identity over previous Turkish nationalist roots established by the founding fathers of the Republic of Turkey; and doing so is best reflected by when Erdoğan's former liberal cooperative policies before 2010 (even classical Kemalist isolationist policies) were quickly replaced with interventionist-Islamist policies.

As for the state society relations, economic and security problems after the initial failure to topple Assad arising from the immigration and ISIS, PKK/YPG terror attacks in Turkey played a critical role in decrease of public support which we see at the June 2015 general elections. However, this public signal gave its place to another wave of support after peace process with PKK has failed and anti-terror operations were reinitiated. Therefore, Erdoğan's discourse on justification of Turkish military operations (both in Iraq and Syria) to eliminate the terror on borders and resettle the migrants

back in Syria not only helped with the public support to use of hard power but also to consolidate his political authority domestically.

Lastly, firstly analysed Turkish domestic institution, the parliament, shows a gradual decline in its influence on Turkish foreign policymaking especially after the 2017 constitutional change. Despite being on the same page against the Erdoğan-led interventionist foreign policy, opposition parties remain impotent at the legislative level. They share the same opinion on a failed agenda regarding Syria while MHP has chosen to support Erdoğan government to constitute the majority in the parliament thus, being the key element for future perpetuity of Turkish influence on Syria.

Secondly, long-continued military tutelage which peaked during the period of 1960–1980 coup d'états sharply declined after the failed takeover attempt in July 2016. Since many of the Gülenist officers involved were exposed and fired, full authority of the government over the military is re-established. This led to an ease in using hard power on Syrian arena respectively.

In conclusion, Turkish foreign policy has experienced substantial changes not only from the external events occurred outside of its borders but also domestic conditions which were put into inquiry by our four abovementioned factors. The reciprocal relationship between the domestic and the international, which neoclassic realism takes as a premise, has been considerably helpful in detaching from traditional ex parte analyses through a more complex way of understanding of the events in question. Nevertheless, the analysis surely needs to be elaborated and detailed through including other factors and aspects of domestic conditions in order to catch a broader grasp on the events.

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011, the Syrian Civil War has become an arena of international competition between regional and global powers. As a dominant regional actor, Turkey has important interests in this conflict. However, although great importance is given to civil war factors and power balances at the field level, Turkey’s internal conditions play a role as well as these externalities. Therefore, an analysis of Turkey’s foreign policy towards Syria from a local perspective is needed to reveal some negligible dynamics. In this direction, this study aims to analyse Turkey’s foreign policy towards Syria, taking into account the interaction between Turkey’s external and internal dynamics within the framework of neoclassical realist theory. Within this scope, we ask “how do Turkish external and internal dynamics explain its foreign policy in Syria?” as the leading search question and conduct our analysis using the explanatory case study method. Based on our findings, we provide a broad perspective on the significant impacts of four main internal factors on Turkish foreign policy, from the start of the Civil War to the most recent “Operation Spring Shield” by the Turkish Army and local Syrian armed groups.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, Turkish Foreign Policy, Neoclassical Realism, Middle East, AKP

ANALIZA TURECKIEJ POLITYKI ZAGRANICZNEJ W SYRII: PERSPEKTYWA REALIZMU NEOKLASYCZNEGO

STRESZCZENIE

Od 2011 roku syryjska wojna domowa stała się areną międzynarodowej rywalizacji pomiędzy regionalnymi i globalnymi mocarstwami. Jako dominujący aktor regionalny, Turcja ma w tym konflikcie ważne interesy. Jednak, mimo że dużą wagę przywiązuje się do czynników wojny domowej oraz równowagi sił na poziomie międzynarodowym, to oprócz tych zewnętrznych uwarunkowań pewną rolę odgrywają również wewnętrzne uwarunkowania Turcji. Dlatego też potrzebna jest analiza polityki zagranicznej Turcji wobec Syrii z perspektywy lokalnej, aby ujawnić pewne pomijalne dynamiki. W tym kierunku, niniejsze opracowanie ma na celu analizę polityki zagranicznej Turcji wobec Syrii, biorąc pod uwagę interakcję pomiędzy zewnętrzną i wewnętrzną dynamiką Turcji w ramach neoklasycznej teorii realistycznej. W tym zakresie zadajemy pytanie „jak turecka dynamika zewnętrzna i wewnętrzna wyjaśniają jej politykę zagraniczną w Syrii?” jako wiodące pytanie poszukiwawcze i przeprowadzamy naszą analizę przy użyciu metody wyjaśniającego studium przypadku. W oparciu o nasze ustalenia przedstawiamy szeroką perspektywę znaczącego wpływu czterech głównych czynników wewnętrznych na turecką politykę zagraniczną, od początku wojny domowej do najnowszej „operacji Wiosenna Tarcza” prowadzonej przez armię turecką i lokalne syryjskie grupy zbrojne.

Słowa kluczowe: syryjska wojna domowa, turecka polityka zagraniczna, realizm neoklasyczny, Bliski Wschód, AKP