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## PRESIDENT R. T. ERDOĞAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF SMART POWER

### INTRODUCTION

Türkiye's actions in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, which directly undermined the rights of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece in their maritime zones (*Turkey-Greece...*, 2021), change of the name from the Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States to the Organization of Turkic States (*Organization of Turkic States*, 2021), Türkiye restricting the access of Russian ships from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea (*Zelenskyy...*, 2022), Turkey's name changed to the Turkish name Türkiye (*Turkey's...*, 2022) – these are the intertwined examples of hard and soft power in the Turkish president's foreign policy. And since J. Nye claims that, "smart power is the ability to combine hard and soft power to create an effective strategy" (Nye, 2011), does hard and soft power in President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign policy mean smart power? Hence, the aim of the article is to analyze of the strategy used by President R. T. Erdoğan in foreign policy in the context of the definition of smart power introduced by J. Nye. The paper poses the following research question: Does President R. T. Erdoğan's foreign policy be described as smart power? The answer to the research question posed in this way will be aided by the verification of the research hypothesis: President R. T. Erdoğan's foreign policy can be described as smart power, as he skillfully uses selected types of hard and soft power, and other tactics in his actions, strengthening Türkiye's position on the international arena. The publication, in which neoclassical realism (Czaputowicz, 2014: 33) was applied, used the following methods: deduction (Helnarska, 2008: 325) and comparative analysis (Bajer, 2012: 21). The period from 2020 to 2024 was analyzed. The paper includes the author's definition of smart power, based on the definition by J. Nye, creating a new, more complete, extended definition, corresponding to the foreign policy of R. T. Erdoğan. This publication also proposed the concept of "imprudent power" as a counter-concept of "smart power." In the study, the author reached for selected, in terms of the discussed issue: statements, communications, comments, reports, analyses, scientific publications, and press materials.

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## PRESIDENT R. T. ERDOĞAN'S ACTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

Türkiye has ambitions to become a global power (Rösler, 2020: 124) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign policy can be described as assertive. Türkiye's long-observed (Ananicz, 2015: 31) and still ongoing distancing from the European Union, e.g. Türkiye's refusal to join the EU sanctions imposed on Russia (Qiblawi, Sariyuce, 2023), is an example of Türkiye's assertive policy. In 2020, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, encouraging Azerbaijan to fight and supporting it, also militarily (Keddie, 2020), or in 2022 threatening Greece with war (Repetowicz, 2022) – these are the actions of President R. T. Erdoğan, which are examples of the aggressive attitude of the Turkish president. However, events such as Türkiye's humanitarian aid to Ukraine (*IOM...*, 2022), Türkiye equipment aid to Ukraine (*How Turkey's...*, 2024), Türkiye's participation as a mediator in the grain agreement (Güney, 2022: 43), and the return to peace talks between Türkiye and Greece in 2023 (Koutantou, Gumrukcu, 2023), show President R. T. Erdoğan in a different light, as a leader willing to provide assistance and engage in dialogue. The Turkish President threatened to veto Finland's and Sweden's membership application to NATO (Spancerska, 2022), but the Turkish parliament ultimately voted for Finland (*Turkish parliament...*, 2023) and Sweden to join NATO (Sariyuce, Gretener, Wilson, 2024); these are further examples of the Turkish president's foreign policy twists and turns. The above examples show that the foreign policy pursued by President R. T. Erdoğan is multifaceted, multilevel and full of twists and turns. Due to publishing limitations, in the research part cites specific events concerning R. T. Erdoğan's foreign policy, attributing specific tactics and strategies to specific events or groups of events, which, according to the author, can be identified in the foreign policy of the Turkish President.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND HARD, SOFT AND SMART POWER IN THE CONCEPTS OF J. NYE

Smart power is a foreign policy strategy that emphasizes the combination of hard and soft power to achieve a country's objectives on the international arena. The concept of smart power was first introduced by J. Nye in the penultimate sentence of his 2004 book *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics*, in reference to the foreign policy of the United States: "In short, America's success will depend upon our developing a deeper understanding of the role of soft power and developing a better balance of hard and soft power in our foreign policy. That will be smart power. We have done it before; we can do it again" (Nye, 2004: 147). The concept of smart power has been further his 2011 book *The Future of Power* (Nye, 2011), which expands on the changing nature of power in the 21st century and the importance of smart power in achieving foreign policy objectives. According to J. Nye, smart power is an integrated foreign policy strategy that combines hard and soft power instruments in order to maximize the effectiveness of state policy and effectively fulfill

national interests (Sadlocha, 2012: 38). Since smart power is a combination of hard and soft power, it is necessary to clarify the definition of hard and soft power. In the subject literature, there is no single definition of hard power, nor a single definition of soft power. This article cites J. Nye's definitions, which are directly related to the considerations conducted. What is hard power? J. Nye "describes hard power as economic and military capabilities which rest on inducements and threats" (Yukaruç, 2017: 493), i.e. on "carrots" and "sticks." What is soft power? The concept of soft power was formulated and described by J. Nye in the monograph *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990) and then developed in the book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Borkowski, 2014: 48). According to J. Nye soft power is: "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments," or more succinctly, "soft power is attractive power" (De Martino, 2020: 15–16). The above definition was criticized by some researchers for being too imprecise (for instance: Zahran, Ramos) and expanded and specified by other authors (for instance: Glaser and Murphy; Hall; Osipova; Smith-Windsor). By way of contrast, it is worth mentioning that according to J. Noy, J. Nye's definitions of hard power and soft power are too rigid (De Martino, 2020: 16–17). At this point it is worth citing J. Nye's article entitled: *Soft power: the evolution of a concept*, in which the author, among other things, refers to the reservations concerning the introduced concept and, in response to them, contrasts soft power with hard power. Here is a quote from the aforementioned article:

"Others, however, argued that my language led to the impression that 'soft power now means everything,' (Gelb 2009, Layne 2010), and some writers used the concept to mean anything other than military power. This was not correct, and I tried to clarify it in *The Future of Power* (Nye, 2011) by reaffirming the primacy of the behavioral definition. As I said, 'many types of resources can contribute to soft power, but that does not mean that soft power is any type of behavior. The use of force, payment, and some agenda-setting based on them I call hard power. Agenda-setting that is regarded as legitimate by the target, positive attraction, and persuasion are the parts of the spectrum of behaviors I include in soft power. Hard power is push; soft power is pull.' Or to extend a common metaphor, hard power is like brandishing carrots or sticks; soft power is more like a magnet" (Nye, 2021: 201).

The above quote is the quintessence of what the author of this article referred to when analyzing the foreign policy of President R. T. Erdoğan. First, that soft power is not everything that hard power is not. Second, that soft power is not a type of behavior.

## **HARD, SOFT, SMART POWER AND TACTICS IN PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN'S FOREIGN POLICY**

The work focuses only on selected events, which, according to the author, reflect the entire strategy used by President R. T. Erdoğan in foreign policy. The events are presented not chronologically but related by problem. Table 1 lists events that, in the author's opinion, can be attributed to hard power, but also to smart power.

Table 1

**Events representing hard power and smart power in the foreign policy  
of the Turkish President**

Events	Hard power	Soft power	Smart power	Other
The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict	X		X	
Türkiye restricting the access of Russian ships from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea	X		X	
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) obtained observer status in the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), even though the European Union (EU) rejected Türkiye's statement on the matter	X		X	

**Source:** Own study based on Skura, 2024b: 234–235.

R. T. Erdoğan provided military support to Azerbaijan. His was the only one who advocated for Azerbaijan's military operations (Skura, 2024a: 56). This is undoubtedly an example of hard power. According to the author, this is also an example of smart power, as Türkiye's involvement in the conflict has strengthened its position on the region. The undisputed contribution of Türkiye to the victory of Azerbaijan also caused the revival of the vision of the "Great Turan" in the Turkish world.

General reflection: When does hard power become smart power? When it brings the expected results.

When it comes to Türkiye restricting the access of Russian ships from the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea (Zelenskyy..., 2022) it can be that this is also an example of hard power and smart power, as R. T. Erdoğan's actions have strengthened Türkiye's position and weakened Russia's position. Another example, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) has been granted observer status in the Organization of Turkish States, which has shown Erdoğan's decisive actions have shown that the EU is not strong enough to force Türkiye to change its decision. Namely, the EU rejected Türkiye's statement concerning accepting the TRNC as an observer in the OTS (Cyprus..., 2022). In response, Republic of Türkiye rejected the EU's statement of concern over the admission of the TRNC to the OTS as an observer member (Press..., 2022).

Table 2

**Events representing hard power, soft power and smart power in the foreign policy  
of the Turkish President regarding President Erdoğan's actions aimed at consolidating  
the Turkish nation and Turkish states**

Events	Hard power	Soft power	Smart power	Other
1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening Türkiye's military cooperation with individual Turkish states, e.g., Türkiye has signed an agreement with Kazakhstan (2020), and Uzbekistan (2021)	X		X	
Joint Statement of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and President of The Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan On Enhanced Strategic Partnership (2022)	X	X	X	
The announcement of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan as the "spiritual capital of the Turkic world"		X	X	

1	2	3	4	5
Change of the name from the Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States to the Organization of Turkic States		X	X	
The approval of the strategic document "Turkic World Vision 2040"		X	X	
Turkey's name changed to the Turkish name Türkiye		X	X	
Turkish Airlines changed its name to Türkiye Hava Yolları		X	X	

Source: Own study based on Skura, 2024a: 59–60.

All events included in Table 2 can be commented as follows: President Erdoğan's actions aimed at consolidating the Turkish nation, they are, aimed at consolidating Turkish states under the leadership of Türkiye and most likely the reactivation of the Great Turan, in a new version. President R. T. Erdoğan's actions aimed at raising the rank of the Turkish nation and Türkiye in the world. However, the strengthening of the strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and Türkiye is an example of hard, soft and smart power as it concerns, "cooperation between the two countries underpinned by shared interests in politics, military, defense, security, economy, trade, investment, industry, mining, tourism, energy, environment, transport and transit, aviation, family and social services, labor and employment, agriculture and forestry, disasters and emergencies, culture, education, science and technology, innovation, media and communications, healthcare, youth and sports, and archives" (Joint..., 2022).

The remaining events included in Table 2, i.e. the announcement of Turkistan in southern Kazakhstan as the "spiritual capital of the Turkic world" (*Turkic World...*, 2021), change of the name from the Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States to the Organization of Turkic States (*Organization of Turkic States*, 2021), the approval of the strategic document "Turkic World Vision 2040" (*Turkic World Vision 2040*, 2021), Turkey's name changed to the Turkish name Türkiye (*Turkey's...*, 2022), and Turkish Airlines changed its name to *Türkiye Hava Yolları* (*Turkish...*, 2022), are examples of soft and smart power. With these actions, the Turkish President strengthen Türkiye's position in the world without encountering a single voice of opposition from the international community. General reflection: When does soft power become smart power? When it brings the expected results.

Table 3 presents events related to the war in Ukraine, which, according to the author, are examples of smart power of Turkish foreign policy.

Table 3  
**Events representing smart power in the foreign policy of the Turkish president  
 (the example of the war in Ukraine)**

Events	Hard power	Soft power	Smart power	Other
1	2	3	4	5
Türkiye's condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye's humanitarian and equipment support for Ukraine, Türkiye's cooperation with Ukraine and Russia, Türkiye's refusal to join the EU sanctions imposed on Russia, Türkiye developing cooperation with Russia			X	

1	2	3	4	5
Türkiye prohibits Russia from flying to Syria via its territory (the ban applies to military and civilian aircraft that would carry military personnel); at the same time, Türkiye still allows commercial flights to and from Russia			X	
Türkiye's negotiations with Moscow and Kiev, with the participation of the UN, the grain agreement			X	
Erdogan's desire to be the arbiter between the parties Russia-Ukraine War				

Source: Own study based on Skura, 2024a: 56–58.

Türkiye's condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine but also Türkiye's cooperation with Ukraine and Russia (Erdogan Says..., 2022), Türkiye's humanitarian (IOM..., 2022) and equipment (Dengiz, Guilbert, 2024) support for Ukraine, Türkiye's refusal to join the EU sanctions imposed on Russia and Türkiye developing cooperation with Russia (Qiblawi, Sariyuce, 2023) these are the events that are considered together in the table above, as then you can clearly see that together they constitute an example of smart power. Why smart power? As President R. T. Erdogan's actions were aimed at improving Türkiye's economic situation and strengthening Türkiye's position on the international arena.

Here is another example of smart power, regarding Türkiye closes airspace to Russian planes flying to Syria. "Turkish airspace has been closed to military and civilian planes carrying troops from Russia to Syria after talks with Moscow, Turkey's state broadcaster TRT Haber cited Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu as saying" (Turkish..., 2022). On the other hand, Türkiye continued to allow commercial flights to and from Russia but did not decide to completely close its airspace. Although the Turkish president's decision has further complicated logistics for Russia in Syria, Russia and Türkiye continue to maintain relations. This can be considered a success for R. T. Erdogan. The last events listed in Table 3 are: Türkiye's negotiations with Moscow and Kiev, with the participation of the UN in the grain agreement and President R. T. Erdogan's desire to become an arbiter between the parties Russia-Ukraine War (Skura, 2024a, p. 58). Why can these events be described as smart power? The Turkish President is in a position of a leader who mediates in resolving global conflicts, which has given Türkiye an important position at the global level. As a result, Türkiye will be placed in a position of a very important player in the new, emerging multipolar world system.

Table 4 presents events that, in the author's opinion, are examples of the smart power of Turkish foreign policy but are not merely a combination of hard and soft power.

Table 4

**Events representing hard, soft and smart power and other tactics (that go beyond hard and soft power tactics) in the foreign policy of the Turkish President**

Events	Hard power	Soft power	Smart power	Other
1	2	3	4	5
Türkiye's actions in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea (including the escalation of the conflict in July and August 2020)	X		X	

1	2	3	4	5
A few weeks before the European Council meeting (25–26 March 2021), Türkiye limited its actions in the Mediterranean Sea and expressed readiness to fully liberalize its internal policy			X	retreating-waiting tactics
Talks between the representatives of Türkiye and Greece regarding the de-escalation of the dispute (May 31, 2021; June 14, 2021)			X	retreating-waiting tactics
President R. T. Erdoğan's announcement to conduct research in the disputed areas of the Eastern Mediterranean (July 2, 2021)	X		X	
A new opening for Türkiye-Greece relations in 2023 – returning to peace talks		X	X	retreating-waiting tactics
Appointment of a UN envoy to Cyprus			X	
The President of Türkiye announced the possibility of a railroad route from Karabakh through Iran if Armenia does not open the Zangezur corridor			X	adaptation tactics

Source: Own study based on Skura, 2024c: 135–136.

Türkiye's actions in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, which directly undermined the rights of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece in their maritime zones (*Turkey-Greece...*, 2021), have shown that R. T. Erdoğan pursues a subjective foreign policy in which he does not exclude conflicts, even armed ones. R. T. Erdoğan assumes that a strong Türkiye, which does not shy away from military action, will command respect on the international arena and will simply be dangerous to other countries. These actions can therefore be called hard power without a doubt, but also smart power. Why? As the Turkish President knew when to stop in his actions. President R. T. Erdoğan's announcement that research will be conducted in the disputed areas (*Erdoğan says Turkey...*, 2021) is both hard and smart power (explanation as in the above example).

Türkiye, which has limited its activity in the Mediterranean Sea and expressed readiness to fully liberalize its domestic policy, a few weeks before the EU meeting (Michalski, Strachota, 2021), and the talks between representatives of Türkiye and Greece on de-escalation of the dispute, which took place in May (*Greece...*, 2021) and June 2021 (*Erdoğan says he...*, 2021), according to the author, means smart power, but not soft power. The aforementioned events can be called the retreating-waiting tactics, as R. T. Erdoğan has not given up on his plans regarding the disputed areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. The retreating-waiting tactics means due to the international situation at a given time, R. T. Erdoğan is not strong enough to achieve his goal. This does not mean R. T. Erdoğan abandons his plans. Instead, R. T. Erdoğan postpones his plans to ultimately achieve his goal. Therefore, despite the fact that diplomatic talks took place, the author would not classify them as soft power, but as a retreating-waiting tactic. Table 4 also includes a return to peace talks between Türkiye and Greece in 2023 (Koutantou, Gumrukcu, 2023). However, when it comes to the diplomatic talks of 2021 and 2023, these are two different types of diplomatic talks. The talks in 2021 were only of the retreating-waiting tactic, while the return to peace talks between Türkiye and Greece in 2023 is an example of the retreating-waiting tactic, which is supported by soft power tools. However, soft power does not apply to the Cyprus issue, but to Türkiye-Greece relations in general (for instance, The Athens Declaration (*Athens Declaration...*, 2023)).

Most likely, President R. T. Erdoğan will want to use friendly relations with Greece to implement his plan – the international recognition of the TRNC. The assertive attitude of the Turkish president in the Cyprus conflict, even after appointing a UN envoy to Cyprus, the failure of the aforementioned mission and the pessimistic statements of the UN Secretary General regarding the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, in the author's opinion, are an opportunity for President R. T. Erdoğan to be the "main player" of this dispute. The Turkish president will want to use friendly relations with Greece in talks on the Cyprus conflict. "Erdoğan will want to discuss the controversial issues regarding Cyprus and the Aegean Sea together, as he will not want to budge on the issue of recognizing the statehood of the TRNC but may make some concessions regarding the ambiguous Greek-Turkish border and the disputed islands in the Aegean Sea" (Skura, 2024c: 139). If the Turkish president succeeds, his strategy could be described as smart power (the author believes this will be the case), but if it fails, it could be described as imprudent power.

Five events discussed in Table 4 directly concern the Cyprus conflict and one event indirectly (the return to peace between Türkiye and Greece in 2023). The last event included in Table 4 concerns the Zangezur corridor. The President of the Republic of Türkiye announced the possibility of building a railway line from Karabakh through Iran if the Republic of Armenia does not open the Zangezur corridor (Prezydent..., 2023). Does these facts be called smart power? According to the author, yes. Are they just a combination of *hard* and *soft power*? According to the author, no. This is adaptation tactics used by R. T. Erdoğan, which is characterized by modifying plans depending on the changing situation in the world. "This adaptation tactics used by R. T. Erdoğan presents him in a different light, not as an impulsive and uncompromising leader, but as a leader open to compromise, with whom other countries can cooperate" (Skura, 2024b: 236).

## CONCLUSIONS

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign policy can be described as smart power, as this policy is successively strengthening Türkiye's position on the international arena. The Turkish President's actions in foreign policy are not limited only to the use of hard and soft power.

Hence, based on J. Nye's definition of smart power, the author of this article proposes to expand it to include aspects used by the President of Türkiye on the international arena, creating a new, more complete, extended definition, corresponding to the foreign policy of R. T. Erdoğan. According to this definition: Smart power is a foreign policy strategy that involves in the skillful use of selected types of hard power and soft power by the leader of a state or international organization, characterized by intuition and political intelligence; this leader does not exclude the use of tactics that go beyond hard and soft power tactics, and his actions focus on achieving the short- and long-term goals of the state in foreign policy.

The key element of this definition is therefore the leader (President or Prime Minister), but it can also be the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the person heading a regional or international organization.

The conducted analysis, raised arguments, and drawn conclusions allowed to confirm the research hypothesis.

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## ABSTRACT

President R. T. Erdoan's policy is complex and multifaceted – on the one hand aggressive, and on the other subdued. The aim of the article is to analyze of the strategy used by President R. T. Erdoan in foreign policy in the context of the definition of smart power introduced by J. Nye. The paper poses the following research question: Does President R. T. Erdoan's for-

eign policy be described as smart power? The following research hypothesis poses in the paper: President R. T. Erdoğan's foreign policy can be described as smart power, as he skillfully uses selected types of hard and soft power, and other tactics in his actions, strengthening Türkiye's position on the international arena. The following methods were used: deduction and comparative analysis. The period from 2020 to 2024 was analyzed. The main conclusion of the considerations is as follows. President R. T. Erdoğan's actions in foreign policy are not limited only to the use of hard and soft power, i.e. smart power as defined by J. Nye. Hence, the work includes the author's proposal to expand J. Nye's definition it to include aspects used by the President of Türkiye on the international arena, creating a new, extended definition, corresponding to the foreign policy of R. T. Erdoğan. The article also proposes the introduction of a concept opposed to smart power – imprudent power.

**Keywords:** Türkiye, J. Nye, hard power, soft power, imprudent power, retreating-waiting tactics, adaptation tactics

## **POLITYKA ZAGRANICZNA PREZYDENTA R. T. ERDOĞANA W KONTEKŚCIE SMART POWER**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Polityka prezydenta R. T. Erdogana jest złożona i wieloaspektowa – z jednej strony agresywna, z drugiej stonowana. Celem artykułu jest analiza strategii stosowanej przez prezydenta R. T. Erdogana w polityce zagranicznej w kontekście definicji *smart power* wprowadzonej przez J. Nye. W artykule postawiono następujące pytanie badawcze: Czy politykę zagraniczną prezydenta R. T. Erdogana można określić jako *smart power*? W artykule postawiono następującą hipotezę badawczą: Politykę zagraniczną prezydenta R. T. Erdogana można określić jako *smart power*, ponieważ umiejętnie wykorzystuje on wybrane rodzaje *hard* i *soft power* oraz inne taktyki w swoich działaniach, wzmacniając pozycję Turcji na arenie międzynarodowej. Wykorzystano następujące metody: dedukcji i analizę porównawczą. Przeanalizowano okres od 2020 do 2024 roku. Główny wniosek z rozważań jest następujący. Działania prezydenta R. T. Erdogana w polityce zagranicznej nie ograniczają się wyłącznie do stosowania *hard* i *soft power*, czyli *smart power* w rozumieniu definicji J. Nye. Stąd też praca zawiera propozycję autorki, aby rozszerzyć definicję J. Nye o aspekty wykorzystywane przez prezydenta Turcji na arenie międzynarodowej, tworząc nową, rozszerzoną definicję, odpowiadającą polityce zagranicznej R. T. Erdogana. W artykule zaproponowano również wprowadzenie pojęcia przeciwnego *smart power* – *imprudent power*.

**Slowa kluczowe:** Turcja, J. Nye, *hard power*, *soft power*, *imprudent power*, taktyka wycofująco-wyczekująca, taktyka adaptacyjna