Away from NATO toward Russia?

- *Turkey's Quest for Security, Autonomy and Regional Power Status*

Simen G. Aamodt

Master's Thesis in Political Science

Department of Political Science

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2018

Word count: 34 446

II

Away from NATO toward Russia?

- *Turkey's Quest for Security, Autonomy and Regional Power Status*

2018

Away from NATO toward Russia? Turkey's Quest for Security, Autonomy and Regional
Power Status

Simen G. Aamodt

Abstract

This thesis analyzes Turkey's security policies toward Russia, the US and NATO with a focus on two cases: Syria (2011-2018) and the Black Sea region (2014-2018). It employs Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory (1987) and Allison & Zelikow's (1999) conceptual models Rational Choice, Organizational Behavior and Governmental Politics. The reader gains increased knowledge of alliance theory, security diversification and emerging middle power activism.

Turkey's relations with the EU, US and NATO quickly deteriorated following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016 against President Erdogan's AKP government, which triggered a major reshuffling of government personnel. Conversely, Turkey increased security cooperation with Russia since mid-2016 as part of their rapprochement process (after the November 2015 fighter jet incident in Syria). Ankara agreed to purchase the Russian S-400 air defense system (incompatible with NATO's defense architecture) and joined the Russia-led Astana peace talks to solve the Syrian conflict. Consequently, Western journalists and analysts claimed Turkey is 'drifting' away from NATO toward Russia and warned the West may 'lose Turkey.' This thesis argues that Turkey's recent turn toward Russia is mainly due to deteriorating relations with the US in Syria and the 2016 post-coup purge, which gave rise to Russia-friendly actors at the expense of pro-Western elements. Yet, in the long term, accommodating Russia neither fulfills Ankara's goals of security, autonomy nor regional power status. Russia's 2014 annexation and subsequent militarization of Crimea changed the regional balance of power in the Black Sea. Crimea then emerged as a logistics hub supplying Russia's military campaign in Syria (since September 2015), where it bolstered Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Witnessing an increased Russian military presence in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean that may challenge its sovereignty, Turkey (as a rational actor) must balance and cannot bandwagon with Russia. Therefore, it will remain anchored in NATO in the foreseeable future.

VI

Acknowledgments

Table of contents

List of Abbreviations

A2/AD - Anti Access/Area Denial

AKP - Justice and Development Party

FSA – Free Syrian Army

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

OES – Operation Euphrates Shield

PKK – Kurdistan Workers' Party

PYD – Democratic Union Party

YPG – Kurdish People's Protection Units

List of Figures

1   Introduction

Turkey's relations with the US, EU and NATO appear to deteriorate. On July 15, 2016, a military faction staged a coup attempt in several Turkish cities, leaving 240 people dead and at least 2194 injured ("Turkey's failed coup," 2017).[1] Subsequently, the Justice and Development Party-led (AKP) government expelled at least 100 000 personnel from its judiciary, military, public and educational institutions. This included around 40 % of higher-ranking military officers and 400 NATO military officers who allegedly possessed ties to suspected coup plotter Fethullah Gulen, a US-based Islamic cleric (Beesley, 2017).[2] Several NATO countries granted asylum to Turkish NATO officers. Consequently, Turkey's role in NATO became fused with its post-coup purge.

Western countries expressed minimal solidary with Erdogan after the coup attempt and instead criticized him for using the event as a pretext for cracking down on dissent to consolidate his power (Waldman & Caliskan, 2016, p. 226). On April 16, 2017, 51 % of Turkish voters approved a constitutional referendum implementing a presidential system that substantially increased executive powers vis-a-vis parliament. The new system's lack of 'checks and balances' (found in other presidential systems) only solidified Western perceptions of Turkey's drift toward 'authoritarianism.' Hence, Turkey's EU accession bid appears increasingly bleak.[3] Conversely, Turkey increasingly sees the BRICS countries and the Russian and Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) "as a new reference point in foreign policy," indicating a diverging political identity away from the 'West' toward the 'East' (Öniş & Kutlay, 2016, p. 15).[4]

The coup attempt exacerbated strained relations between the US and Turkey over the Syrian civil war. Ankara saw the US' support for the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in the fight against IS as detrimental to its national security. Although the YPG is "universally

---

[1] Turkey also experienced military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 and 2007 (online statement). For the first time, it was instigated by an Islamic faction rather than secularists.

[2] Gulen formerly supported the AKP and President Erdogan until they split in 2013. The US refuses to extradite Gulen due to unconvincing evidence. In Turkey, genuine concern prevails that the US played a key role in the coup attempt.

[3] Turkey started EU accession process talks in 2005, implemented several reforms that strengthened political rights, the rule of law and established civilian control over the military.

[4] Eurasian security, economic and political organization comprising Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and India. Turkey is a close dialogue partner and Erdogan several times stated his desire to join the SCO.

accepted as the most effective fighting force against ISIS," Turkey perceives it as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group in south-eastern Turkey, which traditionally sought an independent Kurdish state (Kadercan, 2017).[5] In a broader context, Turkey sees the US' support for the YPG in Syria as a continuation of its support for Kurdish militants during the Iraq War, which emanated in creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq in 2005.[6] The Syrian civil war therefore solidified Turkey's perception that it could not rely on US military assistance in the Middle East, prompting it to find new security partners.

While Turkish-Western relations deteriorated following the coup attempt, Turkey and Russia substantially strengthened cooperation, encompassing trade, tourism, energy and defense. In December 2017, Turkey agreed to purchase the Russian S-400 air and anti-missile defense system, which is incompatible with NATO's defense architecture. It stipulates long-time training and interaction with Russia, potentially moving Ankara closer to Russia in the defense sphere (Korzun, 2017).[7] Consequently, NATO allies and Western commentators and analysts strongly questioned Turkey's intentions and commitment to NATO's military containment of Russia, as outlined at the Wales Summit on September 4-5, 2014 (Hacaoglu, 2017).[8] Similarly, Turkey sought to obtain the FD-2000 Chinese missile system in 2013, but backtracked after severe pressure from the US, which threatened to cancel defense contracts (Kurç, 2017, p. 274).

Yet, Turkey-Russia relations have fluctuated substantially in recent years, subject to pragmatism and underlying suspicion. In November 2015, Turkey downed a Russian Su-24 fighter jet in northern Syria for violating its sovereignty and neglecting multiple warnings. Media outlets in both countries then unleashed a massive wave of propaganda, switching from staunch enemies to close friends within a one-year period. Putin called the shoot-down "a stab in the back delivered by the accomplices of terrorists," accused Turkey of assisting IS and implemented severe sanctions against Turkey (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 5). In late June 2016,

---

[5] The PKK launched low-scale guerilla warfare against the Turkish government (and sporadically civilians) since 1984, claiming around 45 000 lives. The YPG constitutes the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria.

[6] Turkey initially opposed creation of the KRG, but later developed thriving trade and energy ties. A KRG independence referendum (September 2017) severely strained its relations with Ankara.

[7] At the same time, Ankara continues to upgrade its domestic defense industry and signs multiple joint defense projects with other European countries. One of Ankara's main objectives with the S-400 deal is to obtain missile technology to create a long-range air and anti-missile defense system.

[8] NATO strongly condemned Russia's Crimea annexation and actions in eastern Ukraine, agreed to strengthen the Baltic states' security and increase allies' defense spending to 2 % of national GDP within 10 years.

Erdogan sent an apology letter to Putin over the fighter jet incident to restore ties. Subsequently, they fully restored relations after the July 2016 coup attempt. Barkey (2017) argues the rapprochement constituted a "marriage of convenience" between Erdogan and Putin, triggered primarily by growing Turkey-US tensions over Syria.

Turkey's degraded political and security ties with the West in favor of Russia raised NATO allies' concerns over its strategic priorities. With NATO's second largest standing army, Turkey's growing accommodation of Russia may potentially undermine NATO unity and limit NATO's ability to assert influence in the Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. If such, one may question Turkey's geostrategic usefulness to the alliance. Conversely, Ankara perceives the US' and NATO's security assistance as inadequate, failing to tackle Middle Eastern security challenges. Consequently, one may ask to what degree Turkey's and NATO's interests aligns in Turkey's neighborhood.

1.1 Thesis goal and research question

The thesis' goal is to analyze Turkey's security policies toward Russia, the US and NATO in Syria and the Black Sea region to understand its role as a Western security partner. It sheds light on how an emerging middle power such as Turkey diversifies its security policies to increase its security and autonomy. Drawing on the trends in Turkish foreign policy (outlined above), I seek to find out:

(1) To what extent and why has Turkey increased security cooperation with Russia vis-à-vis the US in Syria since mid-2016?

(2) How did Turkey approach Russia politically, militarily and in the energy sphere after the 2014 Crimea Annexation?

(3) What do these findings say about Turkey's role as a Western security partner?

Undoubtedly, question 1 is the most significant for recent developments in Turkey-US-Russia relations. 'Why' drives the question as it seeks to uncover the 'causal mechanisms' for Turkey's shifting foreign policy direction from the US toward Russia. It invites domestic and geopolitical explanations. "To what extent" clarifies to what degree Turkey and Russia conducts security cooperation and implicitly requires an assessment of areas where cooperation failed to manifest and why. Understanding the scope and limitations of their relationship in this conflict lays the

foundation for the rest of the thesis. Turkey's growing accommodation of Russia in Syria since mid-2016 may seem to suggest Turkey is embracing Russia as an alternative security partner to NATO. Yet, such a simplified picture may entail more nuanced analysis.

Question 2 cross-checks the findings from question 1 by testing the bilateral relationship in a region with widely different security challenges. It maps out Turkey's approach to Russia in a relatively calm region versus in a civil war. It will show how Ankara approaches Russia when Russia is the main threat, compared to in Syria, where non-state actors constitute the greatest threat. The Black Sea thus appears as a more 'normal' case in terms of state-to-state relations.

Question 3 uses the findings from question 1 and 2 to gain a more conceptual understanding of Turkey's relations with Russia, the US and NATO.[9] The purpose is to investigate and problematize widespread claims among Western journalists and analysts that Turkey is 'drifting' or 'pivoting' away from NATO toward Russia (Gall & Higgins, 2017). They are concerned the West may 'lose Turkey' as if it was on an inevitable path away from the West. Conversely, Turkish media and analysts often portray the US and NATO as unreliable security partners and may give the impression that Turkey soon will separate from Western security structures. Yet, propaganda and actions often do not align. Question 3 will assess Turkey's role as a Western security partner.

1.2   Case study choice

The Syrian case stretches from March 2011-April 2018. The starting point is Turkey's diplomatic involvement in Syria from eruption of violent protests in March 2011. The ending point is the status of Turkey's role in Syria by the end of April 2018. Although the civil war's trajectory remains unknown as the conflict endures, this time frame should provide a coherent picture of Turkey's involvement in Syria and its implications for Ankara's role as a Western security partner.

Developments in Turkish-Russian relations since mid-2016 constitute the main topic, which requires an understanding of developments in Turkey's relations with Russia and the US since

---

[9] Although NATO is Turkey's primary security partner, an explicit focus on NATO would fail to cover Turkey's role in US-led military operations and other ad hoc coalitions outside NATO's framework. Moreover, NATO is not a direct party to the Turkey-US dispute over the YPG in Syria. Consequently, question 3 draws a fine distinction between Turkey's role in NATO and the Turkey-US-relationship.

eruption of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Firstly, I cover Ankara's position on regime change, role in the Arab Spring and discuss the importance and limitations of NATO support. Secondly, Turkey's two-front war against ISIS and the YPG and participation in the Russia-led Astana peace process (launched in December 2016) are analyzed. Lastly, I discuss Turkey's Operation Olive Branch against the YPG in Afrin (January-March 2018), which triggered a diplomatic stand-off with the US and coincided with growing US-Russian rivalry over influencing the Kurds and shaping post-war Syria.

Analyzing these topics should provide enough insight to answer the first research question. Understanding the entire Syrian civil war remains beyond this thesis' scope (including all its actors, alliances structures, ethnic and religious compositions etc.). Instead, the case focuses on Turkey's national security interests while only superficially assessing the other actors' interests. I limit the amount of actors to those necessary to answer the research question. At the minimum, these include Turkey, Russia, Syria, Iran, the US, NATO, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), IS, the YPG, PKK, President Erdogan and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (See 1.3).

The Black Sea region

Furthermore, I cover the Black Sea region from 2014-2018. [10] Ankara's political response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 constitutes the starting point. It had to respond to alleged discrimination of Crimean Tatars, the question of sanctions and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Ideally, the ending point would be NATO's Summit in Brussels, Belgium in July 2018 to map out Turkey's approach to NATO two years after the coup attempt. Yet, due to time limitations, the thesis will consider actions taken up to April 30, 2018. In addition to the annexation, the implications of two other relevant events will be discussed: Turkey's downing of the Russian fighter jet in Syria in November 2015 (which increased bilateral tensions in the Black Sea) and post-coup developments during the summer of 2016.

The Black Sea region's geostrategic importance increased following the Crimea annexation when Russia altered the region's military balance of power by substantially enhancing its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. In case of a conflict, Russian A2/AD capabilities may deny NATO access to the region. This militarization triggered an increased NATO

---

[10] I mainly consider the region as a strategic entity (air and sea space, the military balance of power and strategic interests). Political conditions within the adjacent states (Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria) and the Caucasus will only be discussed insofar they relate to my research question.

presence in Romania after NATO's July 2016 Warsaw summit. Thus, we may expect major geopolitical developments in the region between NATO, Russia and Turkey in the foreseeable future. The region is geopolitically significant as it enables power projection into the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean. It lies at the crossroads of global energy markets and emerging transportation routes. The region has also gained relatively little attention vis-a-vis Russia-NATO relations in the Baltics after 2014. Consequently, this thesis aims to fill this knowledge gap by analyzing security developments in the Black Sea region.

My case study's geopolitical approach should provide an explanation of Turkey's foreign policy capturing both a 'southern' and 'northern' dimension (Syria and the Black Sea region, respectively). The locations are significant because Russia changed the military balance of power in 2014 (the Black Sea) and 2015 (Syria), thus challenging Turkey's regional position. Explaining the trends in Turkey's security approach toward Russia vis-à-vis the US/NATO in these two regions contribute to answering my research questions. When seen in comparison, they should provide a more comprehensive picture of Turkey's foreign policy than when studied separately. Among the two cases, the Syrian case appears as the most significant to understand the countries' growing security cooperation since 2016 whereas the Black Sea region appears to demonstrate a form of 'normalcy' in the bilateral relations. Hence, the Syrian case gains relatively more attention and space in this thesis.

Figure 1 – Turkey's neighborhood

Turkey lies at the crossroads between Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus and is thus key to Euro-Atlantic security.

1.3   Glossary of Terms and expressions

This section clarifies commonly used terms, definitions and actors providing a *de facto* reference guide to the thesis.

Crimea Annexation – Russia officially annexed Crimea on March 18, 2014 after a controversial referendum passed on March 16. Russia subsequently militarized Crimea, creating an anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD) bubble that may prevent NATO access to sea and air space in case of a conflict.

Davutoğlu, Ahmet– Foreign Minister (2009-2014) and Prime Minister (2014-2016). Diplomat and academic who founded the 'Strategic Depth' doctrine and 'zero problems with neighbors' policy (2009-2011). Replaced as Prime Minister in May 2016.

Erdogan, Tayyip Recep – Co-founded the AKP in 2001; Prime Minister (2003-2014) and President (2014-). Initially hailed in the West as a 'democratic' leader of the Muslim world under the Arab Spring, but fell out of favor with the West after violent crackdowns on the domestic Gezi Park protests (2013) and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt.

Eurasianism (Turkish) – Loose political ideology emerging in Turkey after the Cold War. Takes shape through nationalism, neo-Ottomanism and Islamism. 'Eurasianists' seek closer ties with Eurasia and see Russia as a reference point and useful 'hedge' against the West. Gained increased influence in the military and government since the 2016 post-coup purge.

Free Syrian Army (FSA) –Syrian opposition group, initially comprising defectors from Bashar al-Assad's army. Later transformed into loose umbrella organization of various Syrian opposition forces. Supported by Turkey and become prominent resistance force against the YPG in northern Syria after August 2016.

Gulenist movement – Followers of the US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen and traditionally Western-oriented. Closely allied with the AKP and Erdogan until 2013 when they split due to numerous political disagreements. Erdogan accused 'Gulenists' of conducting the July 2016 coup attempt and consequently expelled them from state institutions.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) –Transnational terror group; seized major parts of Syrian and Iraqi territories in 2014-2016 and governed a self-declared Islamic 'caliphate'

headquartered in Raqqa, Syria. Conducted numerous terror attacks in Turkey in 2015-2016. Largely lost its territory by 2018.

Justice and Development Party (AKP) – Turkey's ruling party since 2002 (re-elected in 2007, 2011 and 2015). Pro-EU until the late 2000s and relatively US-friendly until the Syrian civil war. Socially conservative and market economy oriented; Oversaw rapid domestic economic growth in the early 2000s.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – Domestic militant group attacking security forces and civilians in south-eastern Turkey. Traditionally sought an independent Kurdish state. Upheld a fragile peace deal with the AKP from 2013-mid-2015 but resumed hostilities and started conducting urban warfare in July 2015. Closely affiliated with the YPG in Syria. Labelled a terror group by the EU, US and Turkey, but not by Russia.

Montreux Convention (1936) – Legal document granting Turkey exclusive control over the Turkish Straits (Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles). Limits the length, volume and tonnage of non-Black Sea states' vessels during peacetime, restricting their period of stay to 21 days while guaranteeing Black Sea states free naval passage. Turkey may close the Straits in times of war.

Muslim Brotherhood (MB) – Significant political force during the 'Arab Spring' of 2010-2012. Assumed power in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, but later lost power in all three countries. Ideologically-affiliated with Turkey's AKP.

Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) (August 2016- March 2017) – Unilateral Turkish military campaign to clear Syrian border areas of YPG and IS elements. Managed to split the three Kurdish cantons Jazira, Kobane and Afrin, thereby preventing the establishment of a federal Kurdish region.

Operation Olive Branch (January- March 2018) – Major military campaign (succeeding OES) that expelled the YPG from the Afrin region in north-western Syria. Increased the risk of direct clashes with US troops should Turkish forces continue eastward to Manbij and Iraqi border areas.

People's Protection Units (YPG) – Armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria and the US' main ally in the battle against IS. Prominent guerilla fighting force which

seized major territories in northern Syria since 2012. Closely affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey. Only labelled a terror group by Turkey.

1.4 Literature assessment

This section highlights my research contribution to Turkey-NATO-Russia relations. I then review existing literature on the topic to gain a point of departure into the analysis, map out trends and current research. I then summarize these findings.

1.4.1 Literature contribution

My thesis enhances our understanding of security diversification, middle power activism and alliance theory. Most research on Turkey-Russia relations cover economic, trade and energy ties. Several journal articles discuss Turkey-Russia relations (particularly since 2006) and Turkey's involvement in the civil war. Moreover, Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent militarization of the peninsula have been widely studied as well as Turkey's political response to the annexation.

However, I am not aware of any systematic comparisons of Turkey-Russia relations in the Black Sea region and Syria since 2014 and 2015, respectively. The context is highly relevant because Russia changed the military balance in both these regions, to which Turkey had to respond. The 2016 coup attempt, growing Russia-Turkey cooperation in Syria and Ankara's recent purchase of the S-400 air and anti-missile system prompt a need to re-evaluate the security partnership. The two cases help uncover similarities and regionally-determined factors in Turkey-Russia relations. The thesis' context and scope thus distinguish itself from previous research.

The following literature review covers scholarly articles, journals and political analyses that span from the mid-2000s until 2017. The aim is to establish a point of departure for analyzing Turkey's foreign policy toward Russia, the US and NATO, which set expectations and offers context for my theoretical framework (chapter 2) and the two cases (chapter 4 and 5).

1.4.2 Literature review

Öniş & Yılmaz (2016) identify two phases of Russia-Turkey relations in the post-Cold War era: "Cooperation with significant elements of conflict" throughout the 1990s to "deepening of cooperation in spite of differences in political orientations and geopolitical rivalry" from the late 1990s and beyond (p. 77). The countries' decisions to stop indirectly supporting militant movements in each other countries enabled a rapprochement (Turkey formerly supported Chechen militants and Russia supported the PKK). Simultaneously, Turkey agreed to decrease involvement in Russia's "sphere of influence," which laid the foundation for growing bilateral ties, especially after 2001 (p. 77). The personal relationship between Russian President Putin and Erdogan helped establish high-level meetings in 2005, marking a major development in their relations (Tufekci, 2017, pp. 66-67). Yet, as Baev and Kirişci (2017) note, the relationship "is circumspect rather than trust based" as "the two leaders are deeply suspicious of one another's intentions and motives on many crucial issues" (p. 12).

Geopolitical rivalry prevails in numerous conflicts between Turkey and Russia, particularly over frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus. These include the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh (where Turkey supports Azerbaijan and Russia supports Armenia) and Turkey's support for Georgia's territorial integrity versus Russia's statehood recognition of the breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war (Öniş & Yılmaz, pp. 82-83). Furthermore, Turkish-Russian disagreements over Cyprus remains an underlying issue whereby Russia supports the Greek government in Nicosia and Turkey strongly supports the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Kiniklioglu, 2006, p.15). Russia and Turkey also divert on numerous conflicts in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. In general, Russia prefers Christian orthodox and secular regimes whereas Turkey supports moderate-Islamic regimes.

With minimal geopolitical cooperation, several scholars perceive Russia-Turkey relations as shaped primarily by common objection to the West. In their article "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the excluded?" Hill & Taspinar, 2006 argue "the Turkish–Russian relationship… is founded on a sense of exclusion by the United States, not mutual interest," mainly starting after the 2003 Iraq War (p. 90). Ankara prevented the US from opening a "northern front" at the start of the

Iraq war, showing it could pursue an independent foreign policy (p. 82).[11] Since then, Turkey expressed major disappointment with the US' "war on terror" in the Middle East and opposed US presence in the region (Hill & Taspinar, 2006, p. 86).

Kiniklioglu (2006) builds on Hill & Taspinar's article and characterizes the countries' bilateral relationship as "inherently defensive in nature," aimed at preventing instability (p. 17). NATO's admission of Bulgaria and Romania in 2004 and 'color revolutions' in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) enhanced Turkey's perception of 'encirclement' and triggered widespread opposition to then President Bush's "democracy promotion" agenda, which drew Ankara closer to Russia (Kiniklioglu, 2006, p. 9). He contends that "Ultimately, what will determine the course of Turkish-Russian relations is the quality of their relationships with the West" (p. 17). This notion seems to remain highly relevant after the July 2016 coup attempt and will be elaborated on throughout the thesis.

Geographically, Turkey's allies mainly favors its access to the Middle East over other issues (Barrinha and Bastos, 2016, p. 134). Similarly, Hill & Taspinar (2006) argue "Turkey's current position in NATO and its new strategic value for the United States is now much more related to the Middle East, not Europe and Russia" (p. 89). Scholar Oğuzlu (2012) contends that compared to the Cold War period, "Turkey no longer views NATO as part of its own identity . . . Turkey's membership is now increasingly valued to the extent that it contributes to Turkey's national interests, rather than helping recognize Turkey's Western or European identity" (p. 161). This pragmatic approach may explain why few scholars perceive Turkey as a constructive NATO member in containing Russia after the March 2014 Crimea annexation.

While NATO saw the Crimea annexation as the greatest threat to European security after the Cold War, Turkey's political leaders remained "reluctant to permit 'any external power' (i.e., the U.S. or the EU) to damage the country's relations with Russia" (Elman, 2014, pp. 1-2). Ankara conducted "peace diplomacy" rather than imposing sanctions on Russia. Yet, Russia's annexation and subsequent militarization of Crimea substantially increased Russian naval power, prompting Turkey to develop its indigenous defense program (p. 2). Furthermore, Russia's underlying goal of restoring influence in its 'near abroad'[12] while limiting other actors'

---

[11] The Turkish parliament refused the US to open a northern Iraqi front despite a US deal reached with the AKP permitting a ground invasion. Once the Iraq started, Turkey granted certain concessions to use Turkish airspace.

[12] Concept commonly used to define Russia's post-Soviet neighboring countries.

presence (particularly NATO) in the region constitutes a major challenge to Turkey (Türker, 2012, p. 53).

Although Russia and Turkey expanded cooperation in several areas, "lack of trust" prevents deeper defense and security cooperation, limiting Russian weapon sales (Balcer, 2014, p. 5). Kiniklioglu (2006) also perceives defense cooperation as "the weakest link," an area where the Iraq war failed to trigger deeper cooperation. Consequently, Turkey's potential procurement of the S-400 would represent a watershed in Turkey-Russia defense cooperation. In perspective, from 2000-2016, Turkey imported 40.3 % of its arms from the U.S, but only 0.2 % from Russia (Kurç, 2017, p. 273). The trend is that "Ankara tends to use defense cooperation with Russia as a means to put indirect pressure on European and American companies to exact better conditions" (Kiniklioglu, 2006, pp. 14-15). Hence, one must acknowledge that Turkish officials may use defense procurement with Russia and other non-Western states as political leverage against the West.

These assessments suggest that Russia's and Turkey's common sense of exclusion by the West is insufficient for deeper security alignment. My two cases will therefore reassess these findings and identify opportunities and limitations for increased security cooperation, specifically after Russia changed the regional military balance of power in the Black Sea (2014) and Syria (2015).

Challenging ally

Several analysts and scholars perceive Turkey as an 'unreliable' security partner to the West. Jonathan Schanzer (2014) argues that although Turkey commits militarily to some NATO operations, it holds a weak anti-terror record, which poses a liability to NATO. He cites Ankara's failures "to uphold international standards on fighting terrorism," support for the "terrorist group Hamas" and helping Iran to evade sanctions over its nuclear program. Lastly, Turkey's lax border requirements enabled major foreign fighter flows, allegedly contributing to the rise of IS. Similarly, Kadercan (2017) argues "Ankara rushed into Syria to ensure the fall of the Assad regime, only to fail miserably. Ankara's initial obsession with Assad blinded it to the rise of ISIL and the YPG." Yet, Ankara benefitted from IS' initial presence in Syria as its fighters fought the Assad regime and targeted the Kurdish autonomous *de facto* region (Bechev & Hiltermann, 2017, p. 56).

According to Pinar Tank (2012), the Syrian civil war promoted Ankara to abandon its regional power aspirations and "zero problem with neighbors" policy[13] (p. 38). Instead, it supported militant Sunni groups and since March 2015, moved toward a Saudi Arabia-led 'Sunni-alliance' comprising 10 states, which increased and ethnic tensions domestically and across its borders (p. 39). Consequently, Turkey's policies and goals in Syria seriously questioned its role as a constructive actor for enhancing security in the Middle East. As Bechev & Hiltermann (2017) put it: "from zero problems with neighbors, the country now had zero neighbors without problems" (p. 54).

Ankara partly split with the Sunni alliance by supporting Qatar in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) dispute against the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (June 2017). The GCC accused Qatar of supporting terrorism and demanded it shut down a Turkish military base. Ankara instead deployed more troops to its base in Qatar, officially aimed at protecting Turkey's national interests and contributing to regional stability ("Turkey sends more," 2017).[14] This highlighted Erdogan's growing tendency to take sides in conflicts, build flexible alliances and attempt to strengthen Turkey's position in the MENA region.

Findings

The literature suggests geopolitical competition rather than cooperation constitutes the norm in Turkey-Russia relations. Moreover, exclusion by the West continues to bind Turkey and Russia together, especially through strong economic and energy ties. However, security and defense cooperation is unlikely to increase substantially in the foreseeable future due to diverting geopolitical interests. Moreover, Turkey's NATO membership changed from identity-based to pragmatic interests after the Cold War. NATO sees Turkey's geographic position as the most useful asset to the alliance, and less as a constructive partner in deterring Russia. Lastly, Turkey's failed Syria policies seriously questioned the country's reputation as a reliable security partner and indicated a growing trend of taking sides in regional conflicts. These findings suggest a reassessment of Turkish-Russian rivalry and cooperation in Syria and the Black Sea, the impact of exclusion by the West, and Turkey's quest for an independent foreign

---

[13] Increasing regional trade and positioning Turkey as a key regional actor and diplomatic broker. Predominated foreign policy from 2009-2011 but ended after Turkey's involvement in the Syrian civil war started.

[14] Turkey and Qatar both support the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and cooperate closely on foreign policy issues in the MENA region. Turkey operated a military base in the country since 2015 where it seeks to deploy 3000 troops.

14

and security policy amid shifting power relations in the Middle East (due to US military withdrawals).

1.5   Theory choice and thesis outline

To answer my research questions, I use Stephen Walt's book the Origins of Alliances (1987) as theoretical foundation. The book analyzes why states form alliances and how they "respond to threats" (p. 3). This enhances our understanding of Turkey-NATO-Russia relations and Turkey's historical security concerns as a NATO member. Walt argues states respond to regional threats rather than concern for the global balance of power and that "balancing" (to ally against a threat) is much more common than "bandwagoning" (to ally with the threat). Turkey's NATO membership (since 1952) combined with the two cases' focus on regional threats make the theory particularly suited.

Interestingly, Turkey appears reluctant to strongly balance against Russia despite its annexation of Crimea, support for Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and military campaign in Syria. However, according to Walt, a state showing increased offensive military capabilities and aggressive intentions should trigger a balancing (rather than bandwagon) response from neighboring countries Thus, this thesis investigates in what ways and to what degree Turkey balances Russia.

Building on Walt, I use Allison's & Zelikow's three conceptual models (from the book Essence of Decision, 1999) as analytical framework (henceforth Allison's conceptual models). The purpose is to strengthen the analysis' explanatory power by accounting for domestic political developments. This appears especially relevant due to the 2016 coup attempt, which clearly showed a fragmented state with diverting interests. The models include (1) Rational Choice (2) Organizational Behavior and (3) Governmental Politics. I mainly use rational choice due to its well-tested explanatory power and parsimonious benefits, needed due to this thesis' limited space and time frame (Underdal, 1984). I also draw on elements from the other two models where information is available and applicable. I will demonstrate that in Turkey's case, the three are rather fluid due to the government's relatively informal and personalized decision-making processes, centered on the AKP's and Erdogan's power politics.

Thesis outline

Chapter 2 presents the theories outlined above, suggests certain modifications and generates empirical expectations from these. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach, which includes comparative case study (research design), congruence method and process tracing (research methods), document analysis and semi-structured interviews (data collection).

Chapter 4 analyzes Turkey's foreign policy in Syria (2011-2018) in context of interactions with the US, NATO and Russia. It covers the question of regime change as well as the importance and limitations of NATO support. Moreover, it discusses Turkey's two-front war against IS and the YPG, participation in the Russia-led Astana peace process and Operation Olive Branch – Growing Turkish assertiveness in Syria. I argue that deteriorating US-Turkey relations moved Turkey closer to Russia in this conflict and that the growing influence of 'Eurasianists' and Russia-friendly actors after the 2016 post-coup purge facilitated and encouraged alignment with Russia.

Chapter 5 analyzes how Turkey adapted its security policies in the Black Sea region after the 2014 Crimea annexation, when Russia's changed the military balance of power. I cover Turkey's unsuccessful attempts to build regional institutions before and after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and its political response to the Crimea annexation. Next, I highlight Russian military developments and Turkey's military response. I suggest Turkey preferred a moderate NATO presence (in accordance with the Montreux Convention), sought to strengthen bilateral and regional security mechanisms and continued to upgrade its domestic defense industry. Lastly, I argue Turkey's high accommodation of Russia in the energy sphere poses numerous risks to its energy security and argues that the TurkStream pipeline hampers Ankara's long-term goal of becoming an energy hub.

Chapter 6 discusses my findings' implications for Turkey's role as a Western security partner. I argue that NATO will remain the foundation of Ankara's security portfolio in the foreseeable future and that Russia can only be one among several security partners. In the long term, Turkey must balance and cannot bandwagon with Russia as a rational actor.

Chapter 7 provides a conclusion and suggests areas for further research.

2   Theoretical framework

Stephen Walt's book Origins of Alliances (1987) constitutes the thesis' theoretical foundation. It helps us understand the origins of Turkey's NATO membership and how post-Soviet developments altered its position in NATO. Establishing a theoretical foundation for the Turkey-NATO-Russia triangle enables us to generate empirical expectations and subsequently compare these with our empirical findings. In this chapter, I present general empirical expectations, whereas in chapter 4 and 5, I present case-specific theoretical expectations before evaluating their explanatory power.

Firstly, I discuss states' tendency to balance versus bandwagon and outline the four threat levels. I then discuss the theory's benefits and limitations and propose an adaptation of the book's context (written under the Cold War) to better fit today's alliance structures. Next, I ground Turkey-NATO-Russia relations in a historical context. I elaborate on ideology's role on alliance formation, "asymmetry of dependence" and "asymmetry of motivation" to better understand Turkey's deeply ingrained role in NATO and relatively high dependence on US security assistance.

In addition to the balance of threat theory, I employ Allison's three conceptual models as a loose theoretical framework. I mainly analyze Turkey as a rational, unified actor with coherent interests, and supplement this model with organizational and personal factors, whereby President Erdogan is the main actor. Combining these theories, we now have a theoretical foundation and a framework for analyzing Ankara's foreign policy. To better understand how to use Allison's framework in practice, I include arguments from Arild Underdal's article (1984) *Can We, in the Study of International Politics, do without the Model of the State as a Rational, Unitary Actor?*

2.1   Stephen Walt (1987) as theoretical foundation

Stephen Walt modifies Kenneth Waltz' (1979) balance of power theory (which claims that states mainly form alliances to balance against the stronger state to curtail its power) and argues that four levels of threat decide whether a state will bandwagon (ally with a threat) or balance

(ally against a threat): (1) Aggregate power[15] (2) Geographic proximity (3) Offensive power[16] (4) and Aggressive intentions[17] (pp. 21-25). Walt asserts that external threats constitute the main cause of international alliances (p. 148) and that «balancing behavior is far more common than bandwagoning behavior" (p. 161). Bandwagoning is usually confined to "weak and isolated states" with no alternative alliance partners, whereas regional powers rarely bandwagon with an adjacent great power, which appears to fit the case of Turkey (p. 263). Further, regional states mainly concentrate about their local interests and neglect the global power balance (pp. 164-165). The theory offers a solid foundation for why alliances form assuming that states largely seek protection from regional threats.

The theory's outdated context (1987) poses several challenges for this thesis and requires some modifications. After the Cold War, the US emerged as the only superpower and no longer needed to compete against the Soviet Union (henceforth the Soviet) for allies in every region of the world. Although Russia is not a superpower, one can assume that US/NATO-Russia rivalry and tensions between the West and Russia (after the 2014 Crimea annexation) are relevant for this thesis. External rivalry not directly affecting Turkey's security interests may not necessarily impact its approach toward Russia, both militarily and politically. As regional threats constitute Turkey's main concern, it should perceive threats in other regions as less important.

Alliance dynamics are also likely to have changed since 1987. Walt's theory suggests the options of balancing or bandwagoning. Yet, as the world is no longer polarized between two main blocs, states may not necessarily choose among one or another ally. Indeed, the thesis set to explain that Turkey seeks to diversify its security policies and reduce reliance on the US to enhance its security and autonomy. The theory cannot explain the concept of security diversification. Thus, analyzing the context is crucial. The assumption is that we move toward a more multilateral system where US security assistance can no longer be taken for granted, particularly in the MENA region. Consequently Turkey may choose to hedge its bets more carefully than under the Cold War.

Although Walt's theory applies to threats posed by *states*, I find it necessary to include a state-non-state actor relationship in the case of Syria because Turkey perceives the Kurdish

---

[15] Soviet's combined resources (military, industrial and technological capabilities and population) (p. 22).
[16] Soviet's ability to threaten Turkey's "sovereignty or territorial integrity" (p. 24).
[17] Perception of intent. More important than power itself.

YPG/PKK as the main security threat and IS as a secondary threat. Although the government would prefer to exterminate rather than balance these non-state actors, the four threat levels aggregate power, offensive capabilities, aggressive intentions and geographical proximity likely constitute important factors in Ankara's threat assessments. Changes in one or several of these may alter Turkey's behavior and initiate military responses, as I will demonstrate in chapter 4.

2.1.1 Origins of Turkey's NATO membership: Balancing the Soviet threat

Historically, Turkey possessed relatively friendly ties with the Soviet from its founding in 1923 until 1945 (Tufekci, 2017, p. 80). However, after World War II, the Soviet increasingly displayed offensive power and aggressive intentions toward Turkey. It sought increased power in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean and attempted to militarize the Turkish Straits. They mobilized troops in the Balkans (including Bulgaria) and put major diplomatic pressure on Turkey to accept its presence along the Straits (Trachtenberg, 1999, pp. 36-37). Consequently, the US feared the Soviet would conduct a new fait accompli by invading Turkey and the Turkish Straits akin to its invasion of Eastern Europe. Hence, the US increasingly perceived it necessary to contain Soviet expansionism in Turkey's neighborhood (pp. 38, 41). The Straits incident helped trigger the Truman Doctrine (1947), which ensured Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952. Turkey subsequently became an important anti-communist front and counter-weight to Soviet presence in the Mediterranean (Toucas, 2017).

Proximity of threat

As a large territorial country with NATO as a potential alliance partner, balancing the Soviet threat rather than bandwagoning with it constituted the most attractive option for Turkey. This supports Walt's argument that states, to a large degree, choose whether to balance or bandwagon based on availability of allies (p. 30-31) and that "regional powers clearly have good reason to fear their neighbors" (p. 164). Turkey's proximity to Soviet territory— separated only by the Black Sea—thus constituted a major reason to balance against it. Incidentally, the Soviet overestimated its belief in bandwagoning. Hence, its pressure on Turkey not to join NATO backlashed and moved Turkey closer to the West (pp. 19-20). Thus, one may interpret the post-WW2 'conquest' for Turkey as a competition of influence, part of the global balance of power that would settle the West-East demarcation lines (Trachtenberg, 1999 p. 40). Yet, Turkey perceived the Soviet's proximity and regional offensive power as the most threatening.

Turkey always held a special role in NATO's nuclear weapons strategy. From 1953-1960, the US' main security strategy[18] involved 'encircling' Soviet territory through NATO allies that would "form a paper barrier so that any movement outward by Russia or its satellites, by breaking the paper, would trigger the trip-wire circuit that hurled America's nuclear retaliatory power on the Soviet homeland" (Quigley, 1966/2004, p. 1088). Turkey contributed to this strategy through its membership in NATO.

However, a major shift occurred after 1960 when the Soviet and the US developed capabilities to strike "directly at each other" rather than using third countries such as Turkey to deliver nuclear bombs (p. 1089). Turkey's role during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis is especially important for the US-Turkey relationship. The US withdrew its Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviet withdrawing its missiles from Cuba. Although the deal likely prevented nuclear war, Ankara perceived the US as "selling out one of its allies to serve its own interests" (Tufekci, 2017, p. 80). Nonetheless, Turkey's rare role of storing US nuclear weapons at the Incirlik Air Base in Adana continues into present day (Reif, 2017).[19] Further, the Cyprus incidents of 1964 and 1974 (US imposition of an arms embargo on Turkey after it invaded Cyprus) "fostered Turkish sentiments of betrayal and abandonment" and highlighted the need to pursue a more independent foreign policy and develop its domestic defense industry (Tufekci, p. 82). Underlying anti-US suspicion has since persisted.

Post-Cold War developments

After the Cold War, the Soviet threat seceded and Russia posed a relatively low threat to Turkey. The absence of a common 'enemy' for NATO prompted Turkey to build new alliances, which led to strengthened relations with Russia (Tufekci, 2017). It also sought greater involvement politically and culturally in its nearby regions such as Central Asia and the Caucasus and showed a growing interest in 'Eurasianism' (discussed in 4.3).[20] The implication was that Turkey maintained membership in an organization whose main purpose had disappeared, prompting NATO to reformulate its purpose. Not until the Russia-Georgia War of August 2008 did Turkish perceptions of Russia start to change (see section 5.3). As the literature review suggested, Turkey perceived the Ukraine conflict (2014) as a conflict between

---

[18] "Massive retaliation" of nuclear weapons rather than "containment" through military build-ups.

[19] Part of NATO's nuclear sharing program in Europe (with Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany).

[20] In Turkey, Eurasianism manifests itself through Islam, neo-Ottomanism and nationalism. Not to be confused with Russia's form of Eurasianism as promoted by Aleksandr Dugin.

Russia and the West, particularly the EU. Consequently, it limited its balancing toward Russia to maintain good relations even after the threat level from Russia increased.

2.1.2 Application of the balancing and bandwagoning terms

The 'bandwagoning' label may be misleading in the case of Turkey, as increased cooperation with Russia may not necessarily mean a realignment from NATO. I mainly employ the term 'accommodation'. Turkey accommodates Russia to certain degrees, but it does not 'bandwagon' in the sense Walt employs the term (joining one alliance over another). Yet, In the Syrian case, I argue the question of bandwagoning is relevant and thus investigate whether Turkey did in fact bandwagon with Russia in this conflict.

Balancing may occur either through political and/or military means (p. 149). The degree to which these two manifest themselves in Turkey's security policies toward Russia appears relevant for the empirical analysis. Perception of intentions is also relevant for the analysis, as a sense of exclusion by the West increasingly appears to bind Turkey and Russia together: "As perceptions of intent change, either the direction or the intensity of balancing behavior should change as well" (p. 168). Given that Turkey increasingly perceives the US' intentions negatively, relatively favorable Turkish attitudes toward Russia may partially explain growing security cooperation since 2016. However, since intentions are hard to determine, balancing constitutes the safer response (p. 180). Hence, Turkey may balance both militarily and politically to counter prevalent threats and uncertainties regarding Russian intentions.

Walt also stresses that states may form both formal and informal alliances (p. 12). Formally, Turkey's membership in NATO prompts it to follow Article 5, which stipulates that "an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies" ("Collective defence, 2017"). Hence, joining other alliances contradicting this commitment remains out of the question and would be self-contradicting. However, Turkey may also join security alliances with other countries including Russia, if only temporarily. The benefit would be that "Joining the weaker side [Russia] increases the new member's [Turkey's] influence within the alliance, because the weaker side has greater need for assistance" (Walt, p. 19). Hence, Turkey's closer ties with Russia after mid-2016 may increase its influence in regional decisions (including in Syria).

2.1.3 Role of ideology

Walt argues that most states are actually "relatively indifferent to ideological considerations" (p. 40). An insecure state tends to base its alliances on pragmatic rather than ideological considerations (p. 39). Thus, during times of high security risks, Turkey should build alliances mainly based on pragmatic considerations. Conversely, "the more secure a state perceives itself to be, the greater the impact of ideology on alliance choices" (p. 40). When Turkey perceives itself safer, it should care more about ideological considerations.

I argue the role of ideology is relevant in two instances: In the Syrian case where Turkey tried to install a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government and lead the Arab Spring. I show how the AKP's priorities went from an ideologically-driven foreign policy (allowing foreign fighters to pour into Syria to fight Assad) to a risk-mitigating policy to secure the border, combat non-state actors and reduce terror threats. Secondly, ideology appears relevant at the end of chapter 6 when I briefly discuss the West's interactions with Turkey's new political system, which may seem to move closer to Russia's.

2.1.4 Asymmetry of dependence and motivation

Asymmetry of dependence constitutes an underlying issue throughout the thesis. It helps understand how Turkey's foreign policy is pulled by two asymmetrical relationships: With the US/NATO in the security sphere and with Russia in energy and trade. Firstly, Turkey is deeply ingrained into NATO's command and weapons architecture through its relationship with the US. Although Walt claims, "(…) foreign aid plays a relatively minor role in alliance formation," he asserts it creates some dependency, especially in long-term balancing coalitions (p. 45). Specifically, the greater a donor's monopoly on a commodity and "asymmetry of dependence", the more leverage it has over the donor. Applying this to the Turkey-US relationship, Turkey's relatively high dependence on US arms and technology likely sustains high US leverage and may partially explain Turkey's efforts to develop its indigenous defense industry.[21] Conversely, "if alternative sources are available, leverage will be significantly reduced," which may involve weapons deals with Russia, including the S-400 air defense system (p. 43). Moreover, Turkey's

---

[21] Turkey seeks to become self-sufficient in arms procurement by 2023, obtain its own missile technology and become a net weapons exporter as part of its military modernization efforts ("Turkey Builds a," 2017).

relatively high dependence on Russia through energy and trade may constrain its options within their relationship (highlighted in the Black Sea chapter).

Conversely, "asymmetry of motivation" (issues of high concern to Turkey) likely benefits Turkey because "when the recipient [Turkey] cares more about a particular issue, the supplier's [the US'] ability to influence the recipient is reduced" (p. 44). Asymmetry of motivation is relevant in the theoretical discussions of both chapter 4 and 5. In Syria, Turkey conducted unilateral military actions against the YPG, which the US strongly supported. Moreover, Turkey sought to expel the YPG from the Astana peace process, which Russia opposed. In the Black Sea, protection of Crimean Tatars (following the Crimea annexation) could be an asymmetry of motivation in addition to upholding the Montreux Convention (chapter 5), which constitutes Turkey's greatest security concern.

Attractive alliance

In addition to Walt's theory, a general notion of NATO's endurance contributes to the empirical discussion. In his book *Why NATO Endures*, Wallace Thies (2009) contends that NATO distinguishes itself from pre-WW2 alliances because it promotes long-term commitments and cooperation beyond short-term nationalistic, military goals. He claims NATO possesses certain "self-healing tendencies" as

> members who disagree at present are unlikely to push those disagreements too far because they don't want to jeopardize (1) their relations with the members that are not much involved in the latest intra-NATO spat, and (2) the uncontroversial parts of their relationship with those whom they disagree" (p. 20).

For Turkey's case, this argument may imply that despite its numerous disagreements with other NATO countries (including Greece over Cyprus and islands in the Aegean Sea) and the US over the YPG in Syria, it remains in the alliance because overall it considers NATO an asset (Korzun, 2017). The cases will draw fine distinction between Ankara's approach to NATO and the US (elaborated on in 6.2).

This chapter's historical accounts find that the Turkey-US relationship has proven highly resilient, overcoming severe challenges. This may partially explain Turkey's continued NATO membership. Moreover, Ankara's asymmetrical relations with the US and Russia may limit its room for maneuver in foreign policy, fueling its need for autonomy.

2.2 Allison & Zelikow (1999) as methodological framework

I have shown that Walt's balance of threat theory provides a geopolitical explanation for Turkey's balancing/bandwagoning response toward Russia. However, in assuming the state as a rational actor it falls short of explaining internal political factors. Given that, I employ Allison's three conceptual models as a loose framework to improve the thesis' explanatory power. Actor-oriented and organizational factors will be revealed by the two cases' unique contexts and therefore take an *inductive* approach. Minimal operationalization is thus the preferred choice.

I now present relevant challenges of this theoretical framework and suggest modifications. I then use comments from Underdal (1984) to generate expectations for the models' performance.

2.2.1 Relevant challenges

Due to aforementioned time and space limitations, understanding Turkey's entire political situation and government structure remains beyond this thesis' scope. Analyzing Turkey's form of government may require certain modifications (due to a more centralized and hierarchical structure than in the US, which constituted Allison's focus). A solution may be to identify foreign policy-relevant actors and organizational forces in Ankara, including their political preferences and respective influence. The fact that Turkey remained under a state of emergency since July 20, 2016 also suggests organizations' influence remains weakened and prone to higher executive control.

Inevitably, limited available data on foreign policy decisions (due to confidentiality and reliance on English-written sources) place restrictions on how far I may identify nuances within government decisions. The goal is to provide a fruitful explanation of Turkey's foreign policy given the amount of available information and by relying on context. Finding direct connections between domestic and foreign policy decisions will not be possible, but the available data can be used to identify valuable clues of what drives Ankara's decisions. Below I present Allison's three models through which I will conduct my analysis.

2.2.2 Rational Choice (Model 1)

This thesis primarily treats Turkey as a rational, unified actor conducting foreign policy through coherent interests and goals. The state is a value-maximizer choosing actions whose benefits outweigh costs (Allison & Zelikow, p. 25). Ankara constitutes an "agent" with "one set of perceived choices, and a single estimate of the consequences that follow from each of the consequences" (p. 24). It faces "threats and opportunities" (challenges) in its neighborhood, which trigger certain actions. Ankara thus considers its goals and objectives, alternative options to achieve these, their potential consequences and subsequently chooses the best perceived choice.

Performance expectations

In general, the model may provide a sufficient explanation when analyzing "national consensual issues," including high-ranking threats and low-prioritized issues (Underdal, 1984, pp. 76-77). Conversely, for "controversial, subgroups issues" (cases where several political factions compete), organizational and actor-oriented models may hold higher explanatory power. Further, rational choice is superior in terms of generating general propositions and performs well with regards to "parsimony," explaining a phenomenon with relatively little amount of data (pp. 73-74). Yet, as Underdal (1984) notes, in practice we refer to "imperfect rationality", meaning Ankara in fact only considers "a subset of all available options" among which it "typically neglects some of the possible consequences" (p. 65). This limitation will be particularly highlighted in the case of Syria, when Ankara's foreign policy initially displayed major organizational deficits.

2.2.3 Organizational Behavior (Model 2)

Although the rational choice model may suffice on broad, consensual issues, the 2016 coup attempt revealed a state deeply fragmented. Organizational factors (including civil-military relations) and competing government factions challenge the assumption of a unitary actor and invite alternative explanations for Turkey's foreign policy. Most importantly, the intertwined link between the PKK threat domestically and the YPG in Syria makes it necessary to take into consideration domestic political developments.

Compared to the US, "there is no clear separation of powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary," making Ankara prone to informal decision making (Waldman & Caliskan, 2016,

p. 4). President Erdogan may unequally (vis-a-vis other officials) influence decisions across the bureaucracy, particularly under the state of emergency since July 20, 2016. The Presidential system set for implementation in June 2018 substantially increases the president's powers vis-à-vis parliament and enables increased control over the military and defense procurement.

Civil-military relations is a key aspect for Turkey's security policies. The military's declining political power under the AKP government constituted the most significant development since the Turkish Republic's foundation in 1923 (Waldman & Caliskan, 2016 p. 1). It enabled a more active foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East (p. 15-16). I will demonstrate that the changes in civil-military relations after the post-coup purge lowered the threshold for the AKP to conduct unilateral military operations, emanating in Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) (2016) and Operation Olive Branch (2018) in Syria.

Furthermore, several political forces and interest groups impact Ankara's foreign policies, including powerful business interests and ethnic communities (highlighted in 5.4). Moreover, the split between Gulenists and AKP supporters in 2013 highlighted inherent rivalry within the state and indeed a "parallel state" structure where Gulenists allegedly infiltrated institutions and worked against the state's interests (Waldman & Caliskan, 2016, p. 63). Detailed information about these factions are largely unavailable and may be unnecessary to answer the research questions. However, reading the context and superficially assessing organizational changes' impact on foreign policy may be useful. While organizational forces largely remain in the thesis' background, they must be acknowledged.

Performance expectations

During relatively stable political conditions, we should expect incremental changes in Turkey's foreign policy. However, severe crises often prompt major organizational changes (Allison & Zelikow, p. 172). Turkey's state of emergency and post-coup purge since July 2016 may trigger personnel change, redefined missions, capacities and responsibilities, which may create a new culture. The purge of alleged Gulenists and pro-Western elements reshuffled the state and security apparatuses in favor of loyal AKP supporters and Eurasianists. Consequently, the government may increasingly conduct foreign policy without considering the Gulenists' Western-orientation, facilitating growing cooperation with Russia.

26

2.2.4 Governmental Politics (Model 3)

One layer above the organizational model is the actor-oriented approach. Organizations' leaders are players "in a central, competitive game," which impact foreign policy decisions and often "produce a result, or better a resultant distinct from what any person or group intended" (pp. 255-256). Consequently, certain policies may derive from a multitude of preferences and perceived consequences, which may sometime trigger ad hoc policies. According to Allison, "most players 'represent' a department or agency along with the interests and constituencies their organization serves," prompting actors to perceive issues through different degrees of importance (p. 256). In Turkey's case, such 'representativeness' may need a modification. Instead, we may assume that various actors represent religious and political networks seeking to align with Erdogan's interests to obtain influence, in turn granting Erdogan relatively high power. President Erdogan is the actor in focus due to his substantial control over foreign policy under the case studies' time frame. In a broader context, "it is not new for Turkish politics to be dominated by a single charismatic leader" (Waldman, 2016, p. 4). Consequently, the actor-oriented approach appears more relevant than Model 2 (though ambiguous differences may emerge).

The thesis should also identify Turkish officials' personal interests and goals as "presidents and senior appointees rarely fail to consider domestic political consequences of their choices" (Allison & Zelikow, p. 298). Erdogan seeks to "strengthen the state and shake off the remnants of military tutelage and other subversive forces" and "redress and correct what he and the AKP see as past injustices," including a 2008 closure case against the AKP on charges of anti-secularism (Waldman & Caliskan, 2016, p. 6). Consequently, Erdogan and the AKP face major political stakes that should impact Ankara's foreign policy. Retaining or losing power could mean the difference between being persecuted or not in Turkey.

Erdogan's approach to the Kurds, domestically and in Syria is particularly important, as this indirectly shapes relations with Russia and the US. Moreover, the case of Syria will reveal that the post-coup purge enabled Erdogan to reshuffle the government and security apparatuses as a tool to consolidate power. However, "Erdogan" and "Turkey" are sometimes used in different settings, as I approach Turkey's foreign policy both through rational choice (unified actor with coherent interests) and through President Erdogan's power politics and personal interests. Such approach mitigates the risk of conducting the fallacy of 'reductio ad Erdoganum,' "explaining Ankara's every single choice in terms of Erdogan's personality traits" (Kadercan, 2017).

3   Methodological approach

This chapter presents my research methods, data collection and related challenges. Namely, comparative case study, congruence method and process-tracing, document analysis and semi-structured interviews. I base the literature on leading scholars within methodological approaches, including Gerring (2004), George & Bennett (2005) and Bryman (2016). I argue that case study constitutes the thesis' research design whereas my theoretical framework (outlined in chapter 2) points to congruence method, which I combine with process-tracing to mitigate the risk of spurious causal mechanisms.

3.1   Comparative case study

Gerring (2004) defines case study "as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (p. 342). Turkey thus constitutes the unit under analysis in which Syria and the Black Sea region constitute the two cases (N=2). This case study serves a dual purpose: To represent a "bounded phenomenon" (Turkey's foreign policy) and its particularities and to make generalizations about it (external validity).

With its unique geopolitical challenges, one cannot directly transfer Turkey's foreign policy to other countries. The issue of representativeness poses a challenge to generalization because "one cannot assume that the behavior of one unit [Turkey] will be indicative of the behavior of other units" (Gerring, 2004, p. 348). Undoubtedly, external validity usually constitutes the weakest part of a case study as causal mechanisms vary over time, space and location. However, establishing "contingent generalizations" implies findings may apply to other countries in a similar position as Turkey (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 32). Hence, contingent generalizations mitigate the risk of 'overgeneralizing'. Although this thesis constitutes a small N study, it may extend its validity to similar cases, though this requires further case studies of other countries with similar traits as Turkey.

At the very least, Turkey represents a major challenge for NATO. Its relatively high accommodation of Russia may challenge NATO's—if not coherence—ability to project influence along its southern and southeastern flanks. However, this phenomenon has limited room of representativeness since NATO only comprises 29 members and contains a unique historical degree of institutionalism as the only military alliance with an integrated peace time

command structure. It is therefore reasonable to seek a broader representation than just an internal challenge for NATO.

What Turkey may represent is an emerging middle power that seeks to diversify its security policies and alliance partners to increase its security and autonomy. Its long-term challenge is to 'punch above its weight,' meaning to release its full potential as a regional actor. However, its middle power activism struggles with "a major mismatch between ambitions and capabilities," including over-interventionism abroad (Öniş & Kutlay, 2016, p. 15). In the process, Turkey encounters significant domestic political challenges. The broader context is a growing expectation from the US that its allies increasingly must provide for their own security amid a declining role of the US in the MENA region in favor of its 'pivot to Asia' to contain China. We are thus analyzing a certain type of country (an emerging middle power) in a changing international context (decline of US hegemony in favor of a more multilateral system).

3.2   Congruence method and process-tracing

Chapter 2 generated theoretical expectations from Walt's balance of threat theory, including Turkey's balancing/bandwagoning behavior toward Russia, the role of ideology, asymmetry of dependence and motivation. The goal is to evaluate how well balance of threat can explain the two cases' empirical findings. This approach indicates congruence-method (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 181). Rather than tracing a 'causal process' from 'independent' to 'dependent' variable, it tests "congruity": similarities in the relative strength and duration of hypothesized causes [threat perception] and observed effects [balancing behavior]" (pp. 182-183). With a high level of congruity, one may assume a form of causal relationship exists (p. 181). Yet, "researchers must guard against unjustified, questionable imputation of a causal relationship on the basis of mere consistency" (p. 183). For my research, this would entail uncritically assuming a causal connection between Turkey's balancing behavior toward Russia and changes in Walt's four threat levels. Turkey's attempts to play a multidimensional foreign policy and maintain good relations with Russia may impact its balancing behavior. Moreover, Turkey's policies toward Russia may be due to other factors than threat perceptions. Hence, "dramatic effects" do not necessarily preclude "dramatic causes." The theoretical discussions of chapter 5 and 6 evaluate the level of congruity and provide an explanation of "unexplained variance" in Turkey's balancing behavior (p. 183).

To mitigate this risk of spurious causal relationships, I may combine congruence method with process-tracing to establish a 'causal chain' (p. 183). Analyzing events in Turkey's neighborhood over time and their impact on foreign policy indicates process-tracing (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 183). The assumption is that several factors, when combined, trigger certain policies (p. 206). Following *processes* thus helps answering the question of "why" Turkey and Russia increased security cooperation since mid-2016. Process tracing is particularly relevant for the case of Syria, where new and severe events occur frequently, to which Ankara must respond. Parallel to the writing, I plot a time-line where I insert key events by month and year, providing a comprehensive picture. I also summarize my findings for the Syrian case by including key domestic, geopolitical and regional developments (see Appendix B). Conversely, the Black Sea region case (chapter 5) tends toward a congruence method, both in observed content and argument. This chapter is mainly concerned about Turkey's approach to Russia politically, militarily and in the energy sphere in accordance with changes in Walt's four threat levels. It is less sensitive to changes over time, with few exceptions: Its relations with Russia after the fighter jet incident in Syria and after the July 2016 coup attempt.

Validity

Validity concerns "the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research" (Bryman, 2016, p. 41). While we made claims of representativeness in 3.2, the case study's internal validity should be considerably stronger. Strong internal validity pertains to the degree my analysis meaningfully explains Turkey's security policies toward the US, NATO and Russia and henceforth Turkey's role as a Western security partner. Our focus is on "causal mechanisms" rather than "causal effects" and "descriptive inferences" rather than "causal relationships," which in-depth analysis facilitates (Gerring, 2004, p. 349). The (somewhat) normative aspects of identifying causal mechanisms in international relations constitutes a major challenge for reliability. In other words, falsifying or testing my claims would not be easy. Instead, my findings should largely be judged through their descriptive inferences' reasonableness and logical cohesion.

Assessing the thesis' congruence validity, George and Bennett argue that the researcher must address, "spuriousness, causal priority and causal depth" (p. 186). Moreover, the issue of "equifinality" ("many alternative causal paths to the same outcome") constitutes a challenge for process tracing (2005, p. 10). For my cases, these challenges could mean granting certain variables to much explanatory power or focusing on the wrong aspects when explaining

Turkey's growing preference for Russia over the US in Syria. Combining Walt's theory and Allison's three conceptual models with interviews should partially mitigate this challenge due to the broad overview and knowledge gained through the process. The theoretical evaluations (of chapter 4 and 5) also discuss potential relations between variables and their relative explanatory power. Counterfactual comments are sometimes used to suggest how some events could have turned out differently under other conditions.

Having established the research methods, I now present my data collection methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

3.3   Document analysis

A qualitative analysis of observed data is needed to answer the research questions. Document analysis enables a thorough evaluation of related research, both through primary and secondary sources (English). The key is to triangulate the sources and cross-check them with other sources to verify their validity and trustworthiness. I scrutinize the sources and the authors behind them and seek to obtain relatively high quality analyses that can shed light on my research questions.

Online news articles constitute a major part of this thesis, particularly for recent events in Syria where limited scholarly material exist. News articles require major scrutiny and fact checking, especially from media outlets with a high degree of government inference (likely to influence the content). In some instances, certain events may only be covered by one or few newspapers, so availability may be a selection criteria and hence a selection bias.

In general, the research process finds that Turkish media cannot be relied on as an independent source of news due to its high levels of state propaganda, and that Ankara—not surprisingly— tends to exaggerate its own performance and generally frames its policies in a relatively favorable way. Ankara's official explanations are therefore deliberately downplayed. As with Turkish news articles, they are used parsimoniously and primarily to front the government's position on specific issues. Furthermore, I use some first-hand sources including official texts and press releases by NATO, the US, Turkey and to a lesser degree Russia. I mostly obtain these through their official websites. While these sources front the actors' positions and perspectives, their specific meaning may require expert knowledge.

News articles do not provide much analysis in of themselves. Yet, taking multiple articles in conjunction with one another (by month and year) allows for process tracing. Scholarly articles, reports, policy briefs, risk analyses, blogs etc. by leading analysts and acclaimed research institutions can be used to interpret events and trends. Yet, uncertainty regarding actors' intentions and what their actions mean in a broader context constitutes an underlying methodological issue. As the Syrian civil war endures and its stakes are unsettled, information and evidence may emerge afterwards that provide different stories or explanations. This thesis can at best offer an up-to-date account of available information and analyses up to April 2018. The thesis' broad source application should provide relatively strong reliability and validity. I refer to scholars and analysts from several regions, including the Middle East, Turkey, Europe, Russia, the US and Europe. Consequently, the broad expertise knowledge offers a wide range of perspectives, providing me a deeper understanding of Turkish foreign policy. Researchers writing a similar thesis asking the same research questions may end up with similar findings. Although a lot of the content requires a high degree of subjective interpretation (particularly application of the theoretical framework), my findings can, to a large extent, be traced.

3.4   Semi-structured interviews

In addition to document analysis, I conducted six semi-structured interviews in Istanbul and Ankara in Turkey and subsequently one additional Skype interview in Oslo (January 15-19, 2018). I did this according to the 'Chatham House Rule' (presenting the content without disclosing my respondents' identity). The interview guide is included in Appendix A. While minimal details about my respondents may impact reliability, other researchers may obtain similar perspectives by interviewing elite persons of similar positions in Turkey and/or reading analyses on Turkey online.

My respondents included professors, think-tank representatives and diplomatic circles, mainly chosen upon recommendations from third parties. These actors may have some impact on Turkish foreign policy, or at least possess broad knowledge about the government's workings and/or have contacts within the government. I sought to gain various perspectives on Turkey's security policies, expand my knowledge of the topic and grasp what topics and events they considered important. Semi-structured interviews allow a relatively high degree of flexibility as one can change the questions' order and wording as well as ask follow-up questions that

depart from the initial interview guide (Bryman, 2016, p. 467). My interviews combined open-ended questions with more case-specific questions related to Syria and the Black Sea region.

Interviewing elite persons involves several challenges. Elite persons include those occupying a position of special interest and may therefore promote or represent a specific view or political agenda rather than attempt to provide a balanced and nuanced analysis. Furthermore, they may wish to 'set the agenda' and direct attention to their specific interest areas, thereby eclipsing attention from other topics. As Aberbach & Rockman (2002) argue, "Elites especially—but other highly educated people as well—do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions. They prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think" (p. 674). In my case, respondents tried to offer a coherent historical account of Turkish foreign policy, which calls to attention several important topics and events and provides a broader understanding of the issue. Additionally, I asked more closed-ended questions to obtain deeper insights that could not necessarily be found through document analysis.

My respondents mainly represented a Western-leaning perspective.[22] They perceived Turkey as fundamentally anchored in NATO and as having a Western-oriented foreign and security policy. Yet, their perceptions of the AKP government varied greatly explaining Turkish foreign policy through different prisms. Generally, government-leaning actors tended to downplay the role of the AKP and President Erdogan in Turkey's entrapment in Syria and preferred to explain policies through the rational choice model and geopolitical factors. Conversely, more government-critical actors often emphasized internal political developments, organizational and actor-oriented factors. Thus, striking a balance between these perspectives constituted a methodological challenge. However, combining these perspectives contributed to my argument that Turkey seeks increased autonomy, security and regional power status, but along the way, meets significant political challenges that prevent long-term rational choices.

Comparing my respondents' answers provided a relatively good overview of 'competing realities' that required a thorough evaluation when writing this thesis. I fact-checked and validated the claims through source triangulation (document analysis). Overall, this interview process offered a complimentary perspective by pooling together and subsequently analyzing the various perspectives to make sense of the topic.

---

[22] My respondents did not include Eurasianists, those who seek closer ties with Russia or would like to cut or reduce ties with NATO. Eurasianists' potential impact on Turkish foreign policy is discussed in chapter 4.

4 Turkey's involvement in Syria (2011-2018)

'The one who falls in water even embraces the snake'

- Turkish proverb

This chapter discusses Turkey's role in the Syrian civil war in context of interactions with the US, NATO and Russia. First, I present my argument. Then, I outline the sub-chapters supporting the argument. Subsequently, I derive theoretical expectations for the case before conducting the analysis. Lastly, I assess the theory's explanatory power.

4.1 The argument

I argue that growing Turkey-Russia cooperation in Syria since mid-2016 is mainly due to deteriorating Turkey-US relations and the post-coup purge. The context is the decline of US leadership in the Middle East in and Russia's emergence as a prominent actor in the region. Whereas Turkey sought US military support to topple Assad, the US focused on combating IS by supporting the YPG. Ankara perceived this support as detrimental to its national security and had to find alternative security partners. While both the US and Russia provided support to the YPG, Russia emerged as a more pragmatic partner by letting Turkey use Syrian airspace for military operations (which it controlled since November 2015). Turkey's need for risk mitigation therefore made rapprochement and subsequently alignment with Russia a necessary condition. Yet, without a steady partner and emerging security threats toward its borders, Turkey must increasingly rely on unilateral military actions to contain the YPG and crush Kurdish separatism.

Domestically, Erdogan's power consolidation and the rise of Russia-friendly officials (after mid-2016) facilitated growing cooperation with Russia. The 2016 post-coup purge enabled Erdogan to expel pro-Western elements and stack government institutions and security apparatuses with loyal AKP-supporters and Eurasianists, who supported increased cooperation with Russia vis-a-vis the US. They facilitated and likely expedited the rapprochement with Russia, triggering a diplomatic realignment. Moreover, developments in civil-military relations reduced resistance within the military to unilateral operations in Syria. Consequently, balance

of threat largely explains the underlying geopolitical reason for Turkey's growing cooperation with Russia whereas Allison's conceptual models identify the driving forces and triggers behind Ankara's turn toward Russia.

Chapter outline

To support my argument, I discuss four sub-chapters: (1) *From 'zero problems' to major problems: Entrapment in the anti-Assad camp* (2) *Two-front war against IS and the YPG* (3) *Astana Peace Talks with Russia and Iran (4) Operation Olive Branch – Growing Turkish Assertiveness in Syria.* The basis for understanding the civil war's dynamics is Christopher Phillips's book International Rivalry in the New Middle East (2016). Moreover, I draw on knowledge from long-term observation of the civil war within the media, findings from my literature review, political analyses and interviews in Turkey. The aim is to capture the most relevant issues regarding Turkey's involvement in Syria, using the two theoretical frameworks.

Each sub-chapter serves a purpose. They partly overlap in terms of time frame, but can roughly be read as a historical narrative. The first one maps out Turkey's, the US' and Russia's position on regime change, Ankara's expectations of US military support and the importance and limitations of NATO assistance. The second sub-chapter discusses Turkey's two-front war against the YPG and IS and how it affected relations with the US and Russia. It also evaluates how domestic developments in 2015-2016 helped shape this two-front war and facilitated growing cooperation with Russia. The third one discusses the outcomes, limitations and prospects of the Russian-led Astana peace talks and the last category highlights Turkey's increasingly assertive posture in Syria through its Operation Olive Branch campaign (January 20- March 18, 2018), which triggered a diplomatic stand-off with the US and coincided with growing US-Russia rivalry over the shaping of post-conflict Syria.

The following section presents the theoretical expectations for the Syria case followed by analysis and assessment of the theory's explanatory power.

4.2   Theoretical expectations

Growing instability in Syria and eruption of the civil war in 2011/2012 should trigger a balancing response from Turkey, either politically and/or militarily. Firstly, Syria's adjacent

position to Turkey may increase the threat level along the border areas and prompt major refugee flows. Neglecting the conflict should therefore be an unlikely option.

As Turkey's perceptions of intent change, its balancing response should too. Specifically, if President Assad demonstrates increased aggressive intentions, Turkey should respond. Russia's military intervention in September 2015 in support of Assad against the Turkish-supported Free Syrian Army (FSA) and enhanced offensive power capabilities (ability to threaten Turkey's sovereignty) should also prompt balancing. Yet, if Turkey finds itself in a "weak and isolated" position with few or no alternative partners, it may decide to bandwagon to obtain some strategic gains. Changing perceptions of intent may also trigger realignment. Consequently, Turkey's alliance preferences may change throughout the war depending on how it perceives other actors' intentions.

During relatively peaceful times, Turkey should concern itself more with ideological considerations than during wartime and insecurity, when pragmatic interests set to gain prominence. Consequently, as the civil war deepens, Turkey should align with actors in a more pragmatic way. The commitment of its alliances could be either low, moderate or high and it could join several alliances, formal or informal.

Asymmetry of motivation (threats to Turkey's national security) should favor Turkey and allow it relatively high leeway in its foreign policy. In this area, the U.S and Russia should possess minimal leverage to alter Turkey's behavior. Conversely, asymmetry of dependence (in the security sphere) should favor NATO, and the US specifically, should Turkey need NATO support.

In general, interpreting Turkish actions on consensual issues (such as curtailing Kurdish separatism) through the unitary actor model should suffice. In addition to concern for national security threats, Turkish officials should consider their own interests, particularly if facing high political stakes. Consequently, they may prefer short and medium-term gains rather than long-term strategic considerations. Turkey's parliamentary elections of June and November 2015 and the 2016 post-coup purge may thus partially explain Erdogan's Syria policies. During emergency times, we should expect more swift changes in Ankara's foreign policy than under relatively normal conditions, facilitated by major organizational changes and increased executive control.

Lastly, Turkey should remain relatively indifferent toward any external rivalry. In this case, it would mean being indifferent to external actors using Syria as means to an end. However, it should care about the regional power of balance. As Turkey perceives the PKK/YPG as the greatest threat, it should seek to limit the group's regional power. This entails a consideration of the US' and Russia's interactions with the group, as these interactions may affect the regional balance of power. Moreover, Turkey's regional power status should, to a large extent, also drive its Syria policies as it has good reasons to limit the influence of other actors and balance their military capabilities for its own security.

4.3 From 'zero problems' to major problems: Entrapment in the anti-Assad camp

In his book the Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East, Christopher Phillips (2016) argues that the civil war was from the beginning primarily shaped by the international context rather than Syria's internal politics. Regional actors (Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Russia, the US and Saudi Arabia) competed for regional influence amid a shift from a US-dominated Middle East toward a "post-American Middle East." Their support for various armed groups with different political goals prolonged the civil war. Consequently, relatively 'moderate' opposition groups gradually radicalized as they competed for tactical and financial support from external powers. Hence, entrapment in the conflict became the norm. The notion of foreign states as central actors shaping domestic developments seems a reasonable point of departure into the analysis.

Fragile Turkey-Syria alliance

Understanding Turkey's relations with Russia and the US in Syria requires an assessment of the countries' respective interests and positions on regime change. A general understanding of Turkey's relations with Syria and position in the Arab World is crucial to understand why Turkey enters the Syrian conflict. Two trends emerge in the following sub-chapter: Major organizational deficits in Ankara and overambitious personal visions of installing a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government in Syria, which trapped Turkey in a quagmire.

Phillips (2016) argues that until 2011, the Turkey-Syrian alliance revolved around "economic, soft power and personal relationships" between President Erdogan and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (p. 72). Since the mid-2000s, they substantially increased cultural and diplomatic ties,

cooperation and trade. Thus, Turkey perceived Assad as a relatively low security threat and it seemed unthinkable that Ankara would start supporting armed opposition groups (lest Syria's historic record of housing PKK militants as political leverage against Turkey).[23]

After violent protests erupted in Deraa in southern Syria in March 2011, Turkey conducted mediation attempts to end Assad's violence against protesters and urged political reforms. This aligned with the AKP's 'Strategic Depth' doctrine of being a regional power broker. However, mediation efforts failed and Turkey severed bilateral ties in September 2011, triggering realignment (p. 72). Incidentally, "Turkey's leaders greatly overestimated their influence over and their understanding of Syria" and held insufficient leverage to pressure Assad to instigate political reforms, mainly due to his regime's high degree of nationalism (unbendable to Turkish pressure) and relatively stronger ties with other regimes, including Iran (pp.72-73). Consequently, Turkey's minor competence about Assad's regime may partially explain its diplomatic failures.

Turkey's main priority thereby shifted from a high degree of political accommodation into a balancing coalition against Assad's regime through proxy warfare by supporting the oppositional Free Syrian Army (FSA). Turkey's changing perceptions of intent played into this: "Politically, Ankara did not want to be seen siding with a murderous tyrant, either by its own population or by the Arab street" (Phillips, p. 71). Further, Erdogan's relatively high popularity in the Arab world encouraged him to "preserve this reputation" and ensure Turkey "remained on the right side of history" (p. 74).

The Arab Spring drives the AKP's regional power aspirations

Although Assad's 'murderous' image played a key role in Turkey's realignment, regional priorities constituted "the main driver" for ending relations with Assad. The AKP sought to install "like-minded popular moderate Islamist governments" during the Arab Spring, driven by then Prime Minister Erdogan's and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visions of regional power influence (Phillips, p. 74). Several of my respondents highlighted the installment of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) governments in Tunisia (2011), Libya and Egypt (2012) as key to Turkey's leadership during the Arab Spring (due to the MB's ideological affiliations with the

---

[23] Hafez al-Assad (Bashar al-Assad's father) used PKK militants as leverage against Turkey until 1998, almost triggering a war with Turkey. He then expelled the PKK, laying the foundation for a detente (Phillips, 2016, p. 36).

AKP). Yet, after these MB-led governments lost their power (military coup in Egypt), the regional optimism subdued. 'Losing Egypt's President Morsi in July 2013 meant the AKP lost its greatest fruit,' claimed a professor. 'It lost its regional leverage and became a marginal actor.' Consequently, Turkey's ideologically-driven regional aspirations significantly diminished after July 2013.

Diverging interests on regime change

By 2011, Turkey-US relations were improving under the Obama administration and both countries sought to topple Assad. Conversely, Russia strongly opposed regime change and military intervention from the beginning. It provided a "diplomatic shield" for Assad by blocking UN Security Council resolutions to avoid a Western-led intervention (Allison, 2013, p. 798). Putin consistently stressed international law based on sovereignty, reflecting "instrumental concerns about political legitimacy and state cohesion within Russia and its near neighborhood" (p. 796). Moreover, propping up Assad allowed Russia to counter regional US presence and enhance its great power status (Phillips, 2016, p. 219). Russia also saw historical affinity, material and strategic interests as underlying (though not primary) reasons for its pro-Assad stance (Allison, 2013). Considering Russia's interests, Ankara had little common ground with Russia. There was no obsession nor sympathy for 'Putinism' or his support for Assad.

Syria was indeed one among several conflicts where Russia's and Turkey's geopolitical preferences diverted. Russia strongly opposed the MB from gaining a predominant role in the Middle East, labelling it a 'terrorist' organization (Allison, 2013, p. 810). The MB's affiliates included Turkish-backed militant groups in Syria. Regionally, Russia's pro-Assad position converged with its "counterrevolutionary stance," such as supporting Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's military coup against Egypt's President Morsi in July 2013 (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 5). Yet, the Syrian conflict only indirectly affected Turkish-Russian relations until Russia intervened in September 2015 (Erşen, 2017). In this sense, Syria demonstrated that a major geopolitical disagreement did not significantly impact their close cooperation in other areas, including trade and energy.

Similar interests, diverting commitment

In contrast, the Syrian conflict early on reopened wounds in Turkey-US security relations, partly because Turkey relied on its role in NATO as a security receiver. On August 18, 2011, President Obama declared that Assad must "step aside" and implemented major sanctions against his regime. Obama's statement constituted a "game changer" and a "conflict escalator" as other regional actors based their Syrian policy upon expectation of US military intervention (Phillips, 2016, p. 76). To its disappointment, Ankara expected the US/NATO to follow up Obama's commitment by establishing a no-fly zone akin to NATO's Libya intervention (pp. 102-103). This expectation increased as the war escalated in 2012-2013. Turkish politicians urged patience among Syrian opposition groups for a potential US-led intervention, after Obama's re-election in November 2012 (p. 171). Yet, despite the Obama administration's announcement of a 'pivot to Asia', regional actors still perceived the US as the regional hegemon. However, Obama never intended to intervene: "To admit that would represent an unacceptable loss of regional prestige" (p. 82).

Obama's failure to enforce his 'red line' on chemical weapons in the summer of 2013 exacerbated US-Turkey relations. Ankara perceived the August 21 chemical attack in Ghouta outside Damascus as a highly sensitive issue that challenged its humanitarian agenda. According to one of my respondents, the Obama administration's failure to follow up his 'red line' in turn lent credibility to more radical groups who could highlight the international community's negligence against Assad. In September 2013, the US and Russia struck a deal to remove Assad's chemical weapons, which Ankara saw as an appeasement of Assad. Consequently, the deal significantly reduced the chances of potential US missile strikes against Assad or the imposition of a no-fly zone (Bechev & Hiltermann, 2017, p. 55). Moreover, Turkey fell out of favor with the US after the terror attack against the US consulate in Benghazi in Libya (September 2012), conducted by an al-Qaeda-affiliated group (Özcan, 2017). It showed the difficulties of finding and arming so-called 'moderate' opposition groups in Syria and that they could threaten US national security. Hence, few prospects existed for extensive proxy warfare cooperation between Turkey and the US to oust Assad.

These developments point to an alliance (Turkey-US) with similar interests, but with a highly diverging commitment. Ankara's disappointment over lacking US security assistance showed it no longer could rely on US military assistance in the Middle East, which fueled the need for alternative security partners. Ankara based its support for militant groups on the assumptions

of expected US military support, which would oust Assad through a short-lived, effective war campaign. Yet, without direct military support, Turkey was trapped in a quagmire. Furthermore, Ankara failed to consider key developments in Syria, among these sectarian tensions and demographics that did not exist in the other Arab Spring-affected countries including Libya (Kadercan, 2017). It also failed to recognize Russia's and Iran's solid support for Assad. Consequently, "Ankara totally misread the broader strategic environment." This suggests a solid organizational deficit, which may be partially due to Turkey's historical record of staying out of Arab countries' internal conflicts.

Increased political risks at home

In addition to the AKP's diminished regional power aspirations and disappointment over lacking US security assistance in 2013, Erdogan faced increased domestic turmoil. The Gezi Park protests (May-August 2013) initially erupted over a planned urban development project in Istanbul, but soon unveiled massive resistance against growing authoritarian tendencies and diminished political freedoms under the AKP. Erdogan's violent crackdown on the protestors squandered his regional image as a 'democratic' alternative to authoritarian leaders in the region. Turkey no longer represented a moderate Islamic and democratic country, neither to the West nor the MENA region. Consequently, Ankara's and the West's mutual importance diminished. Moreover, a major corruption scheme in December 2013 involving AKP officials, Erdogan and his family members (allegedly instigated by Gulenists) significantly raised the political stakes. Erdogan increasingly had to concentrate on retaining his political power throughout the Syrian civil war. The developments of 2013 seemed to have marked the start of growing nationalism, prosecution of alleged Gulenists and increased executive power under Erdogan.

Importance and limitations of NATO support

Though bilateral relations with the US and Turkey substantially diverted in 2013 (especially politically), the Syrian war also highlighted Turkey's (fragile) dependence on NATO's security assistance. Two topics particularly stood out: The question of air and missile defense protection and Turkey's role in NATO after it downed the Russian fighter jet in November 2015.

Ankara invoked NATO's Article 4 for consultations three times: On June 26 after the Syrian Army downed a Turkish reconnaissance jet along the Turkey-Syria border (June 22, 2012), on

October 3 2012 in light of shelling from Syrian regime forces and on July 28, 2015 due to domestic terror attacks ("NATO support to," 2013). This suggested Turkey held relatively high influence in NATO and managed to gain its allies' attention at short notice.

In January 2013, NATO allies deployed Patriot missiles to Turkey's southern border areas to protect against rocket attacks from Syria. Yet, the deployments proved highly unstable. In October 2015 (one month before Turkey downed the Russian fighter jet), NATO countries withdrew their Patriots, citing a reduced missile threat level and maintenance purposes, which "raised questions about solidarity on NATO's southern flank . . . and fueled Turkey's desire to enhance domestic defense abilities" (Sloat, 2018, p. 15). Moreover, it highlighted Turkey's "security deficit" of relying on NATO's air protection umbrella, which failed to cover its entire border area (Seren, 2017). Within this context, Ankara's attempts to obtain the Chinese missile system in 2013 and subsequently the Russian S-400 appear reasonable. New transnational threats triggered a growing threat perception and the need for stable, air and missile defense systems.

Furthermore, Turkey's role as a NATO member was highlighted after Turkey downed the Russian Su-24 fighter jet on November 24, 2015. The incident severely tested the robustness of their bilateral relations and subsequent rapprochement in mid-2016 which must also be understood in this context. Officially, Turkey downed the fighter jet due to Russian airspace violations along the Syrian border. Russia reportedly neglected several warnings and had conducted several airspace violations in the previous weeks. Afterwards, Ankara's official story changed multiple times. Erdogan went from proudly justifying the move by providing evidence of airspace intrusions, to later blame Gulenists for seeking to strain relations with Russia (Zilberman & Erdemir, 2016). The incident thus highlighted to extent of propaganda in Turkey-Russia relations and that events are prone to manipulations that will fit the needs of the day for domestic audiences.

Competing realties were also uncovered in my interviews. According to a professor I met, Turkey downed the Russian fighter mainly as a political message to draw NATO deeper into the conflict. Another respondent suggested that Ankara sought to demonstrate its military strength: 'Downing the Russian fighter jet was a bold move. No other countries had done that since the Cold War.' While we cannot determine for sure the underlying reason for the move, who made the decision, nor Turkey's rules of engagement (without relying on dubious sources) one may question Ankara's motive. Downing the Russian fighter jet would most certainly upset

Ankara's relatively good relations with Moscow. Despite multiple previous airspace intrusions, Russia had not attacked Turkey, which suggests the shoot-down was an exaggerated and likely irrational response.

Potential Turkish efforts to draw NATO deeper into Syria achieved modest success at best. In December 2015, NATO agreed to provide "enhanced air policing, and increased naval presence including maritime patrol aircraft" in southern Turkey to prevent future incidents (Emmott, 2015, as cited in Sloat, 2018, p. 15). However, NATO restricted its Syria involvement to non-combat anti-terror operations (McKernan, 2017). Regardless of Turkey's reason for downing the Russian plane, the incident highlighted one of the few times Russia approached Turkey as a NATO member in Syria, thereby showing the importance of NATO's backing to Turkey (Baev and Kirişci, 2017, p. 9). At the same time, relying on NATO's limited security assistance in the Middle East proved a liability. To Turkey's detriment, the fighter jet incident prompted Russia to deploy its S-400 system to its Khmeimim air base near Latakia in north-western Syria, shutting off Syrian air space for Turkey and NATO allies (Erşen, 2017). This meant any future Turkish involvement in northern Syria would require Russian approval, which likely increased the prospects of bandwagoning with Russia (discussed in 4.4).

Furthermore, the incident gave Putin the upper hand over Erdogan by implementing tough sanctions against Turkey. Easing these sanctions rapidly was more important to Turkey than to Russia, which likely deepened the relationship's power asymmetry (discussed in chapter 6). The fighter jet incident also prompted Russia to allow the Kurdish PYD to re-open an office in Moscow in February 2016, which coordinated certain operations with its armed wing the YPG.[24]

---

[24] Contrary to Turkey, the US and the EU, Russia refrains from labelling the PKK a 'terrorist' group.

4.4 Two-front war against the YPG and IS

The following section argues that Turkey's two-front war against the YPG and IS constituted the 'smoking gun' revealing its preference for Russia over the US in Syria. As the war progressed (2014-2015), Turkey's regime change agenda and ideological aspirations decreased and Ankara had to shift focus to the rise of non-state actors (the YPG and IS) and growing security threats toward its borders. This left the US' and Turkey's strategic priorities on a collision course, which opened the way for pragmatic Turkey-Russia cooperation.

A Kurdish problem emerges along the Syria-Turkey border

Ankara's involvement in Syria likely worsened its own security. Two factors indirectly strengthened the Kurds' position in northern Syria: Turkey's fallout with Assad in 2011 and the rise of IS in 2014. In mid-2012, Assad's forces left the Kurdish-dominated Al-Hasakah province in the northeast and Kobane and Afrin in northern Syria (Phillips, 2016, p. 111). Consequently, the PYD and its armed wing the YPG filled the power vacuum, triggering the establishment of the 'Rojava' *de facto* autonomous region.[25] Consequently, Turkey witnessed an increased threat level along its borders (Kadercan, 2017). According to Özcan (2017), this development "indicated the extent of damage the Syrian regime could have given Turkey only through revitalizing its ties with the PKK" (p. 12). In other words, Assad initiated a form of proxy warfare against Turkey. Although the Rojava region mainly represented a political threat, the rise of IS enhanced the YPG's role as a prominent non-state security actor capable of launching highly effective guerilla warfare. Consequently, the previously-marginalized Kurds became a prominent security threat and seized around ¼ of Syrian territory (Kadercan, 2017). Forming protection units against IS helped them survive.

In the long term, Turkey worries that "the YPG's increasing popularity and leverage can trigger a process that will 'whitewash' the PKK" domestically (Kadercan, 2017). Additionally, its cult-based ideology of PKK's (jailed) leader Abdullah Ocalan, aspirations for a regional Kurdish 'revolution' and rapid territorial expansion may trigger increased separatist sentiments and in worst case, territorial partition of Turkey. As one of my respondents claimed: 'security policy is not only about military operations, strategic priorities and alliances, but part of survival and

---

[25] Part of Assad's "strategy of survival", withdrawing regime forces southwards to fight the FSA, putting pressure on Turkey and letting Sunni jihadists (including IS) target the Kurds (Kadercan, 2017).

identity.' This realist perspective appears widespread among Turkish foreign policy makers and may partially explain their hardline stance toward the YPG/PKK.

Reluctantly joining the US-led anti-IS coalition

We noted that the US preferred minimal involvement in the Syrian civil war from the beginning. The exception was combating Islamic terror groups capable of launching international attacks. On September 14, 2014, the US formed the international anti-IS coalition (Operation Inherent Resolve) to expel IS from Syria and Iraq. In June 2014, IS had seized Iraq' second largest city, Mosul and thereby demonstrated an increased regional threat level. In September 2014, Turkey joined the US-led coalition, but initial contributions remained minimal. "Concerns over retaliatory attacks" and IS taking 49 Turkish diplomats hostage in Mosul prevented Turkey from launching a solid anti-IS operation (Merz, 2018). Moreover, terror attacks were rare in Turkey in 2014, suggesting Ankara perceived IS as a relatively low threat at the time.

IS' siege of Kobane triggered a major divergence in Turkish-US strategic priorities in Syria. The US for the first time dropped ammunition to the YPG when IS attacked Kobane in October 2014 (Letsch, 2014). After major domestic and international pressure, Turkey allowed Iraqi-stationed Peshmerga fighters to enter Kobane through Turkish territory. In January 2015, the YPG liberated Kobane from IS in cooperation with the US. It marked a major victory for Operation Inherent Resolve, but also the start of YPG's major territorial expansion, which contributed to Turkey's increased sense of insecurity.

Developments during the summer of 2015 triggered Turkey to take a firmer stance against IS. They sought to contain the threat toward its Syrian border areas and domestically-inspired/directed attacks from Syria. A July 20, 2015 suicide attack by a Kurdish IS sympathizer in Suruc border town (killing 28 people) triggered Turkey's first air strikes against IS-targets while the US got permission to conduct air raids from the Incirlik air base in Adana in southern Turkey (Cockburn, 2015). Moreover, "the IS suicide bomber brought the battle around Kobani between IS and Kurds into Turkey," thereby ending the peace process (in place since 2013) between Ankara and the PKK (Tank, 2016). In accordance with balance of threat theory, IS' growing operational capabilities and intention to explicitly target Turkey heightened the threat perception, which triggered a balancing response. Nevertheless, as Waldman & Caliskan (2016) note: "Turkish engagements against IS targets were few and far between, compared with the air attacks against PKK bases in northern Iraq" as the peace process deteriorated (p. 192).

46

Domestic concerns shape Erdogan's Syria policies

Turkey's parliamentary election on June 8, 2015 likely had an important impact on the peace process and subsequently on Ankara's foreign policy. The AKP lost its parliamentary majority after a substantial number of votes went to the pro-Kurdish HDP party (Öniş, 2016).[26] This would prevent the AKP from passing constitutional amendments to implement a presidential system, one of Erdogan's main political goals. Refusing to join any coalition government constituted a key part of Erdogan's strategy to regain the AKP's parliamentary majority. He then called for re-elections on November 1, 2015 and managed to regain the majority by rallying voters around nationalism, anti-Kurdish sentiments and emphasizing stability.

Establishing a direct connection between Erdogan's domestic political concerns and military actions against the PKK and subsequently the YPG in Syria may be problematic. Any government would probably have taken bold measures against a domestic terror group that reignited fighting. Thus, Erdogan's preference cannot by itself explain the government's anti-PKK operations. Yet, there is a good reason to assume that Erdogan perceived crackdowns on political (Kurdish) opponents and escalatory measures against the PKK as a viable tool for political mobilization. In 2013, he struck a fragile peace deal with the PKK and increasingly accommodated the Kurds politically. Being soft on the Kurds again would most likely gain little resonance among the AKP's constituents and would not help the AKP regain its parliamentary majority. Erdogan's strategy of accommodation had backfired. Thus, de-escalatory measures did not fit Erdogan's political objectives. Instead, Ankara saw no distinction between the domestic threat posed by the PKK and the YPG in Syria. Consequently, domestic conditions increasingly appeared to shape Erdogan's Syria policies from the mid-2015, which indirectly affected relations with the US and Russia.

Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) (August 2016- March 2017)

On August 24, 2016, Turkey initiated Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) with a dual purpose: Clear Syrian border areas (including Jarablus and Azaz) of IS elements and prevent the YPG from establishing a strategic border corridor.[27] OES marked the start of Turkish unilateral

---

[26] The AKP's voter turnout declined from 50 to 41 %. HDP passed the 10 % threshold for the first time, increasing its voter turnout from 6 % in the 2011 parliamentary elections to 12.6 % in June 2015. Its image as "progressive force" in Turkish politics broadened its appeal to new constituents beyond Kurdish voters.

[27] Although the Turkish government framed it as an anti-IS operation, it mainly targeted YPG elements.

actions in Syria and thus a turning point in its Syrian involvement. In March 2016, the PYD and other ethnic communities declared the three cantons Jazira, Afrin and Kobane as a 'federal region,' indicating a heightened political risk of undermining Syria's unity ("Syria civil war," 2016). According to one my respondents, OES constituted a one-year delayed balancing response impossible to carry out earlier due to strained relations with Russia and Erdogan's lacking political power between the election of June 2015 and re-election in November 2015. The rapprochement process with Russia was a necessary condition to carry out the operation.

An important outcome of OES was that Turkey (in cooperation with the FSA) managed to split the three Kurdish cantons and expel IS elements from northern Syria (Erşen, 2017, p. 96). As part of the Turkey-Russia rapprochement process, Russia for the first time supported Turkey with air strikes against IS to recapture al-Bab in north-western Syria in January 2017. While the US hesitated to support Turkey during OES due to Turkey's simultaneous attacks against the YPG, Russia emerged as a more reliable partner against IS in this operation ("Russian and Turkish," 2017). Hence, Turkey could very well cooperate with the US against IS, but this proved difficult once a second actor (the YPG) interfered in this strategic picture.

Restacking the deck in favor of Russia-leaning actors

OES coincided with a major government personnel overhaul after the 2016 post-coup purge and indicated an important development in civil-military relations, opening the way for growing cooperation with Moscow. Firstly, the replacement of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu with Binali Yildirim in May 2016 likely facilitated "a complete shift in Ankara's Syria policy" (Maçães, 2016). Davutoğlu was traditionally skeptical about close ties with Russia and disagreed with Erdogan on several issues However, Binali Yildirim willingly followed Erdogan's agenda and supported a more pragmatic approach toward Russia (Kirişci, 2018, p. 144).

Furthermore, 'Eurasianists' and pro-AKP supporters largely replaced alleged Gulenists and 'pro-Western Atlanticists' after the post-coup purge. This likely reduced resistance to unilateral military operations and arguably moved Ankara's foreign policy closer to Russia (Jacinto, 2017). Any resistance within the military to instigate unilateral operations in Syria became meaningless after the coup attempt, when Erdogan gained increased power over the security apparatuses by ruling through decree. Moreover, allying with influential secular nationalists such as Doğu Perinçek (leader of the left-wing Patriotic Party) provided Erdogan a broader base

for consolidating his power and securing approval for the presidential system passed in April 2017 and toward the presidential election in June 2018.[28] The Eurasianist forces likely saw closer cooperation with Russia in the Syrian conflict as attractive as they sought to build a "counter-hedge to the West" while seeking to "detach Turkey from the Western world" (Alaranta, 2018). However, Erdogan's quest for power consolidation indicates the Eurasianists' growing influence in the AKP since mid-2016 may be a temporary phenomenon and that the long-term foreign policy line remains relatively unaffected. After all, the AKP and Erdogan were in charge. National and personal interests predominated far-fetched ideological motives.

Arguably, a Turkish-Russian rapprochement would likely have occurred sooner or later regardless of the coup attempt. Russian-imposed sanctions severely impacted Turkey's economy, especially its exports and tourism industry. Thus, Ankara sought to ease these sanctions as soon as possible, giving Putin the upper hand. However, Ankara's relatively rapid rapprochement and subsequent high accommodation of Russia appear strongly related to the personnel changes in Erdogan's cabinet and the military. The coup attempt therefore seems to have triggered a major opening in Ankara's foreign policy, enabling a rapid and affirmative realignment.

4.5   Astana Peace Talks with Russia and Iran

By 2016, Turkey witnessed a substantially different geopolitical landscape. Its strategic interests had diverted from the US while border threats predominated its security priorities. Most significantly, Russia's intervention in September 2015 changed the war's balance of power and "ended any prospect of regime change in Damascus" (Bechev & Hiltermann, 2017, p. 56). The oppositional FSA suffered severe setbacks to Russia's military capabilities, which reduced Turkey's leverage in shaping the conflict. Thus, by 2016, Turkey appeared to fit the category of a "weak and isolated" state in Syria with few or no (influential) alternative partners. Thus, bandwagoning with Russia became a realistic option. Consequently, Erdogan perceived it necessary to adopt to the new realities on the ground by accommodating the threat (Russia).

I will now discuss the goals and performance of the Russian-led Astana peace talks and 'de-escalation zones' and map out Turkey's strategic interests in the alliance. I then proceed to

---

[28] The Patriotic Party is a marginal electoral force, but contains influential actors such as its leader Doğu Perinçek, who reportedly leads a powerful pro-Russia lobby in Ankara.

discuss the inherent rivalry within the alliance, revolving around the future of Syria and the role of the YPG. Lastly, I discuss the paradox of Russia's high degree of support for the YPG/PYD within the context of growing Turkey-Russia cooperation.

Realigning with Russia

We have seen that Turkey's two-front war required Russia's approval to use Syrian airspace (due to its S-400 systems stationed in Latakia). OES expanded into further pragmatic cooperation in the late 2016. On December 20, 2016, Turkey, Iran and Russia signed the Moscow Declaration, reiterating their "full respect for [the] sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as multi-ethnic, multi-religious, non-sectarian, democratic and secular state" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation). It stated there was "no military solution to the Syrian conflict" and acknowledged the role of the UN for a political settlement to the war. An implicit outcome of the declaration was that Turkey rendered its regime change agenda and reduced its anti-Assad rhetoric (although Assad was not explicitly mentioned in the Moscow Declaration) (Bechev & Hiltermann, 2017, p. 58).

Establishing' de-escalation zones'

By 2016, several rounds of the UN-led Geneva process had failed to establish peace. Minimal political will by the Syrian government, opposition groups and external actors prevented such efforts (Phillips, 2016). Assad's future remained the largest obstacle to any solution, as opposition groups demanded his resignation. Russia's growing influence in Syria allowed it to counter US presence in the Middle East and provided increased leverage vis-a-vis the West, which became increasingly important after its Crimea annexation triggered Western-imposed sanctions (Phillips, 2016). Russia used its growing leverage to initiate new rounds of peace talks alongside the UN-led Geneva process that included Turkey and Iran. For the first time, these talks involved armed opposition groups.

On December 30, 2016, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed on a ceasefire, which laid the foundation for peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. In May 2017, they signed an agreement to establish four 'de-escalation zones' stipulating a "cessation of hostilities" between regime and opposition forces preventing air strikes (for a six-month period) officially aimed at protecting

civilians ("Syria's 'de-escalation zones' explained").[29] The three countries agreed to serve as security guarantors for the safe zones, whereby Turkey monitored parts of the Idlib province in north-western Syria.

Mixed record

Overall, 'de-escalation zones' managed to temporarily reduce fighting in certain areas and between selected opposition groups. However, they failed to establish lasting humanitarian results. Russian and Syrian forces conducted several ceasefire violations by attacking and surrounding opposition groups and civilian areas, which enabled them to retake key cities including Idlib, Aleppo and Ghouta outside Damascus. While the zones officially sought de-escalation, it seemed more accurate to label them 'escalate to de-escalate zones' because they played into a regime-consolidating strategy. A Syrian-Russian-Iranian offensive to oust opposition forces from Idlib and nearby areas in December 2017 severely undermined the deal. As of April 2018, heavy Syrian regime shelling of Eastern Ghouta outside Damascus showed the Astana deal was largely defunct.

In humanitarian aspects, the tripartite alliance scored low on commitment, whose actors' intentions were highly questionable. Yet, Turkey provided some valuable contributions once Assad's regime was consolidated. Between October 2017-February 2018, Turkey established six observation posts in the Idlib province as part of the Astana deal, which appeared to form part of a 'peace-keeping' force separating the FSA and regime forces (Erkoyun, 2018). Politically, the ceasefire agreement strengthened Assad's grip on power and thereby (temporarily) contributed to fulfilling the Moscow Declaration's goal of preserving Syria's territorial integrity. It also demonstrated a relatively better performance than the UN-supported Geneva process despite its many flaws and ceasefire violations, indicating Russia's growing leverage in the region vis-à-vis the US.

The tripartite alliance's symbolic significance appeared much stronger than its humanitarian record. It demonstrated Putin's successful bid to attract a NATO member to the negotiating table, which could partially undermine NATO unity. The alliance also showed Putin's and Erdogan's willingness to use their relations as an anti-US hedge as it highlighted the US'

---

[29] The four zones host around 2.5 m inhabitants and include (1) Idlib province, parts of Aleppo and Hama provinces (2) Homs province (3) Eastern Ghouta outside Damascus (4) opposition-held border areas toward Jordan.

limited diplomatic power in the conflict. In sharp contrast to the 2003 Iraq war (when Russia and Turkey were largely passive actors), the diplomatic table was reshuffled by 2016. For the first time, closer security cooperation between Turkey and Russia became a reality.

Figure 2 - Syria's de-escalation zones
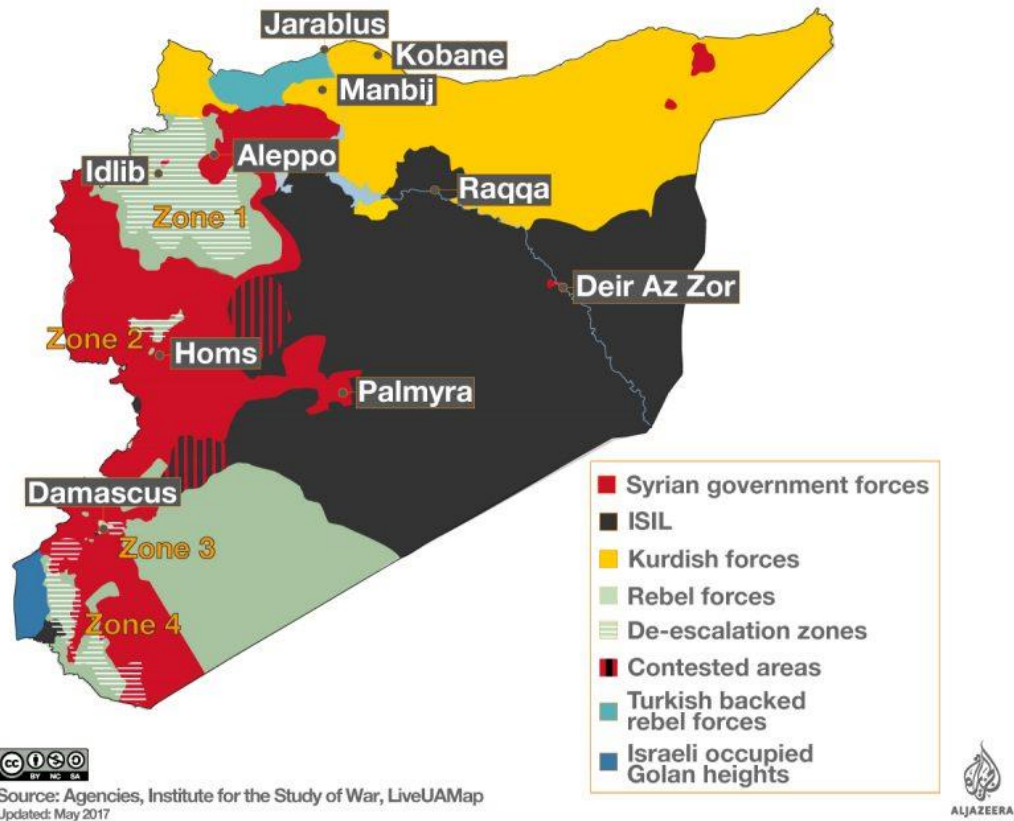
The 'de-escalation zones' helped bolster Assad's regime whereas its initial humanitarian performance was negligible. Light blue area near Jarablus: Turkish/FSA territorial gains from OES (2016-2017).

Protecting border areas and gaining influence

Considering the marginal humanitarian performance of the de-escalation zones, Ankara seemed to have obtained little benefit. Yet, the tactical and strategical gains Ankara took from the tripartite alliance likely outlasted the humanitarian costs it had to pay. According to my respondents, Turkey mainly joined the Russian-led alliance as a last resort to improve a largely unfruitful Syria policy and to increase security along the Syrian border and prevent the YPG's expansion. Furthermore, gaining a stake in the shaping of post-conflict Syria and ensuring civilians could return from Turkey to Syria constituted another important factor. Structurally, Erdogan's participation therefore made sense as Russia became the main actor on the ground. Without US participation in the Astana process and the UN-led Geneva conventions essentially obsolete, Russia inevitably became the new reference point for Turkey in Syria. Furthermore, Erdogan may have sought to rebuild his reputation as a credible power broker, which would align with Ankara's previous goals of being a central regional actor and a peace broker.

Among these factors, the need for risk mitigation appears the underlying motivation for allying with Russia. Had the YPG remained a marginalized force and the security relationship with the US been retained throughout the war, Turkey would have few incentives to ally with Russia. As one of my respondents argues: 'Had it not been for the YPG, business would have been as usual in US-Turkey relations.' Accordingly, deteriorating Turkey-US relations largely shaped Turkey-Russia relations in Syria.

Intra-alliance rivalry hampers long-term solutions

Although the Turkey-Russia alliance may indicate growing bilateral cooperation, the alliance appears destined for conflict. In his assessment of the tripartite alliance, Professor Friedman (2017) argues "Moscow's reset with Ankara is not primarily directed at the West; rather, Russia is trying to reestablish itself as Syria's ultimate arbiter" (p. 1). He concedes Russia mainly "reconciled with Turkey to reduce Iran's influence and constrain the Assad regime, limiting Assad's ability to maneuver between Russia and Iran" (pp. 1-2). If so, one may argue the coalition's premises largely revolve around Russia's intentions of gaining increased influence in Syria and the Middle East. Moreover, the three actors seek to contain each other's influence in post-conflict Syria, reflecting their regional rivalry. While Turkey and Iran may certainly share similar concerns about Kurdish separatism, Ankara would no doubt oppose any long-term presence of Shiite militias including Hezbollah in Syria. The seemingly close cooperation

between the three countries was largely limited to end the war and maintain Syria's territorial integrity.

Additionally, Turkey and Russia fundamentally disagree on the future role of the Kurds in Syria. Whereas Russia welcomed the YPG's inclusion in the Astana process, Turkey strongly objected.[30] Moreover, Russia rejected Turkey's demand of cutting ties with the PYD office in Moscow (reopened in February 2016) and suggested to grant the Kurds' greater autonomy in Syria through a federal system (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 11). Consequently, post-conflict Syria emerges as particularly crucial for Turkey's relationship with Russia due to their diverging stance toward the YPG. Yet, the Astana peace talks indicated asymmetry of motivation indeed favored Turkey, as it managed to keep the YPG out of the process. However, this may be more an act of goodwill from Russia toward Turkey rather than a long-term agreement.

Retaining an autonomous foreign policy

Although aligning with Russia prompted Erdogan to (officially) render his regime change agenda and reduce his anti-Assad rhetoric, Erdogan continued to pursue an autonomous role in Syria and criticized Assad when deemed appropriate. Ankara continued to support and indeed strengthened the FSA in northern Syria, which may give it leverage in post-war Syria. This showed that Ankara perceived the FSA as a valuable partner (primarily as a buffer against the YPG) and that this partnership could co-exist with Russia's and Assad's continued war against the opposition. The parallel goals of Turkey and Russia suggested major deal-breaking occurred, indicating Moscow and Ankara established effective communication channels.

Furthermore, Erdogan also demonstrated that his underlying position on regime change still converged with the US'. He supported US cruise missiles strikes in April 2017 against a Syrian military target (over an alleged chemical attack) and sporadically continued to plea for greater US military involvement against Assad (Pamuk, Butler, & Toksabay, 2017). On December 27, 2017, Erdogan stated in a press conference that "Assad . . . is a terrorist who spreads state terrorism . . . Would the Syrian people like to see someone like this stay in charge?" (Barnard, 2017). These developments suggested a reversal of Erdogan's previously toned-down anti-Assad rhetoric and showed he needed to affirm his resistance to Assad. Moreover, Ankara supported the April 14, 2018 strikes by the US, UK and France against Syrian chemical weapon

---

[30] Ankara welcomed other Kurdish political parties unaffiliated with the YPG/PKK, though these parties' hold minimal influence in Syria.

facilities in response to a chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta outside Damascus ("Turkey welcomes US," 2018). Although Turkey's underlining policy preference still converged with the US', they lacked a strategic, coordinated plan to oust Assad. Their long-term interests remained similar, but their alliance commitment and priorities still differed.

4.6 Operation Olive Branch (January- March 2018) – Growing Turkish assertiveness in Syria

The last sub-chapter advances the discussion of Turkey's two-front war against the YPG and IS focusing on important recent developments. As IS largely lost its territory in Syria by 2018, the YPG remained the last major security threat to Ankara. The first part of 2018 witnessed unprecedented Turkish assertiveness in Syria, continued tactical cooperation with Russia and a diplomatic stand-off in Washington-Ankara relations over the YPG's continued presence in the region. In other words: More of the same, but on an unprecedented scale. The period also marked growing US-Russian rivalry over the shaping of post-conflict Syria and witnessed growing Ankara-Washington miscommunication and disagreements within the Trump administration. The emerging trend is therefore the appearance of a new phase of the war, as discussed in the following pages.

Firstly, I present the US' controversial plans to establish a border security force in northern Syria and remain there after IS' expulsion. Secondly, I describe Turkey's response embodied by the Operation Olive Branch military campaign in Afrin and its goals commenting specifically, on what it meant for Russia's stance toward the YPG. Lastly, I suggest growing US-Russian rivalry over influencing the Kurds mainly affected Ankara's concerns for regional balance of power rather than great power rivalry.

US announces ambitious plans for enhanced border security

On January 13, 2018, the US-led anti-IS coalition announced plans to train a "Syrian Border Security Force (BSF)" comprising 30 000 SDF soldiers in northern Syria southward to the Iraqi border and along the Euphrates (Stocker, 2018).[31] On January 15, Erdogan responded by saying that the US seeks to establish an "army of terror" along the Turkish-Syrian border, reinforcing the narrative that the US contributes to encircling Turkey by empowering militant Kurds

---

[31] The US possessed around 2000 troops in northern Syria by 2018, assisting the YPG.

("Turkey to crush," 2018). Then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later denied that the US-led coalition planned to establish a border security force. However, on January 17, 2018, he announced a protracted US troop presence in Syria to exterminate IS and prevent its re-emergence, and secondary, to contain Iran, oppose Assad, shape a new political order through the UN and help civilians return after the war (Harris, 2018). Although Turkey may agree to some of these objectives, continued US support for the YPG will likely eclipse all other efforts.

Growing threat perception of the US and the YPG

The US announcements changed Ankara's threat perceptions of the US and its key ally the YPG. They now displayed enhanced offensive capabilities in Turkish borderlands. Moreover, the US signaled it would no longer cooperate with the YPG exclusively to fight IS, but also retain the relationship after IS' expulsion. This stood in stark contrast to the US' initial reasons for supporting the YPG under the Siege of Kobane (September 2014-January 2015). Moreover, miscommunication from Washington and broken promises toward Ankara substantially undermined trust. In November 2017, President Trump reportedly promised Erdogan to cut arms supplies to the YPG (Cunningham & Morello, 2017). The US continued to stress Turkey's "legitimate security concerns", but Ankara remained to see the US follow up its pledge (Aliriza & Yekeler, 2018). Although Tillerson announced prolonged plans to stay in Syria, internal US disagreements on future Syrian presence prevailed (Sloat, 2018, p. 13). Undoubtedly, this supported the narrative of the US as inconsistent and unreliable, fueling the appeal of anti-US rhetoric in Turkey.

Consequently, Turkey perceived a strong balancing response was necessary. On January 20, 2018, it launched *Operation Olive Branch* in Afrin in cooperation with the FSA. It preceded at historical intensity and speed and demonstrated a significant amount of force compared to OES, primarily through air power. Kasapoğlu and Ülgen (2018) argue the operation held three policy objectives: (1) respond to domestic pressures to increase and intensify anti-YPG campaigns (2) constrain the YPG's territorial expansion and (3) deter the US from supporting the YPG. The proximity of the Afrin operation to the US coalition's announcement of the BSF indicated a likely correlation between these two events. Although the US backed down on its plan to create the BSF, Turkey likely sought to send a signal to the US to choose between itself and the YPG as an ally (Friedman, 2018, p. 1). Military analyst Metin Gurcan (as cited in Friedman, 2018, p. 4) labels the Afrin incursion an "effect-based operation" mainly aimed at "influencing the strategic goals of other actors with stakes in northern Syria, particularly the United States and

56

Russia." On March 18, Turkish and FSA forces captured Afrin city center with minimal resistance from the YPG, marking a significant victory for the Turkish military (see figure 2 below). Turkey had expanded its sphere of influence in northern Syria, however temporarily.

The operation also increased the risk of direct clashes between American and Turkish troops should Turkey advance toward Manbij (situated 100 km east of Afrin), east of the Euphrates and toward the Iraqi border. After the Afrin campaign, Erdogan announced plans to expand operations across northern Syria. A direct confrontation would constitute a severe development in their bilateral relations, potentially affecting NATO coherence (Friedman, 2018, p. 5). Unless Washington and Ankara reached a diplomatic solution, the risk of clashes would be imminent.

Signs of growing Russia-US rivalry

Operation Olive Branch seriously questioned Russia's commitment to the YPG as an ally and demonstrated a willingness to strike pragmatic deals with Turkey. Growing US-Russia rivalry in Syria played a crucial role. During OES, Russia permitted Turkey to use Syrian airspace, but did not directly support its anti-YPG operations. However, in Afrin, Russia withdrew its military personnel prior to the Turkish invasion despite its previous promises to protect the YPG (Varshalomidze & Uras, 2018). According to Turkish professor Mensur Akgun, Moscow "showed green light to Turkey's operation to decrease the US influence in the region." Similarly, Cafarella & Teoman from the Institute for the Study of War (2018) argue that "Russia and Iran seek to use Turkey to undermine the U.S. and may encourage Turkey to conduct operations in areas that would make U.S. forces vulnerable." Hence, Moscow showed it could sacrifice its partnership with the YPG to obtain a strategic edge against the US in Syria.

Conversely, Moscow adapted a pragmatic stance toward the YPG when appropriate. In December 2017, Russia (along with the US) provided air support to the YPG to retake the oil-field rich Deir ez-Zor province from IS. According to Turkish columnist Fehim Tastekin (2017), Russia's expansion east of the Euphrates constituted "a move seeking to balance the United States along the Euphrates line and change the rules of the game in favor of Damascus."[32] Consequently, great power politics (between the US and Russia) for influencing the Kurds continued throughout the war. This converged with Russia's quest to counter US

---

[32] The US-led coalition combats IS east of the Euphrates (and Manbij westward) through the YPG-dominated SDF, whereas Russia and Syrian regime forces operate west of the river (Browne, 2017).

regional presence and be a 'great power' (as stated in 4.2). Yet, Ankara never cared about any 'great power' rivalry between the US and Russia. It cared about the regional balance of power. Thus, the actor providing the greatest support to the YPG would also pose a greater threat. Undoubtedly, Turkey perceived the US as a greater threat than Russia in this conflict (due to its steadfast support for the Kurds). Russia, however, could be a pragmatic ally. Whereas the Russia-Turkey rapprochement constituted a "marriage of convenience," Turkey and the US experienced a 'divorce of inconvenience'. A Turkey-US détente never occurred in the period of 2014-2018. Yet, in the long term, Russia's growing military presence in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean likely constitutes a greater threat than US presence in the region due to its encirclement of Turkish territory.

Figure 3 - Strategic map of Syria April 2018

Syria: Who controls what?

Afrin

Manbij

Aleppo

Idlib

Raqqa

Latakia

Hama

Deir Az Zor

Homs

Albu Kamal

DAMASCUS

Eastern Ghouta

- **Syrian government forces**
- **ISIL**
- **Kurdish forces**
- **Rebel forces**
- **Turkish and rebel forces**
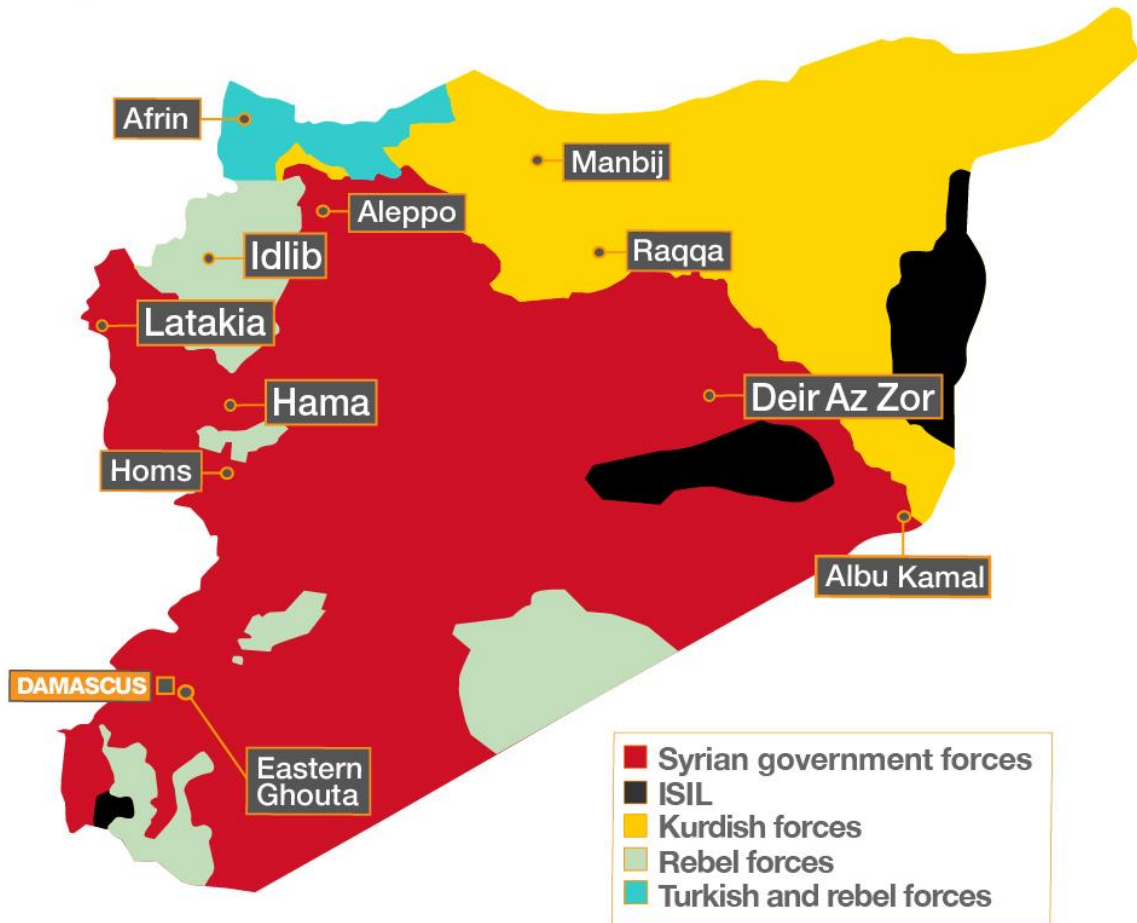
Source: Al Jazeera
Updated: April 14, 2018

@AJLabs ALJAZEERA

In top left square: Territorial gains by Turkey and the FSA in Afrin. Looking ahead, the odds are stacked against Turkey as the YPG/PYD (yellow) de facto controls around 1/3 of Syrian territory.

59

4.7   Theoretical evaluation

I will now evaluate the theoretical performance of the balance of threat theory and Allison's three conceptual models. Firstly, I comment on Turkey's balancing response to the different threats. Secondly, I show a shift from ideologically-driven to pragmatic policies aimed to mitigate risks. Thirdly, I discuss Turkey's bandwagoning tendencies. Next, I comment on the explanatory power of Allison related to organizational factors and Erdogan's power consolidation. Lastly, I point to shortcomings of both theoretical frameworks.

The balance of threat theory sufficiently explains Turkey's balancing response to the various threats (Assad, Russia, the YPG/PKK and indirectly the US). Assad demonstrated an increased threat level, both through his autocratic rule and 'murderous' image. Ankara's changing perception of intent triggered a realignment. Assad's forces later launched rocket attacks into Turkey, which posed emerging threats and triggered NATO deployment of Patriot missiles. Further, Russia demonstrated increased offensive capabilities and aggressive attentions in Syria since September 2015 by attacking the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and conducting numerous airspace violations along the Turkish border, triggering the fighter jet incident.

Furthermore, the case demonstrated a gradual shift from ideological preferences to a pragmatic approach aimed at risk mitigation. Ideological and regional power aspirations (installing an MB government) drove the AKP's Syria policy. Ankara perceived its national security relatively safe at the start of the civil war and saw a major opportunity. As security threats increased, Turkey adapted a pragmatic stance and perceived it necessary to cooperate with whomever could provide short and medium-term tactical gains and security benefits. This policy change correlates with Walt's argument that "security considerations likely prompt ideological preferences" for an insecure state (p. 38).

The most reliable security provider to Turkey in Syria became, paradoxically, its main adversary, namely Russia. Their growing cooperation since mid-2016 indicated strong bandwagoning tendencies. As Russia's entry into the civil war in September 2015 changed the balance of power, Turkey found itself in a "weak and isolated" position in Syria and had few or no alternative security partners. The US' support for the YPG proved detrimental to Turkey's national security and the US was unlikely to establish a no-fly zone nor intervene militarily (except for sporadic strikes against chemical weapons facilities). Moreover, the fighter jet incident prompted Russia to take control over Syrian airspace. Access to the airspace was

necessary to launch Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) to clear border elements of the YPG and IS. Consequently, the need for risk-mitigation and growing threats (posed by the YPG) became the underlying geopolitical reason to ally with Russia. Ankara conducted a *diplomatic bandwagoning with tactical and strategic benefits.*

Yet, Ankara sought to pursue an autonomous foreign policy. It continued supporting the FSA and Erdogan's strong anti-Assad rhetoric suggested Turkey only partially realigned in the Syrian conflict: It sought multiple options and security partners to shape Syria in favor of its security interests. The desire for security diversification therefore helps explain Turkey's diplomatic bandwagoning. Joining the Russia-led Astana process also achieved the critical objective of expelling the YPG from any peace talks. This showed asymmetry of motivation favoring Turkey since the Astana process' launch in December 2016. The YPG constituted its main security concern and was more important for Ankara's security than for Russia's.

In addition to balance of threat, Allison's three conceptual models expanded the analysis' explanatory power by including domestic factors. The case of Syria revealed the challenge of "imperfect rationality" as Ankara based its Syrian policies on direct military support from the US/NATO and started facilitating foreign fighter flows. Yet, Ankara's overambitious regional power aspirations were dissonant to (1) the US' intentions of intervening militarily and (2) demographic and political conditions in Syria. Ankara failed to grasp the functioning of the Syrian government and the specific sectarian and ethnic relations in Syria compared to those in other Arab Spring-affected countries. This showed how limited human competence negatively impacted Ankara's foreign policy, dragging Turkey into entrapment. Yet, once entrapment and its associated failures was established, the government adjusted its policies and appeared to conduct strategic moves based on the limited information and perceived choices it possessed. The government seemed to have undergone a maturing process that strengthened its organizational capacity.

Additionally, Erdogan's power consolidation at home likely played a key role in his Syria policies. We saw the Kurdish question became increasingly relevant after mid-2015 when Erdogan rallied voters around nationalism and anti-Kurdish sentiments. The deteriorating peace deal with the PKK (July 2015) fused Ankara's domestic security situation with the Syrian civil war. The PKK and the YPG gained equal status, which enabled Erdogan to pursue a highly securitized foreign policy in Syria. While other governments than the AKP may have taken a tough stance against the PKK/YPG, Erdogan, specifically, had major incentives to avoid de-

escalation measures due to the significant political stakes he faced. Intensifying attacks and refusing to acknowledge the YPG's constructive efforts in the fight against IS helped Erdogan present a consistent policy line toward his constituents. Being soft on the Kurds was not an option, as previously tried.

Both theoretical frameworks have shortcomings. Whereas Walt's theory can explain the underlying geopolitical reasons for allying with Russia, it cannot account for internal political factors nor explain why realignment occurred specifically after the July 2016 coup attempt. Realignment was highly controversial among government circles before the purge and could thus not be taken for granted. Moreover, many NATO-friendly military officers (later purged) strongly objected to unilateral operations in Syria, likely preventing or delaying Erdogan's plans to intervene. Hence, the post-coup purge, the Turkey-Russia rapprochement process and their strained relations with the West seemed to have played a key role in explaining Turkey's realignment.

Allison's conceptual models supplemented Walt's theory by including domestic variables. It provided some valuables clues about the Eurasianists' impact on Turkey's approach to Russia after 2016. However, we lacked more detailed information about what occurred behind closed doors and who made the decisions. Relying on context and limited sources was the main challenge of using this theoretical framework. Moreover, the models could not determine for sure what specific role Erdogan played in Turkey's involvement in Syria except for that he likely had major personal interests. In a sense, Syria highlighted a case where the Rational Choice and Governmental Politics models strongly converged, whereby Erdogan likely exacerbated an already fragile security situation for his own political gain.

5 The Black Sea Region

"The Black Sea region belongs to Black Sea countries"

- Respondent

This chapter analyzes Turkey's security policies in the Black Sea region after Russia's Crimea Annexation (March 2014) and Eastern Ukraine involvement (April 2014). Firstly, I present my argument, and outline the sub-chapters supporting it. Subsequently, I derive theoretical expectations for the case before conducting the analysis. Lastly, I assess the theory's explanatory power.

5.1 The argument

I argue that Turkey's balancing response to the Crimea annexation did not match its growing threat perception of Russia. Commercial interests, legal aspects and asymmetry of dependence drove Ankara's low-level response to the Crimea annexation. Domestically, pro-Russian business interests held relatively high influence in shaping Ankara's policies toward Moscow. Refusing to sanction Russia provided major economic opportunities, which likely limited Ankara's ability to impact Russia's treatment of Crimean Tatars.

Secondly, the Montreux Convention of 1936 (which restricts non-littoral states' naval access) encouraged Turkey to refrain from taking measures that may trigger a military build-up and challenge the convention. The implication was continued Turkish preference for limited NATO support and a focus on developing its national defense industry. Yet, Turkey supported an increased NATO presence in the Black Sea after the fighter jet incident in Syria in November 2015. This showed a relatively high willingness to balance when directly involved in a conflict, as opposed to the Ukraine conflict (which Turkey framed as a conflict between the West and Russia). Thirdly, Turkey's asymmetrical power relationship with Russia (in energy and trade) made Turkey susceptible to Russian demands. Moreover, Ankara's diplomatic and military resources were focused on Syria, hampering the government's room for maneuver in the Black Sea.

In the long term, Ankara's low-level response to Russia's growing assertiveness in the Black Sea is unsustainable and Turkey (as a rational actor) must take a firmer stance against Russia in the region to preserve its security interests. Russia's militarization of Crimea triggered enhanced anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which may prevent NATO access to the Black Sea in case of a conflict. Russia also holds several asymmetrical leverages over Turkey's energy security and may re-ignite frozen conflicts in the Caucasus. Consequently, Ankara's quest to become an energy hub, expand its regional influence, and increase autonomy is incompatible with overdependence on Russia.

Chapter outline

To support this argument, I will cover political, military and energy aspects. Firstly, I discuss Turkey's unsuccessful attempts to establish regional cooperation mechanisms before and after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, which set a precedent for regional militarization. I then explain why Russia's Crimea Annexation changed the regional balance of power and how Turkey responded politically, militarily and in the energy sphere. Thereafter, I investigate Turkish preference for a limited NATO response and efforts to upgrade its national defense industry. Turkey's relatively high reliance on Russian energy will be my final area of discussion, where I suggest its quest to become an energy hub and pursue an autonomous foreign policy is undermined by its dependency.

These sub-chapters derive from knowledge obtained through my literature review, which suggested that cooperation and rivalry constitute the main trend in Turkey-Russia relations. My respondents in Turkey also brought up issues of the Black Sea region that relate to my research question. Additionally, lessons learned from chapter 4 provided a reference point for this chapter's content.

5.2   Theoretical expectations

By itself, Russia's proximity to Turkey (separated only by the Black Sea) should ensure a balancing response from Turkey. Turkey's NATO membership stipulates that any Russian attack against Turkey would constitute an attack against the alliance and thus trigger Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Therefore, we may assume Turkey's security policies should resemble the risks associated with the countries' geographic proximity to each other.

If Russia demonstrates enhanced offensive power (ability to threaten Turkish territory or sovereignty), aggregate power and aggressive intentions, Turkey should increase its balancing behavior. This may involve political and/or militarily measures. Russia's Crimea annexation, military involvement in eastern Ukraine and militarization of Crimea indicate a growing regional threat level, suggests Turkey, as a rational actor, should balance.

Furthermore, Ankara should largely neglect any external balance of power and rivalry, including tensions between Russia and the West. Consequently, Turkey's position on the Ukraine conflict should partially depend on how it perceives itself in relation to other actors. If Turkey deems Ukraine as a conflict between the West and Russia, it may prefer a limited balancing response. Moreover, NATO-Russia relations and their power balance should primarily matter in the Black Sea region and the Eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey's local interests are the main concern.[33]

Asymmetry of dependence (in energy and trade) should affect Turkey's interactions with Russia. The higher Turkey's dependence on Russia, the more leverage Russia possesses over Turkey's actions. Asymmetry of dependence should also favor the US/NATO in case Turkey needs security assistance. We should thus expect Turkey's foreign policy to be pulled by two asymmetrical relationships. However, issues of crucial importance to Turkey's security (asymmetry of motivation) should favor Turkey.

In general, the rational choice model should perform relatively well on consensual issues of national security. Undoubtedly, upholding the Montreux Convention constitutes the most significant of these, as it ensures Turkey's sovereignty over the Turkish Straits. Additionally, internal political dynamics may hold some explanatory power. Officials and organizations in Turkey may have personal interests that will help shape security policies in the region. These interests will expectedly revolve around contested issues (where two or more actors disagree).

---

[33] As NATO member, Turkey also contributes with troops and assets to other regions. However, from a national security standpoint, outlying regions should be less important.

5.3 Turkey seeks regional cooperation before and after the 2008 Russia-Georgia War

Prior to the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the Black Sea region had largely remained a low-tension and non-militarized region.[34] Turkey took a leading role in facilitating regional cooperation mechanisms. In 1992, it established the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) to "contribute to security and stability in the region through economic cooperation as a major priority" (Öniş & Yilmaz, 2016, p. 80). The BSEC project held limited success, mainly because few countries wanted to delegate sovereignty to a higher authority, particularly Russia, which perceived it as a challenge to its great power status (pp. 80-81). Furthermore, lack of "common norms or a common identity" akin to the EU prevented deeper regional integration.

In 2001, Turkey and Russia established the BLACKSEAFOR multinational naval task force (comprising all six littoral Black Sea states). They argued it constituted an adequate security structure, which reduced the need for a NATO presence in the Black Sea (Kiniklioglu, 2006. p. 10). Turkey perceived Russia as a key actor to any regional cooperation mechanism and was therefore confident it could engage Russia without outside interference. This suggested Ankara held relatively positive perceptions of Russian intentions.

Russian power projection during the 2008 Georgia war rocked the status quo in the Black Sea region which had endured since the end of the Cold War and therefore took Turkey by surprise. Ankara adopted a relatively neutral position by adhering to the Montreux Convention. Erdogan's statement on September 2, 2008 captured Turkey's sentiment at the time:

> It would not be right for Turkey to be pushed toward any side. Certain circles want to push Turkey into a corner either with the United States or Russia after the Georgian incident. One of the sides is our closest ally, the United States. The other side is Russia, with which we have an important trade volume. We would act in line with what Turkey's national interests require (Fotiou, 2009, p. 6).

---

[34] Except for territorial disputes in 'frozen conflicts' including Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and Moldova/Transnistria.

This national interest was indeed neutrality, adhering to legal principles (support for Georgia's territorial integrity) and taking a non-aligned position. The event demonstrated quintessentially how two asymmetrical relationships (with the US and Russia) helped shape Ankara's security policies.

The Georgia-Russia war "rendered the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) . . . practically defunct" and Turkey conducted a "gradual geopolitical retreat from the wider Black Sea region," partially due to several rounds of purges within the military, which hampered the Turkish navy (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 8). This suggests Turkey held an organizational deficit in the region. Consequently, "Russia saw no need to rush its agenda to establish dominance." After 2008, BLACKSEAFOR cooperation continued at low-pace, but without Georgia. Despite confidence-building measures, "inter-state disputes and national interests ultimately still took precedence over pro-integration statements and task force initiatives" (Sanchez, 2012). Whereas the BLACKSEAFOR failed "to serve as a security confidence building mechanism," it improved communication between the regions' navies and enhanced operational capacities, enabling humanitarian and rescue missions (Sanchez, 2012).

Furthermore, Erdogan proposed establishing the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP) after the Russia-Georgia war (part of the 'zero problems with neighbors' policy). It sought to "contribute to the establishment of peace and stability in the region through dialogue." Yet, the platform failed to manifest, partly due to regional suspicion that it would strengthen Russia's regional position (Çelikpala, 2013). A major obstacle for fostering cooperation in the Caucasus region has been "lack of sufficient social, political and economic institutions" and an "atmosphere of distrust." This suggests Turkey's middle power ambitions in the region greatly extended its capacity to create mechanisms for reducing the regional threat level.

5.4 Political response to the Crimea Annexation

On March 18, 2014, Russia officially annexed Crimea after holding a questionable referendum on March 16. The annexation appeared as a continuity of Russia's regional power projection during the Georgia war. However, it differed in that it challenged the legal boundaries of Europe for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Two developments appear particularly relevant for our case: Political and military dimensions of the annexation, which directly or indirectly affected Turkey. Politically, three issues were especially relevant for Ankara: the territorial

integrity of Ukraine, the treatment of Crimean Tatars and the question of sanctions. Investigating Turkey's responses to these topics should reveal clues about its balancing response and the driving forces behind Ankara's policies.

Supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity

Turkey's main balancing response to the Ukraine conflict was a commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity. It condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and urged a democratic solution (Balcer, 2014, p. 3). Thus, Turkey's reference to its violation of international law aligned with Western states. However, Ankara had limited involvement in the Ukraine conflict (November 2013-March 2014) by adapting a "quasi-neutral position" akin to its stance on the Georgia war (Göksel, 2014, p. 5). Resistance to Western-instigated regime change in the post-Soviet space constituted one important reason. In this context, Ankara's response converged with its previous policy line in the region. Yet, the Ukraine conflict also provided political opportunities as the AKP government used the Ukraine upheaval "to bolster its own domestic standing," warning similar protests could emerge in Turkey and potentially pose a threat to national security. The Ukrainian protests bore a resemblance to the 2013 May-August Gezi park protests (Elman, 2014, p. 2). Thus, the AKP had to carefully respond to the Ukraine conflict.

Protecting Crimean Tatars of Turkish descent

Russia's treatment of Crimean Tatars constituted the most sensitive issue to Turkey, including alleged persecution and harassment of pro-Ukrainian Tatar activists and political opponents.[35] The treatment of Crimean Tatars "gained the status of an internal political issue in Turkey" fueling discontent toward Russia (Balcer, 2014, p. 7). Major demonstrations erupted in Turkey among the Crimean Tatar community, with which Turkish officials agreed to meet. In 2016, *de facto* Russian authorities abolished the Crimean Tatars' parliament on extremist charges, highlighting one other instance where their geopolitical disagreements of using the extremist label are used. The treatment of Crimean Tatars indicated a growing threat against a Turkish diaspora community and Ankara's goal to represent and protect Turkic-speaking people beyond its borders. Overall, Ankara sporadically plead for protection, but muted its criticism.

---

[35] Crimean Tatars represent 13 % of the peninsula's population and largely opposed the annexation.

Political bargaining games and business interests largely shaped this low-level balancing response. Göksel (2014) argues that "during the Ukrainian crisis, Turkish citizens of Crimean Tatar descent demanded that Ankara take a stronger stance against Moscow, while some in the Turkish business community working with pro-Moscow Ukrainian partners worried about how this would affect their interests" (p. 4). Elman (2014) suggests that Tatars in Turkey were largely marginalized despite close connections with the AKP. Additionally, any efforts to improve their security went "through discussions with Moscow" or commercial negotiations involving private investment and airline companies "launching direct flights to Crimea" (p. 2). Although one cannot know for sure the nature nor the extent of such negotiations, several signs suggested political bargaining games favored pro-Russian business interests. Consequently, Turkey's security policies demonstrated they were flexible to these under the given circumstances. The Crimean Tatar issue also highlighted how an ethnic minority group within Turkey could collide with business interests, affecting Ankara's foreign policy.

Avoiding sanctions

Contrary to Western states' imposition of sanctions, Turkey refrained from sanctioning Russia over the Crimea annexation. It therefore rendered one of the few policy tools it had to oppose Russian aggression (at least symbolically). However, avoiding sanctions provided major economic benefits for Ankara. According to a Turkish professor with whom I spoke, Turkey pragmatically favors cooperation provided it does not undermine national interests. Hence, it perceives sanctions, trade restrictions and other forms of economic punishments as unconstructive. As an emerging middle power, it is also conceivable that it would avoid sanctioning a major trade and energy partner.

Framing the Ukraine conflict as a conflict between Russia and the West, particularly the EU was one of the tools to gain legitimacy for avoiding sanctions, which likely strengthened cooperation with Russia. Moreover, minimal solidarity with Western states (due to Turkey's stalled EU access process) may partially explain Turkey's muted reaction. Yet, as balance of threat suggests, Turkey should remain relatively indifferent to external power struggles in third-party conflicts. Its limited support for the West in this conflict can therefore partially be explained by the rational choice model. Additionally, "limited political and diplomatic capacity" (due to the Syrian civil war) hampered its room for maneuver in the Ukraine conflict (Elman, 2014, p.1). Consequently, even if Ankara wanted to increase its balancing response, it would be severely restricted.

5.5   Military developments

We have now seen Ankara largely pursued a low-level political response to the Ukraine conflict. It was mostly rhetorical, referred to international law and held little chance of affecting the outcome. From a security perspective, the political developments mainly affected the governments and residents of Russia, Ukraine and Crimea including the Crimean Tatars.

Yet, the subsequent militarization changed the regional balance of power, to which Turkey inevitably had to respond. Firstly, I show how the militarization increased the regional threat level to Turkey and NATO. I provide examples of Russia's ability to threaten Turkish sovereignty and potentially re-ignite regional conflicts. Next, I analyze Turkey's response to these developments through NATO (5.4.2) and through its national defense (5.4.3), which contribute to my discussion of Turkey's role as a Western security partner in chapter 6.

5.5.1 Increased threat level

In addition to gaining *de facto* control over the peninsula, the Crimea annexation gave Russia full and permanent access to the Sevastopol naval base and control over major parts of the Ukrainian navy. Moreover, Russia seized the Kerch Strait connecting the Sea of Azov with the Black Sea, where it constructed a bridge to Russia, at times cutting off access to ships (Dubovyk, 2016). It also extended its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by seizing parts of Ukraine's continental shelf. Gazprom started hydrocarbon exploration and took control over Ukraine's gas and oil reserves, "dealing a crippling blow to Ukraine's hopes for energy independence" (Blockmans, 2015, p. 184). Russia thus altered land and maritime borders and seized Ukrainian assets and natural resources, suggesting increased aggressive intentions.

Furthermore, Russia substantially enhanced its military presence. In May 2014, it announced plans to modernize its Black Sea fleet for 2.4 bn USD by 2020, strengthening its land, air and maritime components (Larrabee & Flanagan, 2016).[36] It withdrew from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in March 2015, which enabled a militarization of Crimea. It deployed Iskander missiles and "strategic nuclear-capable bombers" covering major parts of the Black Sea (Dubovyk, 2016). As of April 2018, Russia commissioned six Kilo-class submarines and three (out of six) Admiral Grigorovich frigates capable of launching land-

---

[36] Russia's Black Sea fleet modernization process started already in 2010 following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

directed Kalibr cruise missiles (Vișan, 2018). In the fall 2015, it launched these missiles from the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean into Syria against IS targets and other militants with high precision.

Enhanced A2/AD capabilities

Deploying long-range weapons enabled Russia to establish a highly effective A2/AD bubble covering large parts of the Black Sea including Turkish territory.[37] In an Atlantic Council Black Sea security conference (June 2016), several respondents argued this A2/AD bubble constituted the most serious development since the Crimea Annexation.[38] In case of a conflict, Russia may prevent the US/NATO access to the region through air, sea and cyber space. Russia perceives its A2/AD capabilities as defensive against any potential NATO incursion into the Black Sea or attempts to retake Crimea. However, multiple scenarios may enable Russia to conduct warfare while cutting off access to the US or NATO. Potential scenarios include an escalation of the Ukraine conflict or re-eruption of conflicts in Georgia/Abkhazia or in Transnistria/Moldova (Marten, 2017, p. 22). Moreover, in case of an "all-out war" between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia and Turkey may be forced to "take sides," which may put them in a direct confrontation (Celac, Cropsey, Dungaciu, Fota & Ioniță, 2016, p. 15).

---

[37] Long-range weapons were not new developments in Russia's Black Sea strategy. However, the annexation enabled Russia to move long-range (land-based) weapons including S-400s and Bastion anti-ship cruise missiles to Crimea from their previous location in Novorossiysk in south-western Russia.

[38] Part of Russia's strategy "to prevent NATO forces operations in the NATO border states and in the regions perceived by Moscow as their strategic ones" including the Baltics and Eastern Mediterranean (Smura, 2016, pp. 5-6).

Figure 4 - Russia's Black Sea A2/AD bubble

Russia's A2/AD bubbles pose major security risks for NATO in the Arctic, the Baltics, eastern and south-eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, increasingly covering Turkish territory.

Testing the limits of Turkey and NATO

Several indications suggest Russia enhanced its regional aggregate and offensive power capabilities, which means an increased ability to undermine Turkey's sovereignty and territory. Since 2014, Russia tested the limits of Turkey by flying surveillance plans along Turkey's Black Sea coast, prompting Turkey to send fighter jets (Balcer, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, Russian fighter jets equipped with radar jammers buzzed several US ships in the Black Sea, at one time managing to dismantle the Aegis Combat System. Russia also conducted multiple airspace intrusions into Turkish territory. On January 31, 2016, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned Russia it would "face the consequences" if air space violations continued ("Turkey says Russia," 2016). Lastly, Russia conducted major snap exercises in February 2016 close to Turkish territory that resembled preparations for an invasion (Felgenhauer, 2016).[39] These last two events particularly stood out because they occurred amid growing tensions after Turkey downed the Russian Su-24 fighter jet in Syria three months earlier (which I elaborate on in 5.5.2.). Consequently, Turkey should be concerned about the growing regional threat posed by Russia's assertive military posture in the Black Sea.

Growing maritime rivalry

The annexation also resulted in Russia significantly challenging Turkey's traditional maritime dominance. Although Turkey enjoys a slight numerical advantage of warships, Russia's Black Sea fleet modernization will further close the maritime gap by 2020 (Celac et. al, 2016, p. 8). Concerning the regional power balance, Turkey has major interests in balancing. Growing Turkey-Russia maritime rivalry also increasingly manifests itself in the Eastern Mediterranean. 'We can no longer distinguish between the threat posed by Russia's military in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean,' says one of my respondents. This is because Crimea emerged as a logistics hub supplying the Russian army in Syria since September 2015. Since then, Turkey witnessed an increased pressure of military material through the Bosporus Straits. 'Russia will seek to test the limits of the Montreux Convention. This will inevitably trigger a growing Turkish balancing response in the long term,' argues my respondent.

---

[39] This massive snap exercise resembled the pre-war mobilization of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War and the Crimea annexation.

5.5.2 Limited NATO response preferable

I have now mapped out developments and security risks related to the militarization of Crimea. Next, I assess Turkey's approach to NATO after the annexation and subsequently note how this approach changed in early 2016, when Turkey-Russia relations were strained over the fighter jet incident in Syria. Firstly, I assess in brief the limitations the Montreux Convention place on warship deployments to the region to understand NATO's limited room for maneuver.

Legal restraints

The Montreux Convention of 1936 stipulates that non-littoral states' ships spend maximum 21 days in the Black Sea, subject to strict tonnage restrictions. While an increased NATO presence by itself would not necessarily violate the Montreux Convention, Ankara worries a substantial military build-up may set a precedent and potentially open a 'Pandora's box' whereby a renegotiation or abolishment of the convention may grant non-littoral states increased favorable terms vis-a-vis the littoral states, which neither Turkey nor Russia support. In the worst case, Turkey fears it may lose its sovereignty over the Turkish Straits, which would pose a national security threat. Yet, the new regional balance of power places Turkey in a major dilemma: It needs more external assistance than before the Crimea annexation, while at the same time it has a major interest in keeping the military build-up minimal.

Since the Crimea annexation, neither Ankara nor Moscow challenged the status of the Montreux convention. Despite several bilateral disputes, Turkey adhered to the convention and upheld Russian access to the Turkish Straits as a continuity from the Russia-Georgia War of 2008. This showed the resilience the convention grants their relationship as both sides benefit from the legal framework. Dubious reports emerged that Turkey delayed the passage of Russian ships after the fighter jet incident, but it did not prevent Russian ships from passing. In case of war, Turkey may close the Bosporus Straits. Hence, Russian weapon shipments to and from the Eastern Mediterranean and Crimea will continue to depend on Turkish approval, granting Turkey an edge on which could not be counted through a conventional arms match-up.

Figure 5 - The Turkish Straits

Controlling the Turkish Straits is key to Turkey's security. However, the Straits face increased pressure from Russia's growing military assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Limited, but increased NATO response preferable

Officially, Ankara stood by NATO's decision to suspend all "civilian and military cooperation" with Russia in April 2014 in wake of the annexation (NATO, 2014). Erdogan reiterated Turkey's political support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and the illegal annexation of Crimea at the Wales Summit in September 2014. However, Ankara initially downplayed the threat posed by Russia's militarization and was cautious of advocating a greater NATO presence in 2014. NATO was also relatively occupied with growing threats toward the Baltics. Hence, minimal deterrence constituted the norm in the Black Sea from 2014-2016.

The winter and spring of 2016 appeared a turning point (however temporary) in Turkey's approach to NATO. Strained Ankara-Moscow relations after the fighter jet incident triggered a growing threat perception of Russia. During NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg's visit to Turkey in April 2016, Erdogan reportedly stated that NATO's limited presence in the Black Sea turned it into a "Russian lake" and urged NATO to increase its presence in the region. Erdogan reiterated this at NATO's Warsaw summit on July 8-9, 2016 and in October, after the rapprochement with Russia (Kirişi, 2018, 169-170).

This statement indicated a policy shift, as Turkey traditionally opposed a greater NATO presence in the Black Sea. It showed that Turkey adapted a more flexible approach toward NATO when under intense pressure from Russia. Specifically, Ankara expressed a growing willingness to balance when involved in a direct bilateral dispute rather than a third-party conflict such as Ukraine. The fact that Erdogan reiterated support for greater NATO presence in October 2016 (after the rapprochement with Russia) may indicate Ankara saw it as a necessary buffer until relations were fully restored.

In addition to growing security concerns, Erdogan's statement may also have targeted Turkey's domestic audience, as it reinforced the narrative of NATO as an inadequate security supplier. This resembled Ankara's perception NATO failed to tackle Turkey's border security challenges in Syria by withdrawing Patriot batteries at a critical time for Turkey's security. Moreover, Turkey's approach to NATO should be evaluated in context of the NATO Summit scheduled for July 11-12, 2018 in Brussels in Belgium. This approach could indicate how it perceived NATO in the region when relations with Russia were substantially strengthened after the July 2016 coup attempt.

NATO increases its Black Sea presence

NATO took multiple steps to strengthen its Black Sea presence before and after the Warsaw Summit in July 2016. These may or may not have been in response to Turkish security concerns, but nonetheless strengthened Turkey's security.

In May 2016, NATO launched the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System in Romania as part of its broader missile defense shield (facilities in Germany, Spain and Turkey) aimed at containing ballistic missile threats from "rogue states like Iran" (Browne, 2016). Yet, Russia labelled it ""an attempt to destroy the strategic balance." This missile system likely strengthens Turkey's air defenses. Furthermore, NATO launched the Tailored Forward Presence multinational brigade in Romania (October 2017) comprising land, air and sea components (Toucas, 2018, p. 3). It sought to "reaffirm NATO's presence and commitment in the region, while keeping an eye on Russia's A2/AD capabilities and deployments" (Jacob, 2017). These deployments to Romania indicated a growing US preference for Romania over Turkey as the region's strategic partner (Toucas, 2018, p. 4). Turkey likely also perceives Romania as a favorable NATO location as deploying assets and troops there could reduce the risk of undermining Ankara-Moscow relations, while reinforcing NATO's deterrence measures, in turn strengthening Turkey' security in the Black Sea. Moreover, Romania's privileges under the Montreux Convention (as a littoral state) makes it a more flexible partner, suggesting Turkey perceives littoral NATO countries substantially more favorable than non-littoral NATO countries.

Despite NATO's increased presence in the Black Sea after 2016, uncertainty looms regarding the scale of its future presence in the region. A central question is whether to establish a permanent rotational force of naval warships. In an Atlantic Council conference (June 2016), the respondents discussed potential steps to deter Russian aggression in the Black Sea region. According to a US marine officer, enforcing the current legal framework is already complicated and would be exacerbated by a permanent stationing. A US ambassador highlights the Montreux Convention's outdated tonnage limits (from 1936), which prevent most US combat ships access to the region. Moreover, Turkey refuses to sign the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which would require it to amend to the Montreux Convention (Blockmans, 2015, p. 183). External pressure for amending the convention will likely increase in the foreseeable future, partly due to the new regional balance of power and as new energy and transportation routes emerge in the region. The Crimea annexation put the Montreux

Convention in a fragile equilibrium. Turkey must now maintain this equilibrium for all its worth.

Enhancing bilateral and regional security mechanisms

In addition to supporting a limited, yet increased NATO presence following the fighter jet incident in Syria, Turkey sought to strengthen bilateral and regional security arrangements. This occurred amid growing rivalry within the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus. Turkey strengthened defense cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia. In March 2016, it held joint naval exercises with Ukraine in the Sea of Marmara, indicating growing efforts to counter Russia's military power (Kirişi, 2018, p. 178). It also expressed support for Georgia's NATO membership in February 2016, indicating a new policy line. Strengthening Georgia's and Ukraine's self-defenses and integrating them closer into NATO's partnership program therefore emerge as a common regional interest for Turkey and NATO. Conversely, Russia strengthened defense ties with Armenia and *de facto* states South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Erşen, 2017, p. 94). Since then, Ankara increased regional security cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia aiming to "strengthen its geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus," protect key infrastructure projects and keep regional conflicts under control (Shahbazov, 2017). Containing Russian influence appears to constitute one of several goals of this trilateral security mechanism. In sum, this regional rivalry reflected the underlying geopolitical competition between Russia and Turkey and showed that tensions in the Black Sea and the South Caucasus have a spillover effect, making the two regions hard to distinguish.

5.5.3 Upgrading its national defense

I have now shown that Turkey prefers a limited, yet increased NATO presence in the Black Sea and continues to strengthen bilateral and regional security mechanisms. The last and the most crucial pillar of its defense strategy is to upgrade its national defense to become self-sufficient by 2023, tackle challenges unilaterally and become a net weapons exporter.

Firstly, I provide a brief methodological challenge for this sub-chapter. Next, I explain Turkey's naval modernization efforts, its maritime strategy and how this strategy fits into the strategic picture of Russia's growing A2/AD capabilities.

Building a sufficient deterrent while adhering to the Montreux Convention prompts Turkey to upgrade its domestic defense industry. According to one of my respondents, 'Turkey cannot escape the security dilemma: It needs to develop its indigenous defense industry and anti-missile capabilities.' Yet, it may be hard to establish a causal connection between Turkey's perception of Russia as a growing threat (after 2014) and specific measures taken in the defense industry. Understandably, Ankara would likely avoid announcing that certain domestic defense programs explicitly seek to offset Russian military capabilities. Doing so would most likely encourage an arms race, which neither of the involved actors (Turkey, NATO and Russia) seeks. Yet, Turkey's military posture in the Black Sea after 2014 is worth exploring as it must inevitably consider the new military balance of power. Both specific actions and lack of action should provide clues to understand Ankara's military approach to Russia.

Modernizing the military

Traditionally, Turkey tried to prevent competition with Russia in the region due to Russia's military superiority (Toucas, 2018, p.2). At the time of the Crimea annexation, Turkish government circles perceived their military to be at "relative parity with Russia in the Black Sea" (p. 1). However, this perception only held true if one compared all of Turkey's navy assets with Russia's Black Sea fleet, which it would be unlikely to deploy in case of a regional conflict. Upgrading its national defense is therefore important to counter Russia's growing regional dominance.

The Turkish military has for decades sought to boost and modernize its Black Sea naval fleet. The 3bn USD "National Warship project" (MILGEM) forms the pillar of the Turkish navy's defense modernization. It seeks to replace the navy's older German-made Meko 200 frigates with four Ada class anti-submarine warfare corvettes and four TF 100 frigates (Istanbul class) entering service by 2021. This will lay the foundation for producing the TF2000 anti-air warfare frigate. However, a politically-driven decision by Erdogan in September, 2013 halted the project, giving Russia a maritime "window of vulnerability" to exploit (Tanchum, 2014, p. 1).[40] Developments since 2014, however, indicate major progress on the project. On July 3, 2017, Turkey launched the fourth of the Ada class corvettes (starting operations in 2019) and started construction of the first TF-100 frigates ("Turkey Launch," 2017). These notions suggested two

---

[40] Erdogan instigated a politically-motivated persecution of the major Koç Holding enterprise after one of its hotels housed demonstrators fleeing police during the Gezi park protests in Istanbul in 2013. This led to cancellation of a tender won by Koç Holding's subsidiary company RMK Marine.

things: They showed how a politically-motivated decision could delay a national defense project and that the government recalibrated its efforts afterwards.

Potential Turkish responses to Russia's growing A2/AD capabilities at Crimea also deserve attention. Turkey's naval modernization strategy is "geared toward sea control and force projection" to neutralize threats before they reach Turkey's borders" (Kurtdarcan & Kayaoğlu, 2017). Yet, developing sea denial capabilities is a relatively low-priority for Ankara and a resource-intensive and costly task in a littoral sea area. Turkey's maritime strategy is particularly challenged by Russia's A2/AD bubbles in Crimea and Syria, which may deny the Turkish military access to sea and air space in case of a conflict. Turkey took certain measures to develop A2/AD capabilities. It developed air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) technologies for the air force and "seems to possess the needed technical capability to quickly develop and mass-produce high-precision ASCMs [Anti-ship Cruise Missiles]". However, developing "long-range air and missile defense technologies" remains in progress, which is where the recent S-400 missile purchase fit in (Kurtdarcan & Kayaoğlu, 2017). In dealing with a growing Russian submarine threat, Turkey possesses "fully sufficient anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities" which can intercept Russian submarines transiting through the Turkish Straits (Vişan, 2018). Yet, NATO possesses minimal ASW's capabilities in the Black Sea, making the alliance vulnerable to Russian submarine activity. In general, Turkey's and NATO's efforts to build their own A2/AD capabilities and to counter Russia's growing capabilities appear insufficient and slowly progressing. The ultimate issue (as seen in Georgia and Ukraine), is that "NATO has no agreed-upon policy on how to react to future Russian aggression in Eurasia that occurs near, but not in violation of, NATO borders" (Marten, 2017, p. 22).

This subchapter suggested Turkey pursues a multilayer defense strategy, whereby upgrading its national defense constitutes the preferred form of balancing Russian influence. The main goal is power projection into the Caucasus, the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. Yet, this is more a *continuity* of rather than an *adaptation* of Turkey's maritime strategy after the Crimea annexation. Turkey's defense modernization project has displayed major progress, but this would likely have occurred regardless of the Crimea annexation. As Turkey's maritime strategy revolves around power projection and sea power, Russia's A2/AD capabilities increasingly challenge Turkey's sphere of influence.

5.6 Accommodating Russia in the energy sphere

In addition to militarizing Crimea, Russia sought to strengthen its position in regional energy markets since 2014. It is therefore worth investigating Turkey's response to Moscow's energy plans and associated risks with this response. I argue Turkish overreliance on Russian energy hampers Ankara's ambitions to become an energy hub. This energy dependence combined with Russia's growing military posture increase the risk to Turkish energy security and regional interests. Consequently, Ankara is not pursuing a long-term rational strategy.

The politics of energy hampers Turkey's energy hub ambitions

The context is that Turkey imports 50-55 % of its natural gas from Russia, the majority going through the Blue Stream and Trans-Balkan pipelines (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 6). For years, Turkey's dependence on Russian energy declined, in line with Turkey's major goal to "to become an energy hub and crucial transit country" (Göksel, 2014). A major component is the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP) transporting gas from Azerbaijan into Turkey en route to Europe.[41] Until 2014, analysts thus expected Turkey to further reduce its reliance on Russian energy and align closer with the EU's energy plans.

However, the Crimea annexation likely strengthened Russia's leverage over Turkey's energy hub ambitions. Göksel (2014) argues that "While the Ukraine crisis increased Turkey's strategic importance as a gas transit country for the West, it has simultaneously increased the importance of Turkey to Russia." The TurkStream pipeline enables Russia to bypass Ukraine as a gas transit destination en route to Europe. According to one of my respondents, TurkStream's main purpose is to monopolize Russian control over the Turkish gas market, which deepens the asymmetry of dependence. Consequently, TurkStream substantially strengthens their bilateral relationship and ties Turkey's energy security closer to Russia. Yet, it is also a mutual agreement. With one of world's fastest growing energy markets, Turkey would nonetheless need to obtain increased amounts of gas.

TurkStream highlighted the degree to which energy projects are susceptible to rapid political changes in Turkey-Russia relations and specifically Putin-Erdogan dynamics. Firstly, Russia

---

[41]First gas deliveries to Turkey and Europe scheduled for 2018 and 2020, respectively. TANAP constitutes part of the planned 'Southern Gas Corridor' (SGC) intended to reduce the EU's energy reliance on Russian gas by importing gas from the Caspian Sea.

cancelled the project after Turkey downed the Russian Su-24 in Syria. Subsequently, Ankara perceived it necessary to continue diversifying its energy supplies and agreed with Azerbaijan to expedite construction of TANAP. As part of the rapprochement process, Putin and Erdogan met in St. Petersburg on August 9, 2016. They agreed to increase trade to 100 bn USD by 2020, revive construction of TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, which had faced delays (scheduled for completion in 2019 and 2022, respectively). The consequence is increased Russian control over Turkey's energy security. Konarzewska suggests that "the revival of Turkish Stream is primarily a tactical move by Ankara to reset relations with Russia in order to ease the sanctions that Moscow imposed on Turkish businesses." If so, this shows the lengths the AKP is willing to go to rapidly revitalize economic ties, reflecting its middle power aspirations.

TurkStream may therefore be interpreted as (1) a high degree of accommodation of Russia's solidified power in the region after 2014 and (2) a strategy to restore relations as part of the rapprochement process in mid-2016. Hence, pragmatic, short and medium-term political considerations likely enabled this high accommodation. Similar to Ankara's political response, economic concerns shaped energy relations with Russia. This indicates Ankara downplayed the long-term risks associated with overdependence on Russian energy, which limits Ankara's long-term goal of becoming an independent energy hub.

Associated risks

The paradox is that Turkey's pursuit of independence tends to increase its dependency on Russia, says one of my respondents. Thus, Turkish officials increasingly fear overdependence on Russia, which may increase the risk to Turkey's energy security in case of a conflict. Although Russia refrained from using gas exports as political leverage against Turkey, it has a demonstrated record of using its gas supplies for this purpose against countries in the region, including Ukraine. (Baev & Kirişci, 2017, p. 6). To counter growing competition over gas en route to Europe (delaying the 'Southern Gas Corridor'), Russia may resume hostilities with Georgia and/or increase military pressure against Azerbaijan (through its cooperation with Armenia). Ariel Cohen from the Atlantic Council argues that "If a conflict flares up, Moscow could hold the area's energy supply hostage—yet another sign that excessive dependence on Russian gas is a security risk the region can ill afford" (2015, p. 2). Moreover, a potential shut-off of Russian gas to Turkey may hamper around 20 % of its electricity production, severely

affecting industry as well as its population. Finding credible supply alternatives in case of energy shortages remains a major challenge to Ankara (Demirmen, 2016).

These findings suggest that Russia's growing military posture and energy arrangements after the Crimea Annexation increasingly converge, raising the regional risk level and deepening Turkey's dependence on Russia. This asymmetrical relationship thus constitutes a major factor Ankara needs to consider when interacting with the US/NATO and responding to conflicts in the Black Sea.

Figure 6 - Turkish pipeline politics
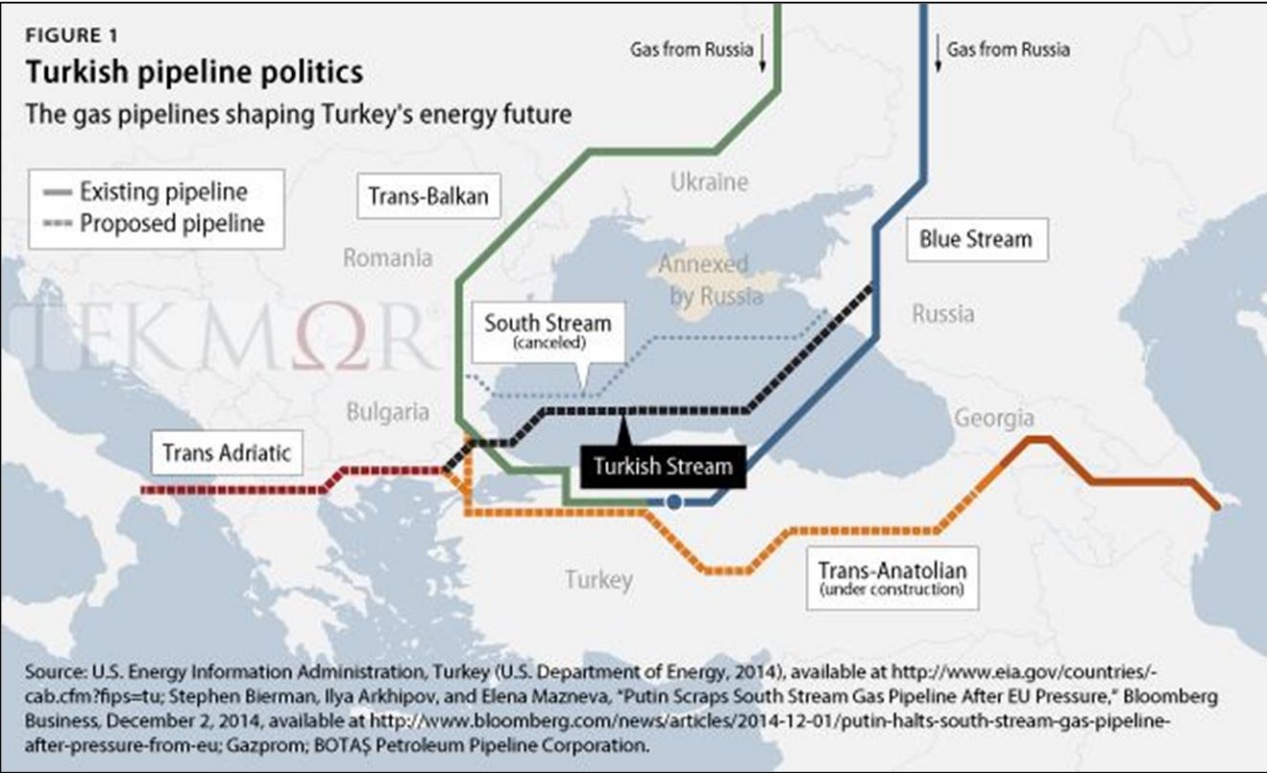
Turk Stream will help Turkey meet its growing energy demands but is not helping Ankara fulfill its long-term ambitions to become an energy hub.

5.7 Theoretical evaluation

The balance of threat theory appears particularly suited for evaluating Turkey-Russia relations in the Black Sea. Russia's Crimea Annexation and subsequent Eastern Ukraine involvement indeed demonstrated a growing threat level. Russia displayed enhanced aggregate and offensive powers as well as increasing aggressive intentions. Moreover, it altered the military balance of power, which significantly challenged Turkey's naval power and NATO's room for maneuver in case of a conflict. This power projection solidified Ankara's perception of Russia as an offensive, expansive actor in the post-Soviet space, in turn challenging Ankara's regional power aspirations. Thus, considered in isolation, the post-annexation developments suggest Turkey should have balanced against Russia politically/and or militarily.

In general, Ankara's perception of Russia as a growing threat did not match its counter-measures neither politically, militarily, nor in the energy sphere. Balancing remained largely confined to support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and demands to protect Crimean Tatars, yielding minimal success. In this regard, Ankara lacked asymmetry of motivation (ability to protect its kinship community) and demonstrated minimal efforts and ability to shape political developments on Crimea. This was partially driven by an opportunistic policy where trade interests impacted Ankara's foreign policy and, likely the treatment of Crimean Tatars. Refraining from significant pressure and avoiding sanctions provided lucrative business opportunities. This highlighted the importance of organizations' influence on Ankara's Black Sea policies, particularly regarding contested issues.

Nonetheless, Turkey increased its balancing response toward Russia in the Black Sea region after the fighter jet incident resulting in Russia severely sanctioning Turkey. Erdogan urged a stronger NATO presence in the region and emphasized Turkey's role as a NATO security receiver. Turkey demonstrated a growing balancing response when involved in a bilateral dispute, whereas it preferred to stay out of the Ukraine conflict, which it framed as a third-party conflict. It also strengthened bilateral and regional security mechanisms. This suggests Ankara pursued a *flexible, diversified balancing response.* Erdogan's call for a NATO presence also constituted one of the few instances where he fronted Ankara's policies. In general, Ankara seemed to pursue a de-politicized policy in the Black Sea region where Erdogan left large parts of the foreign policy to the bureaucracy and organizations' bargaining processes while focusing on Syria. However, the increased Turkey-Russia rivalry in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions

(2015-2016) showed that security relations in this relatively low-tension region could deteriorate rapidly.

Balance of threat appears less suited for explaining the security dynamics of a littoral area enclosed by a legal regime (the Montreux Convention). Turkey's control of the Turkish Straits guarantees its sovereignty and thus a self-imposed responsibility to limit tensions and prevent a regional arms race. Had it not been for the Montreux Convention, the proximity of threat would likely have triggered stronger Turkish balancing measures. At the same time, one may argue the Montreux Convention keeps an equilibrium in the wider Turkey-Russia relationship. Both countries benefit from the convention as abolishing it may pose major security challenges for both countries. Amending/abolishing the Montreux Convention could even represent a greater security risk for Turkey than a dominant Russian military. Ankara's implementation of the Montreux Convention remained unchanged under the time of study, suggesting its greatest national security concern was kept in check. It secured asymmetry of motivation.

Balance of threat performs relatively well in explaining the asymmetry of dependence in the energy sphere, which reduces Turkey's balancing options. Retaining uninterrupted energy supplies constituted a key priority, which may partially explain Turkey's relatively high accommodation of Russia since 2014. Russia's dominant energy position clearly increases its leverage over Turkey. I found officials in Ankara were increasingly uncomfortable with this asymmetrical relationship. Yet, re-launching construction of TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in the fall of 2016 was a viable way to ease Russian-imposed sanctions. Hence, short to medium-term considerations likely drove the decision. In the long term, Ankara would be better off by increasing its energy diversification and focus on the TANAP project.

The balance of threat theory falls short concerning the substantial amount of political and security resources depleted in Syria. At the time of the Crimea annexation, Turkey already faced an exceptional security situation due to the Syrian civil war. It hosted around two million refugees (later over three), experienced multiple terror attacks (2015-2016) and struggled to contain the YPG's expansion. Consequently, even if it wanted to balance more affirmatively against Russia, it would lack crucial resources. It is also clear that its Black Sea policies were an issue of *priority*. The threats posed by the YPG and IS in Syria were clearly a greater, imminent threat than Russia's deployment of long-range weapons to Crimea. Lastly, the issue of *motivation* may have prevented a firmer balancing response. Turkey saw major benefits in staying out of the Ukraine conflict. The less it did, the better the ties it could foster with Russia.

Hence, even if it had necessary means and the Syrian civil war was not a factor, it may have lacked the motivation for conducting different policies.

6 Implications for Turkey's role as a Western security partner

I have now analyzed the cases of Syria and the Black Sea region, provided arguments and answered the two first research questions. Based on these findings, I will now suggest implications for Turkey's role as a Western security partner. The idea is to map out the trends, suggest a path forward and help scholars and policy makers how to approach Turkey's foreign policy.

Firstly, I argue the two cases point to security in sensitive neighborhoods. Next, I comment on Turkey's role in NATO, highlighting the benefits and limitations of NATO membership and Turkey's and NATO's common interests in deterring Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Lastly, I argue Ankara is becoming increasingly *assertive at home, assertive abroad* and discuss how this may impact Turkey's interactions with the West and Russia. A brief discussion on the role of ideology and governance style is included.

6.1 Security in sensitive neighborhoods

Security in sensitive neighborhoods emerges as the main topic from the case study. National security concerns shape Turkey's overall policy line in both regions pertaining to this sensitivity. Consequently, Ankara's relations with other actors in these regions will, to a large extent, depend on how well its security concerns are addressed.

In Syria, short, medium and long-term security threats (posed by Assad's regime, Russia, IS and the YPG) drove Ankara's security policies. The greatest threat was the potential establishment of a Kurdish state along its border, connecting with Kurdish regions in Turkey's south-east. In the Black Sea, commercial interests, the Montreux Convention and asymmetrical constraints shaped Turkey's approach to Russia. The Syrian civil war posed substantially more imminent and clear threats. At the same time, Russia's militarization of Crimea significantly increased the risk level to Turkey's and NATO's interests in the Black Sea region. Russia violated Turkish airspace and buzzed NATO ships multiple times after 2014. It staged major snap exercises nearby Turkish borders and strengthened its military presence in the South Caucasus through cooperation with Abkhazia and Armenia. It also launched Kalibr cruise missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean into Syria targeting IS and

opposition militants. Russia clearly demonstrated an increased threat level in the Black Sea, even for Turkey. Yet, it was far less clear in which ways, under what conditions and for what reasons Russia would pose an imminent threat toward Turkey's sovereignty and territory in the Black Sea region. Nonetheless, a fundamental new development emerged since 2014: Ankara's previous argument—that an increased NATO presence in the region was unnecessary to maintain stability—imploded. It eventually came to the realization itself, but not until relations with Russia were strained after the fighter jet incident in Syria.

Common interests, diverging priorities

The introduction posed the question to what degree Turkey's and NATO's interests align in Turkey's neighborhood as opposed to whether Turkey constitutes a useful partner to the alliance. The cases revealed that the US/NATO and Turkey have shared security interests, but different security priorities.

In Syria, Turkey and the US initially converged on the question of regime change, but their commitments differed significantly. Ankara mainly saw itself as a security receiver and took a major risk enabling foreign fighter flows in expectation of US military support to oust Assad. The US' lacking will to provide military support to topple Assad highlighted the US' declining regional role and opened a power vacuum for Iran and Russia to exploit. This suggested Turkey's and the US' alliance commitments differed significantly. The US' refusal to play a key role in the Syrian civil war (except for fighting IS) prompted Turkey to find other security partners. It had to diversify to secure itself.

Both Turkey and the US perceived IS as a major threat. Hence, by itself, they could cooperate on anti-IS operations without major difficulties. However, Ankara's two-front war against the YPG and IS was incompatible with the US' focus on combating IS with the YPG's support. Neither NATO nor the US perceived the YPG as a threat and definitely not as a terrorist organization. Using the Kurds as a strategic partner represented continuity with past US involvement in Iraq. The US/YPG alliance therefore solidified pre-existing Turkish perceptions of the US as a destabilizing ally intent on 'bringing Kurdish democratization into Turkey.' This has significantly strengthened the appeal of anti-US propaganda and increased urgent responses to security threats, as Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) and Operation Olive Branch demonstrated.

88

The rise of the YPG significantly lowered the threshold for unilateral Turkish military actions. Incidentally, the rise of the Kurds was also a self-inflicted wound as Ankara enabled major foreign fighter flows across its borders en route to Syria, helping trigger the rise of IS. The case of Syria thus demonstrated the dangers of over-involvement in a neighboring state's internal affairs. Moreover, overambitious personal agendas and organizational deficits backfired, increasing Ankara's own vulnerability.

Balancing relations in the Black Sea

Whereas Syria was a case of over-involvement, the Black Sea demonstrated the risks associated with under-involvement. Turkey had to take multiple relationships into account in wake of the Crimea annexation. It switched between three roles: Its asymmetrical relationships with the US/NATO in the security sphere, Russia in trade and energy and its quest to act independently as an emerging middle power. It wants to be a security contributor to NATO and acknowledges its own reliance on the alliance. At the same time, it wants to maintain good relations with Russia to avoid damaging energy and trade ties. Lastly, Turkey's quest to act independently is demonstrated in particular by its defense industry, seeking to obtain its own missile technology and reduce reliance on US security assistance and weapon imports. However, as I argued, its quest for independence tends to move it closer to Russia, particularly in the sphere of energy. This is perhaps not surprising due to Russia's important regional position, geographically and politically. Nonetheless, overdependence on Russia also increased the threat perception of Russia among Turkish government circles. In this context, Turkey's and NATO's threat perception of Russia largely converged.

Ankara's threat perception of Russia appears largely unchanged since the July 2016 coup attempt, although their growing cooperation may indicate otherwise. I argued that Ankara's security policies did not match its growing threat perception. Hence, a large potential for NATO-Turkey cooperation in the Black Sea region emerges. At best, Western policy makers are witnessing a delayed balancing response from Turkey due to short and medium term political considerations. At worst, Turkey's overreliance on Russia may undermine its security. Nonetheless, geopolitical differences in the Black Sea region point to anything but a strategic Turkey-Russia security axis. As regional competitors, both countries find value in propping up their respective interests, including in the South Caucasus.

Lessons learned

The results of growing Turkey-Russia cooperation in Syria since mid-2016 appear exaggerated. They largely limited cooperation to anti-IS and tactical operations and monitoring of 'de-escalation zones.' They agreed on the unity and territorial integrity of Syria but disagreed on Assad's future and the political role of the YPG, to which Russia supported giving greater autonomy. Growing cooperation in Syria did not trickle down to other regions under the case studies' time frame. Deep political disagreements and rivalry persisted elsewhere, including in the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea and Caucasus regions. Consequently, the fruits of the Russian-led Astana peace process appear largely confined to Syria and not necessarily a sign of an emerging Turkish-Russian security axis.

Looking ahead, they may cooperate to solve other conflicts, such as in the MENA region. Syria obviously showed they can cooperate despite diverting geopolitical interests. Yet, unless they show a genuine willingness to solve frozen conflicts in their neighborhood, a strong security partnership seems highly unlikely. The Black Sea case gives nuance to growing claims that Turkey is embracing Russia as an alternative security partner to the West. Ankara may, to a large degree, support closer ties with Russia in energy, trade, tourism, anti-terror operations, diplomacy etc. However, there are limits to how far it will approach Russia in the security sphere. Cooperating with Russia is much easier when non-state actors pose a threat (including the YPG and IS in Syria) rather than when Russia is the main adjacent threat. Undoubtedly, Russia will continue to constitute the main security threat to Turkey in the Black Sea. Thus, the proximity of threat factor holds relatively high explanatory power and will likely continue to shape their balancing response in the foreseeable future.

The two cases also reveal a deepening asymmetrical relationship where Russia appears to gain increased leverage over Turkey. Previous research labelled the relationship as an 'Axis of the excluded.' My findings suggest rather a deepening 'Axis of asymmetric dependence' favoring Putin. Following the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan and Putin perceived each other more than ever as a useful hedge against the West, and the US particularly. However, Turkey paid a major price in moving closer to Russia. Joining the Astana peace process likely bolstered Russia's position in Syria and helped strengthen Assad's regime. The rapprochement process of 2016 seemed to have included a 'package' offered to Ankara to ease sanctions. Increasing trade, defense cooperation and reviving construction of TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power plant may bring mutual benefits, but they deepen the asymmetry of dependence. In a

90

sense, Russia's growing leverage over Turkey may be a case of Putin's (limited) success in undermining the West. Their 'special relationship' and geographical proximity make Turkey Russia's most significant entry point into NATO.

6.2   NATO membership as a foundation

Despite Turkey's tensions with the West (and the US in particular), Turkey will likely remain anchored in NATO in the foreseeable future. It sees itself as an important contributor to the alliance, and expects support as a security receiver. Furthermore, its participation in NATO has remained relatively steady after the coup attempt. On April 18, 2018, NATO secretary Jens Stoltenberg announced that Turkey will take a prominent role in NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force in the next few years aimed at containing "risks and threats that might arise in Russia, the Middle East, and North Africa" ("Turkey set to join," 2018). This may indicate Ankara wants to signal its continued commitment to the alliance (after receiving criticism over purchasing the S-400 system) and to take a leadership role in the MENA region.

Besides the Article 5 guarantees, Turkey remains heavy reliant on NATO's weapons arsenal and benefits from its peace time command structure and shared pool of resources that reduce security costs. One of my respondents suggested that 'Someone should actually calculate how much it would cost Turkey to fund its own defense should it withdraw from NATO.' He also made an important observation on Turkey's role in NATO: 'It may object to certain decisions, but once a decision is taken, it follows through on its commitments.' Moreover, Ankara's relatively high funding of its GDP to NATO has remained unchanged since 2016. Hence, the anti-Western rhetoric has simply not matched Ankara's participation in NATO. This indicates the AKP still perceives major benefits from the alliance, similar to Wallace Thies' notions that NATO endures because its members support the alliance's long-term commitments beyond short-term nationalistic and military goals. Moreover, Turkey does not want to jeopardize relations with other countries outside its disputes with the US. Ankara thus demonstrates relatively more respect for Brussels than for Washington. Moreover, withdrawing from NATO may not necessarily be an electoral success: A recent poll found that 62 % of Turks support NATO membership (Kirişci, 2018, p. 22). While large parts of the public and Eurasianist proponents may not necessarily distinguish between NATO and the US, Ankara's foreign policy line seems to acknowledge a fine distinction between the two actors, which seems unchanged by the post-coup purge.

While the thesis found a deepening asymmetrical relationship, it found substantially few signs that Turkey is on a systematic path away from NATO toward Russia in the security sphere. Quite the contrary, Russia's growing military posture in Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea highlighted why it needs NATO (and vice-versa), but only as one among several security partners. How the recent S-400 missile purchase (if it ever arrives) will affect long-term relations with Russia and NATO remains unknown. Yet, Turkish officials may continue to use this and future deals as bargaining tools against NATO/the US to attract political concessions or better weapons deals. Threatening to accommodate Russia will likely remain a powerful tool for Ankara and a flashpoint in its relations with the West. The April 2017 referendum grants the president formal powers to oversee defense procurement. Consequently, the threshold for buying controversial weapons from Russia will be lower. Yet, Turkey also signed defense agreements with several European countries for various purposes (including missile technology) under the case studies' time frame, which suggests Russia's weapons repertoire can only fulfill part of its security portfolio

Limitations of NATO membership

Although NATO is and will remain the foundation for Turkey's security portfolio, most threats posed toward Turkey involve non-Article 5 issues. The PKK/YPG and other non-state actors may pose such threats. They may use excessive weapons and develop hybrid capabilities that may threaten Turkey (Kasapoğlu and Ülgen, 2018). Consequently, NATO's ability to respond to non-Article 5 threats will also help determine how useful Turkey perceives the alliance.

The cases also revealed Erdogan's frequent attempts at coalition building, often for short-term purposes. A respondent highlighted the challenge that 'Turkish foreign policy no longer has an anchor. Therefore, Erdogan needs to look for potential allies wherever and whenever possible to avoid diplomatic isolation.' Another respondent suggested that Turkey started experimenting with a "neo non-aligned position" revolving around 'temporary issue-built alliances' with other countries. The strategy is to abide by NATO's policies in general and cooperate, and sometimes to act independently, depending on national security needs. Another respondent argued Turkey's quest for autonomy is indeed in line with the US' demands for increased self-help among NATO allies and NATO's Article 3 of the Washington Treaty.[42] Turkey's strategy of reducing military dependence on the US and developing its domestic defense industry seems to

---

[42] Article 3 stipulates that member states should take the necessary means to protect its own territory.

conform to US expectations of its allies. Yet, Turkey gained minimal support for combating its greatest national security threat, the YPG/PKK. Ankara thus perceives the concept of self-help as acceptable only when in line with the US' 'war on terror'. This paradox has fueled Ankara's sense of isolation and its need to develop an autonomous foreign policy.

I argued short and medium-term security concerns largely triggered Ankara's growing cooperation with Moscow in Syria. Diverting alliance commitments and priorities (between the US and Turkey) played a key role in this realignment. Yet, despite the US' cooperation with the YPG and lacking leadership will in the Middle East, the two states can still cooperate in many areas of the world as the US can arguably offer more reliable long-term cooperation of mutual benefit than Russia. However, the risks associated with overdependence on and military dominance by Russia should prompt a firmer Turkish balancing response in the long term. Failing to do so may undermine Turkey's quest for regional influence, ambitions to become an energy hub and in the worst case, undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Although a Russian invasion of Turkish territory is a highly unlikely scenario, Russia may use its numerous asymmetrical levers over Turkey if it were inclined. One of my respondents suggested Russia uses Turkey as an instrument to achieve its 'great power' ambitions. He claimed the main threat from Russia is not so much its conventional capabilities, but 'attempts to destabilize Turkey through Kurdish militants.' Akin to Assad's proxy warfare against Turkey (letting the PYD/YPG fill a power vacuum in Syrian border areas), Russia will likely continue to hold high leverage over the YPG in the foreseeable future. As Russia seeks to counteract Western institutions and particularly NATO members, Turkish suspicion toward Russia's intentions in the Black Sea region and the MENA region will likely remain high in the foreseeable future.

6.3   Assertive at home, assertive abroad

The new Turkey is the assertive Turkey, at home and abroad. No longer constrained by secularist, non-interventionist military officers, the armed forces appear willing to fulfill the duties of the day. Turkey's involvement in Syria provided the military with invaluable experience. The military campaigns OES (2016) and Operation Olive Branch (2018) boosted the morale, provided training and combat experience yielding territorial gains. Erdogan cleansed the military of opposition elements in wake of the coup attempt, which solidified his

control over the security apparatuses. Consequently, resistance to military operations appears to have greatly declined. Moreover, Ankara seems to have strengthened its organizational capacity and shown that its military capabilities remain strong despite the post-coup purge of military personnel including F-16 pilots. For NATO, civil military-developments since the coup attempt mean its second largest standing army now have a much lower threshold for intervening in conflicts. This can both lead to constructive contributions and major challenges, such as getting involved in regional disputes and taking sides, purportedly with regards to regional stability and national interests.

Both cases demonstrated how Turkey's regional power ambitions greatly exceeded its capabilities. In Syria, Turkey struggled with over-involvement whereas the Black Sea region saw under-involvement as the main issue in wake of the Crimea Annexation. However, multiple signs suggest greater regional influence remains high on the agenda. Erdogan seems impatient and—if elected President in June 2018—is not going to wait to rebuild state institutions before conducting new foreign expeditions. The new foreign policy approach may build on former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth concept (establishing Turkey as a key regional actor expanding trade and cultural ties through soft power). However, with the 'zero problems with neighbors' policy in shatters, Turkey continues to struggle with "zero neighbors without problems" (Bechev & Hiltermann, 2017, p. 54)

Power projection becomes increasingly important to protect national security and economic interests. In addition to unilateral actions in Syria, multiple signs point to greater Turkish military involvement in its neighborhood. These include renting an Island from Sudan in the Red Sea which may be used for military developments, operating a military base in Qatar and combating terrorism in Somalia. Signing bilateral security agreements outside international-led operations and frameworks appears as an emerging trend, highlighting Ankara's ambitions to become a key security actor in the MENA region. This ambition converges with its goals to become a net weapons exporter and achieve self-sufficiency in the defense industry by 2023.

Ideology not an obstacle

Like most states, Turkey will remain largely indifferent to ideological considerations in its foreign policy. The Arab Spring was the exception. Installing a Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government in Syria appears highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. Erdogan may seek to spread a benevolent form of Islam, but his foreign policy will largely remain determined by

geopolitical and domestic political considerations. Power play at home increased after the 2016 post-coup purge and will likely continue to dominate Turkish politics toward and after the implementation of the presidential system in 2018. In this power consolidation process, aligning more closely with Russia and capitalizing on anti-US sentiments may be one tool for AKP officials and Erdogan. They face major personal and organizational stakes, which could impact their approach toward Russia, the US and the Kurds. While Erdogan saw Russia as a useful partner in Syria to make the best out of its own marginalized situation, allying with Putin was also a useful hedge against the West and a way to consolidate political power for the AKP. Allying with and giving greater space for secular Eurasianists including nationalists constituted one of Erdogan's strategies. Yet, this was likely more of an 'anti-imperialist' project than a long-term turn toward Russia in Turkish foreign policy (Alaranta, 2018). There was no doubt Erdogan and the AKP in charge.

Putin's governance style may be a role model, but there is no obsession with Putinism in Ankara. Strong relations between Erdogan and Putin are likely to be self-re-enforcing rather than a cause of alignment. Their high degree of pragmatism makes them natural partners. Once they strike a deal, they follow through, as demonstrated in Syria after mid-2016. This stands in stark contrast to Ankara's relations with the Trump administration, which appears fragmented sending contradictory messages to Ankara, such as pledging to stop arming the YPG without following up. As such, Turkish officials perceive talking with the Russians as more effective than dealing with the US bureaucracy. However, the Erdogan-Putin relationship—while appearing strong—rests on underlying suspicion, asymmetric dependence favoring Putin and both leaders' need to fulfill domestic propaganda needs.

While implementation of the presidential system substantially strengthens the Turkish president's authority (formally), a nuanced approach is necessary. The system takes effect under a pre-existing informal system with minimal transparency and limited checks and balances. Turkey never resembled a 'Western-style democracy' and it was always a 'special case' politically as a NATO member. It was admitted to NATO in 1952 to fight communism and prevent Soviet expansion into the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, not to fulfill any political credentials. Its EU membership access process in the mid-2000s triggered important political reforms but became a tool for the AKP to consolidate power by gaining civilian control over the military. Moreover. Turkey's image of a moderate Islamic and 'democratic' country

with rapid economic growth is gone and no longer an alternative to other authoritarian systems in the region. The coup attempt was the seal on the door for any accession to the EU.

Therefore, Turkey's geographic position remains its last bargaining tool in NATO. It is both an asset and a liability to NATO. Securing access to the Incirlik air base south in Turkey, missile defense sites and other facilities will remain crucial to NATO. Moreover, Turkey's cooperation in the Black Sea region became more important after Russia's militarization of Crimea and growing military assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean. Hence, there is major unfulfilled potential in Turkey-Western security relations. Turkey is certainly not a 'lost cause' for the West as a security partner and it will not separate from the West over ideological differences (including its increasingly centralized governance style). However, Erdogan has shown himself as a risk taker. Therefore, Turkey will remain a challenging, but important ally. It will be assertive at home, assertive abroad.

7 Conclusion

This thesis analyzed Turkey's security policies toward Russia, the US and NATO in Syria (2011-2018) and the Black Sea region (2014-2018) and their implications for Turkey's role as a Western security partner. It employed Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory and Allison's three conceptual models as analytical framework. It contributed to the concepts of alliance theory, security diversification and emerging middle power activism.

Theoretically, it demonstrated the continued relevance of balance of threat as a theoretical tool especially in explaining how states form alliances in response to proximate and regional threats. Turkey's security concerns included Assad's regime, the YPG/PKK, IS and Russia. The Syrian case showed that Turkey's and the US' diverting priorities made Russia a more attractive partner and that Ankara realigned with Russia partly in response to geopolitical concerns. Moreover, Ankara's alignment with Russia highlighted the end of US hegemony in the Middle East and the emergence of Russia as a key regional actor.

The rational choice model also demonstrated high explanatory power with regards to national security threats in both cases. Ankara took affirmative steps to curtail Kurdish separatism and prevent the YPG/PKK's expansion, which constituted its main national security threat. Moreover, Ankara did not challenge the status of the Montreux Convention (ensuring Turkish sovereignty over the Bosporus Straits) and took careful steps to avoid a regional arms build-up after the 2014 Crimea annexation. Yet, the Black Sea and Caucasus regions experienced growing Turkish-Russian rivalry in the first half of 2016 over the Syrian fighter jet incident. This triggered an increasingly politicized environment, growing Turkish balancing against Russia and calls from Erdogan for a greater NATO presence.

The thesis supplemented balance of threat with Allison's Rational Choice, Organizational Behavior and Governmental Politics models to improve the analysis' explanatory power. This combination revealed that short and medium-term domestic political considerations often contradict (or do not help fulfill) Ankara's long-term strategic goals. The thesis discussed what role the 2016 coup attempt played in growing Turkish-Russia cooperation in Syria since mid-2016. The post-coup purge cleansed the government and security apparatuses of alleged Gulenists, pro-Western and NATO-friendly officers, which opened a major shift in Ankara's foreign policy and likely facilitated military actions in northern Syria. Allying with Eurasianists

enabled Erdogan to consolidate his power. Moreover, Ankara's high accommodation of Russia in the energy sphere (reviving construction of TurkStream and the Akkuyu nuclear power) was largely a strategy to lift Russian-imposed sanctions (2015-2016). This increased Turkey's dependency on Russian energy and did not contribute to Turkey's goal of becoming an independent energy hub.

The cases revealed that Ankara seeks a diversified security portfolio, in which NATO forms the foundation due to its security guarantees. However, inadequate NATO assistance in Turkey's neighborhood prompts Turkey to find alternative security partners. Russia can be one among several partners and can provide weapons such as the S-400 air defense system. However, minimal trust (due to the proximity of threat) prevents a deeper security partnership. Therefore, Ankara's growing security ties with Russia neither contributes to its security, autonomy nor regional power status in the long term. Ankara's threat perception of Russia increasingly converges with its NATO allies, partly due to Russia's enhanced A2/AD capabilities in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and Syria. Assuming Turkey is a rational actor in the long term, it must balance and cannot bandwagon with Russia.

Implications for further research

This thesis lays the foundation for further research on several topics: On Turkish security studies (the connection between domestic and foreign policy). At the conceptual level (security diversification and emerging middle power activism), and on regional security studies in the Black Sea and MENA regions.

Firstly, more knowledge is needed about the connection between Turkish domestic and foreign policy, particularly related to the YPG/PKK. Testing Ankara's foreign policy through the Rational Choice, Organizational and Governmental Politics models may reveal clues about the factors that drive its foreign policy. One may analyze Turkey's interactions with more countries and actors in addition to the US, Russia and NATO. This will increase policy makers and researchers' knowledge about how to approach Turkey and its officials. Ideally, researchers would attempt to develop a refined theory of Allison's three conceptual models covering the foreign policy of a highly centralized state with informal decision-making structures such as Turkey.

At the conceptual level, researchers should study the phenomenon of security diversification as emerging powers seek to diversify their security policies and security partners. These types of states see coalition building as key to regional influence and are willing to go outside its traditional alliances to assert themselves. Their strategy aligns with the US' pledge for its allies to take increased responsibility for their own security. Security diversification, as expected, is becoming increasingly important to the so-called 'Post-American World' where others 'great powers' such as BRICS (particularly China) gain increased influence. At the regional level, one may imagine states may choose among several alliances, as demonstrated by the Syria case study.

Lastly, the thesis invites research on regional security developments. Researchers may inquire into how Russia's growing military assertiveness in the Black Sea region and Syria affects regional security and how regional rivalry shapes the 'Post-American Middle East' as the US expectedly continues its 'pivot to Asia' to contain China. Moreover, NATO's purpose, unity and operational capacities will likely continue to face major challenges. More knowledge is needed about NATO's ability to respond to (and ways to counter) Russia's enhanced A2/AD capabilities in the Baltics, the Arctic, the Black Sea region and the Eastern Mediterranean. Failing to address these challenges may pose major security risks to NATO allies.

References

Aberbach, J., & Rockman, B. (2002). Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews. PS: *Political Science and Politics, 35(*4), 673-676. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1554807

Alaranta, T. (2018, January 31). A "Eurasian Turn" in Turkish Foreign Policy? Not Likely. Turkey Analyst. Retrieved from https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/594-a-eurasian-turn-in-turkish-foreign-policy?-not-likely.html

Allison, G. T., & Zelikow, P. (1999). Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis. New York: Longman.

Aliriza, B., & Yekeler, Z. (2018, January 25). Understanding Turkey's Afrin Operation. CSIS. Retrieved from https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-turkeys-afrin-operation

Allison, R. (2013). Russia and Syria: Explaining alignment with a regime in crisis. International Affairs, 89(4), 795-823. doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12046

[AtlanticCouncil]. (2016, Jun 15). The Changing Military Balance in the Black Sea [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGLpzD79_8E

Baev, P. K., & Kirişci, K. (2017). An ambiguous partnership (Rep. No. 13). Washington, D.C.: The Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) at Brookings. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/pavel-and-kirisci-turkey-and-russia.pdf

Balcer, A. (2014, July). Dances with the Bear: Turkey and Russia After Crimea (Working paper No. 08). Warsaw, Center for East European Studies, University of Warsaw. Retrieved http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte_wp_08.pdf

Barkey, H. J. (2017, January 11). Putin and Erdogan's Marriage of Convenience. Foreign Policy. Retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/11/putin-and-erdogans-marriage-of-convenience/

Barnard, A. (2017, December 27). Assad Must Go, Erdogan Says, as Syria War Winds Down. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/27/world/middleeast/syria-evacuations.html

Barrinha, A., & Bastos, L. (2016). Out of Will or Out of Necessity? Turkey and the Middle East. In Security in Shared Neighbourhoods. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9781137499103_7

Bechev, D., & Hiltermann, J. (2017). Turkey's Forays into the Middle East. *Turkish Policy Quarterly, 16*(03). Retrieved from http://turkishpolicy.com/files/articlepdf/turkeys-forays-into-the-middle-east_en_7049.pdf

Beesley, A. (2017, June 26). Nato holds its peace as relations with Turkey degrade. Financial Times. Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/b0d3f518-3ed7-11e7-82b6-896b95f30f58

Blockmans, S. (2015). Crimea and the quest for energy and military hegemony in the Black Sea region: Governance gap in a contested geostrategic zone. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 15*(2), 179-189. doi:10.1080/14683857.2015.1060016

Browne, R. (2016, May 12). U.S. launches long-awaited European missile defense shield. CNN. Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/11/politics/nato-missile-defense-romania-poland/index.html

Browne, R. (2017, December 22). US says Russia intentionally violating Syria military agreement. CNN. Retrieved from https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/21/politics/us-says-russia-violating-syria-agreement/index.html

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cafarella, J., & Teoman, E. (2018, March 20). Turkey Threatens New Attacks in Syria and Iraq [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://iswresearch.blogspot.no/2018/03/turkey-threatens-new-attacks-in-syria.html

Celac, S., Cropsey, S., Dungaciu, D., Fota, L., & Ioniță, C. (2016). Why the Black Sea Matters (Policy paper). Washington, D.C.: Center for American Seapower, Hudson Institute. Retrieved from

https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/files/publications/201606CropseyWhyth eBlackSeaMatters.pdf

Çelikpala, M. (2013, March 25). Ankara is able to stabilize the Caucasus due to the Circassian Diaspora: Mitat Çelikpala [Interview]. Retrieved from http://caucasustimes.com/en/ankara-is-able-to-stabilize-the-caucasus-due-to-the-circassian-diaspora-mitat-celikpala/

Cockburn, P. (2015, July 25). War with Isis in Iraq and Syria: Turkey joins West as a reluctant ally - but what took it so long? The Independent. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news-19-6/war-with-isis-in-iraq-and-syria-turkey-joins-west-as-a-reluctant-ally-but-what-took-it-so-long-10414801.html

Cohen, A. (2015). Developing a Western Energy Strategy for the Black Sea Region and Beyond (ISBN: 978-1-61977-976-1). Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council. Retrieved from http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Black_Sea_Energy.pdf

Collective defence - Article 5. (2017, March 22). Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_110496.htm

Cunningham, E., & Morello, C. (2017, January 24). Trump tells Turkish president U.S. will stop arming Kurds in Syria. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-tells-turkish-president-us-will-stop-arming-kurds-in-syria/2017/11/24/61548936-d148-11e7-a1a3-0d1e45a6de3d_story.html?utm_term=.9a81e029328c

Demirmen, F. (2016, January 14). Russian plane incident puts Turkey in a Difficult position on energy [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://tekmormonitor.blogspot.no/2016/01/russian-plane-incident-puts-turkey-in.html

Dubovyk, V. (2016, May 31). The Implications of the Crimean Annexation for Black Sea Security. PONARS Eurasia. Retrieved from http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/implications-crimean-annexation-black-sea-security

Elman, P. (2014, June). Split Three Ways on Ukraine: Turkey in a Changing Regional Order. Polish Institute of International Affairs, Strategic File, 10(46), 1–5. Retrieved from https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=17576

Emmott, R. (2015, December 18). Exclusive: NATO agrees Turkey air defense package, seeks 'predictability'. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-nato-exclusive/exclusive-nato-agrees-turkey-air-defense-package-seeks-predictability-idUSKBN0U123520151218

Erkoyun, E. (2018, February 15). Turkish military says sets up sixth observation post in Syria's Idlib. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey/turkish-military-says-sets-up-sixth-observation-post-in-syrias-idlib-idUSKCN1FZ1PJ

Erşen, E. (2017). Evaluating the Fighter Jet Crisis in Turkish-Russian Relations. *Insight Turkey, 19*(4), 85-103. doi:10.25253/99.2017194.06

Felgenhauer, P. (2016, February 11). Sudden Massive Snap Exercise and Mobilization of Russian Forces in Black Sea and Caspian Region Appears Aimed at Turkey. Jamestown Foundation. Retrieved from https://jamestown.org/program/sudden-massive-snap-exercise-and-mobilization-of-russian-forces-in-black-sea-and-caspian-region-appears-aimed-at-turkey/.

Fotiou E. (2009, June). Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform": What is at Stake for Regional Cooperation? (Policy brief No. 16). Athens: The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS). Retrieved from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104737/PB_16.pdf

Friedman, B. (2017). Russia, Turkey, and Iran: Cooperation and Competition in Syria. *Tel Aviv Notes, 11*(2). Retrieved from https://dayan.org/content/russia-turkey-and-iran-cooperation-and-competition-syria

Friedman, B. (2018). The Elusive Quest for Stability in Syria. *Tel Aviv Notes, 12*(2). Retrieved from https://dayan.org/content/elusive-quest-stability-syria

Gall, C., & Higgins, A. (2017, September 12). Turkey Signs Russian Missile Deal, Pivoting From NATO. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/europe/turkey-russia-missile-deal.html

George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). Case studies and theory development in the social sciences. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Gerring, J. (2004). What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *The American Political Science Review, 98*(2), 341-354. doi:10.1017/s0003055404001182

Göksel, D. N. (2014). Turkey's Russia conundrum: To court or to curb? (pp. 1-6, Policy brief ISSN: 1989 - 2667). FRIDE. Retrieved from http://fride.org/download/PB_185_Turkeys_Russia_conundrum.pdf

Gurcan, M. (2018, January 25). 4 factors affecting Turkey's new operation in Syria. Al-Monitor. Retrieved from [original link removed].

Hacaoglu, S. (2017, July 13). Turkey Chooses Russia Over NATO for Missile Defense. Retrieved from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-13/turkey-is-said-to-agree-to-pay-2-5b-for-4-russian-s-400-sams

Harris, G. (2018, January 17). Tillerson Says U.S. Troops to Stay in Syria Beyond Battle With ISIS. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/world/middleeast/tillerson-troops-syria-islamic-state.html

Hill, F., & Taspinar, O. (2006). Turkey and Russia: Axis of the excluded? *Survival, 48*(1), 81-92. doi:10.1080/00396330600594256

Jacinto, L. (2017, July 13). Turkey's Post-Coup Purge and Erdogan's Private Army. Foreign Policy. Retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/13/turkeys-post-coup-purge-and-erdogans-private-army-sadat-perincek-gulen/

Jacob, L. (2017, March 19). Heading Towards a New NATO-Russia Stand-Off in the Black Sea Region? NATO Association of Canada. Retrieved from http://natoassociation.ca/heading-towards-a-new-nato-russia-stand-off-in-the-black-sea-region/

Kadercan, B. (2017, August 04). Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A 'Turkish Tragedy' in the Making. War on Rocks. Retrieved from https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/

Kasapoğlu, C. K., & Ülgen, S. (2018). Operation Olive Branch: A Political – Military Assessment (Rep. No 2). Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (Edam). Retrieved from http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Operation-Olive-Branch-02-1.pdf

Kiniklioglu, S. (2006) "Turkey and Russia: Partnership by Exclusion?" *Insight Turkey, 8*(2). Retrieved from www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_61.pdf

Kirişci, K. (2018). Turkey and the West: Fault lines in a troubled alliance. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Korzun, P. (2017, July 16). NATO Member Turkey Turns to Russia for Air Defense Cooperation. Strategic Culture Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2017/07/16/nato-member-turkey-turns-russia-for-air-defense-cooperation.html

Kurç, C. (2017). Between defence autarky and dependency: the dynamics of Turkish defence industrialization, *Defence Studies, 17*(3), 260-281. doi:10.1080/14702436.2017.1350107

Kurtdarcan, B., & Kayaoğlu, B. (2017, May 05). Russia, Turkey and the Black Sea A2/AD Arms Race. The National Interest. Retrieved from nationalinterest.org/feature/russia-turkey-the-black-sea-a2-ad-arms-race-19673?page=2.

Larrabee, F. S., & Flanagan, S. J. (2016, July 11). Re: The Growing Importance of Black Sea Security [Web log comment]. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/07/the-growing-importance-of-black-sea-security.html

Letsch, C. (2014, October 20). US drops weapons and ammunition to help Kurdish fighters in Kobani. The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/20/turkey-iraqi-kurds-kobani-isis-fighters-us-air-drops-arms

106

Maçães, B. (2016, August 10). Did Turkey's Moves Toward Russia Provoke the Coup? *The National Interest*. Retrieved from http://nationalinterest.org/feature/did-turkeys-moves-toward-russia-provoke-the-coup-17307

Marten, K. (2017). Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO (Rep. No. 79). Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from https://cfrd8-files.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2017/03/CSR_79_Marten_RussiaNATO.pdf

McKernan, B. (2017, May 25). Nato to join the US-led coalition against Isis fighting in Iraq and Syria. The Independent. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/nato-us-coalition-isis-iraq-syria-donald-trump-jens-stoltenberg-brussels-visit-a7755751.html

Merz, F. (2018). Security and Stability in Turkey (pp. 1-4, Rep. No. 221). Zurich: Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich. Retrieved from http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse221-EN.pdf

NATO. (2014, April 01). Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108501.htm

NATO. (2015, July 28). Statement by the North Atlantic Council following meeting under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_121926.htm

NATO support to Turkey: Background and timeline. (2013, February 19). NATO. Retrieved from https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_92555.htm?

Oğuzlu, T. (2012). Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO: From Identity to Interests. *The Washington Quarterly, 35*(3), 153-164. doi: 10.1080/0163660X.2012.706578

Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2016). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs, 71*(2), 1-20. doi:10.1080/10357718.2016.1183586

Öniş, Z. & Yılmaz, S. (2016). Turkey and Russia in a shifting global order: cooperation, conflict and asymmetric interdependence in a turbulent region, *Third World Quarterly, 37*(1), 71-95, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1086638

Öniş, Z. (2016). Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back. *Journal of Democracy, 27*(2), 141-154. doi:10.1353/jod.2016.0021

Öniş, Z. (2017). The Age of Anxiety: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy in a Post-Hegemonic Global Order. *The International Spectator, 52*(3). doi:10.1080/03932729.2017.1325133

Özcan, G. (2017). If the Crisis is What We Make of It: Turkey and the Uprisings in Syria. In *Analyzing Foreign Policy Crises in Turkey: Conceptual, Theoretical and Practical Discussions* (pp. 178-199). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Pamuk, H., Butler, D., & Toksabay, E. (2017, April 07). Turkey's Erdogan says U.S. attack in Syria 'positive' but not enough. Reuters. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-erdogan/turkeys-erdogan-says-u-s-attack-in-syria-positive-but-not-enough-idUSKBN1791X2?il=0

Phillips, C. (2016). The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new middle east. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Quigley, C. (2004). Tragedy and hope: a history of the world in our time. San Pedro, CA: GSG and Associates. (Original work published 1966)

Reif, K. (2017, November). U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Turkey Raise Alarm. Arms Control Association. Retrieved from https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-11/news/us-nuclear-weapons-turkey-raise-alarm

Russian and Turkish jets 'bomb ISIL' in Syria's Al Bab. (2017, January 18). Al Jazeera. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/russian-turkish-jets-bomb-isil-syria-al-bab-170118130233894.html

Sanchez, A. (2012, November 18). Did BLACKSEAFOR Ever Have a Chance? E-International Relations. Retrieved from http://www.e-ir.info/2012/11/18/did-blackseafor-ever-have-a-chance/

Schanzer, J. (2014, October 09). Time to Kick Turkey Out of NATO? Politico Magazine. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/time-to-kick-turkey-out-of-nato-111734?o=1

Schleifer, Y. (2014, March 06). Turkey: Ankara's Crimea Conundrum. Eurasianet. Retrieved from https://eurasianet.org/s/turkey-ankaras-crimea-conundrum

Seren, M. (2017, April). Turkey's Quest for a National Missile Defense System (Rep. No. 26). Retrieved https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/04/Analysis_26.pdf

Shahbazov, F. (2017, June 07). Azerbaijan-Turkey-Georgia: A Geopolitical Axis or an Accidental Alliance? *Eurasia Daily Monitor 14*(25). Retrieved from https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkey-georgia-geopolitical-axis-accidental-alliance/

Sloat, A. (2018, February). The West's Turkey conundrum (Rep.). Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/fp_20180212_west_turkey_conundrum.pdf

Smura, T. (2016). Russian Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities - implications for NATO (pp. 1-7, Policy paper No. 29). Warsaw: The Pulaski Foundation. Retrieved from https://pulaski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Pulaski_Policy_Paper_No_29_16_EN.pdf.

Stocker, J. (2018, January 13). Coalition retraining 15,000 veteran SDF fighters to serve as Syrian border force. The Defense Post. Retrieved from https://thedefensepost.com/2018/01/13/syria-border-security-force-sdf-coalition/

Syria civil war: Kurds declare federal region in north. (2016, March 17). Al Jazeera. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/syria-civil-war-kurds-declare-federal-system-north-160317111902534.html

Syria's 'de-escalation zones' explained. (2017, July 04). Al Jazeera. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/syria-de-escalation-zones-explained-170506050208636.html

Tanchum, M. (2014). Turkey Vulnerable to Rising Russian Power in the Black Sea. *Turkey Analyst, 7*(7). Retrieved from https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/101-turkey-vulnerable-to-rising-russian-power-in-the-black-sea.html

Tank, P. (2016). Tyrkias regionale politikk i Midtøstens skiftende geopolitiske landskap. *Nordisk tidsskrift for Midtøstenstudier, (1)*. Retrieved from https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/babylon/article/view/4114/3586

Tastekin, F. (2017, December 07). Syrian Kurds move closer to Russia. Al-Monitor. Retrieved from https://www.newcoldwar.org/syrian-kurds-move-closer-russia/

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (2016, December 12). Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey on agreed steps to revitalize the political process to end the Syrian conflict, Moscow, 20 December 2016 [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2573489

Thies, W. J. (2009). Why NATO endures. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tillerson: U.S. Troops Staying In Syria To Counter Assad, Iran. (2018, January 18). Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. Retrieved from https://www.rferl.org/a/us-troops-staying-syria-indefinitely-open-ended-commitment-counter-assad-iran-isis-tillerson-says/28982139.html

Toucas, B. (2017, February 02). The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History. CSIS. Retrieved from https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history

Toucas, B. (2018, February 13). Turkey Has No Allies in the Black Sea, Only Interests. CSIS. Retrieved from https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkey-has-no-allies-black-sea-only-interests

Trachtenberg, M. (1999). A constructed peace: the making of the European settlement, 1945-1963. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tufekci, O. (2017). The foreign policy of modern Turkey: power and the ideology of
    Eurasianism. London: I.B. Tauris.

Turkey Builds a Military-Industrial Complex to Match Its Ambitions (Issue brief). (2017,
    May 26). Retrieved https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/turkey-builds-military-
    industrial-complex-match-its-
    ambitions#/entry/connect/jsconnect?client_id=644347316

Turkey's failed coup attempt: All you need to know. (2017, July 15). Al Jazeera. Retrieved
    from http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12
    /turkey-failed-coup-attempt-161217032345594.html

Turkey Launch its Final MILGEM-class Corvette & Start Construction on First Istanbul-class
    Frigate. (2017, July 04). Navy Recognition. Retrieved from
    http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2017/july-2017-navy-
    naval-forces-defense-industry-technology-maritime-security-global-news/5354-
    turkey-launch-its-final-milgem-class-corvette-start-construction-on-first-istanbul-
    class-frigate.html

Turkey says Russia will 'face consequences' if airspace violations continue. (2016, February
    01). Hurriyet Daily News. Retrieved from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-
    says-russia-will-face-consequences-if-airspace-violations-continue--94593

Turkey sends more troops to Qatar. (2017, December 27). Al Jazeera. Retrieved from
    https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/171227051912500.html

Turkey set to join NATO task force: Stoltenberg. (2018, April 17). Hurriyet Daily News.
    Retrieved from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-set-to-join-nato-task-force-
    stoltenberg-130457

Turkey to crush 'terror army' to be set up by US in Syria: Erdoğan. (2018, January 15).
    Hurriyet Daily News. Retrieved from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/operation-
    into-afrin-can-start-any-moment-erdogan-125757

Turkey welcomes US-led strikes targeting Assad regime in Syria. (2018, April 14). Hurriyet
    Daily News. Retrieved from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-welcomes-us-
    led-strikes-targeting-assad-regime-in-syria-130299

Türker, A. T. (2012). An analysis of Turkish Russian rapprochement: Trends and prospects. *ISZU Journal of Social Sciences, 1*(1), 46-60. Retrieved from https://www.izu.edu.tr/Assets/Content/file/20130201-att.pdf

Underdal, Arild (1984): 'Can We, in the Study of International Politics, do without the Model of the State as a Rational, Unitary Actor? A Discussion of the Limitations and Possible Fruitfulness of the Model, and its Alternatives'. *Internasjonal Poltikk*, Temahefte 1. 63-79.

Varshalomidze, T., & Uras, U. (2018, January 23). What is Russia's end game in Afrin? Al Jazeera. Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/russia-green-light-turkeys-afrin-offensive-180123064315810.html

Vișan, G. (2018). Growing Submarine Threat in the Black Sea. *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 15*(8). Retrieved from https://jamestown.org/program/growing-submarine-threat-black-sea/.

Waldman, S. A., & Caliskan, E. (2016). The new Turkey and its discontents. London: Hurst & Company.

Walt, S. M. (1987). The Origins of Alliances. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Zilberman, B., & Erdemir, A. (2016, August 10). The Turkey-Russia reset. Politico. Retrieved from https://www.politico.eu/article/the-turkey-russia-reset/

References of figures

Figure 1:

Turkey (Political) 2006 [Map]. (2006). In University of Texas Libraries (map developed by
    CIA). Retrieved from
    http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/turkey_pol_2006.jpg

Figure 2:

Syria's de-escalation zones [Digital image] (2017, July 04). Retrieved from
    https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/syria-de-escalation-zones-explained-
    170506050208636.html

Figure 3:

Who controls what? [Digital image]. (2018, April 14). Retrieved from
    https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/05/syria-country-divided-
    150529144229467.html

Figure 4:

Weinberger, K. (2016, August). Russian Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) Range:
    August 2016 [Digital image]. Retrieved from
    http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian A2AD AUGUST
    2016_1.pdf

Figure 5:

Khan, S. (2013, June 17). [The Turkish Straits]. Retrieved from
    https://e360.yale.edu/features/an_economic_boom_in_turkey_takes_a_toll_on_marine
    _life

Figure 6:

Turkish pipeline politics [Digital image]. (2016, September 10). Retrieved from
    http://tekmormonitor.blogspot.no/2016_09_04_archive.html

Appendix A – Interview guide

How would you assess the current state of security relations between Russia and Turkey and how does the recent S-400 purchase fit into this picture?

How did the US' limited involvement to oust Assad affect Turkey's relations with NATO and the US?

What do you make out of the Astana peace talks hosted by Russia, Turkey and Iran?

What is Turkey hoping to gain from it? Does Turkey think it's realistic for a peace settlement without the Kurds given how much territory the YPG controls?

What do you think the Turkish government is trying to achieve from the Astana process? Why have they been so accommodating to Russia despite supporting opposite sides?

Do you think that these peace talks, if successful, may trigger increased Turkish-Russian security cooperation in other areas and conflicts?

Can we expect more Turkish arms purchases, defense cooperation with Russia in the coming years? Potentially deeper security relations?

Have there been any notable changes in Turkey's foreign policy after the 2016 coup attempt and persecution of alleged Gulenists?

What personal interests do Erdogan have in Syria?

What role does Incirlik air base play in anti-terror operations and US-Turkey relations?

What's the link between security and political relations in US-Turkey relations?

How does Ankara perceive the Russian threat level in the Black Sea, considering the August 2008 Russia-Georgia War and the Crimea annexation/Ukraine involvement?

Were there any major differences in Turkey's threat perceptions of Russia after the 2008 Georgia war and the 2014 Ukraine conflict?

To what degree does Turkey see Russia as a military threat? Are they trying to appease Russia?

How do you see Turkey's future role in NATO?

Is Turkish membership in the SCO a realistic scenario?

Appendix B – Key events Syria (2011-2018)

Summary	2011-2014 Regime change first priority; Assad main threat.	2014-2015 Non-state actors (IS and the YPG) pose emerging security threats.	2016–2017 Unilateralism, increased pragmatism and rapprochement with Russia.	2018 – Growing Turkish assertiveness in Syria
Key domestic developments	• Summer of 2013: Gezi Park protests squander Erdogan's reputation as a democratic alternative to other countries in the MENA region. Corruption scheme targeting AKP officials in December further increases the political stakes.	• 2014: Erdogan starts stretching constitutional boundaries of the presidential office • Peace process with the PKK evaporates in the summer of 2015. • The AKP loses its parliamentary majority in June 2015; regains majority in November re-election by	• 2016: Multiple IS-linked terror attacks in Turkey. • July 2016: State of emergency implemented after coup attempt; Eurasianists gain increased influence in the government at the expense of pro-Western elements. • April 2017: Constitutional referendum passes, implementing a presidential system in 2018.	• Early parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for June 24, 2018. • April 2018: Turkey extends state of emergency decree (by three months) for seventh time after July 20, 2016.
Key developments Syria	• July 29, 2011: Free Syrian Army (FSA) formed in Turkey against Assad. • August 2011: Obama declares 'Assad must go.' • Second half of 2012: Syrian war deepens. Turkey expects US military support (i.e. no-fly zone). • Kurds declare Rojava de facto autonomous region in northern Syria, posing increased political risk to Turkey • NATO deploys Patriot shields in January 2013 to protect Turkish border areas from missile attacks. Assad major threat to Turkey.	• September 2013: Russia and the US strike deal to remove Assad's chemical weapons, significantly reducing likelihood of US military intervention. • September 2014: US forms the international anti-IS coalition. Turkey joins reluctantly. • IS becomes a greater threat than Assad's regime due to multiple terror attacks in Turkey, starting in July 2015. • Russia's military intervention (September 2015) alters the conflict's balance of power • November 24, 2015: Turkey downs the Russian fighter jet in Syria. Russia shuts off Syrian airspace by deploying the S-400 system. • YPG gains major territory; deepening Turkey-US strategic rifts.	• June-July 2016: Turkey starts rapprochement with Russia. • August 2016-March 2017: Turkey conducts Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) to clear YPG and IS elements from border areas. Growing anti-IS cooperation with Russia. • December 2016: Turkey joins the Russia-led Astana peace process. Establishes 'de-escalation zones' in May 2017, which help bolster Assad's regime. • Regime change decreased priority for Turkey. • December 2017: Turkey signs deal with Russia to purchase the S-400 air and anti-missile system.	• January 2018: US declares continued presence in Syria and support for the YPG by establishing a border security force in northern Syria. • January 2018: Turkey launches Operation Olive Branch in Afrin and announces further advances toward US-controlled Manbij and east of the Euphrates, triggering a diplomatic stand-off with the US. • Emerging signs of growing US-Russia rivalry in post-conflict Syria over influencing the Kurds. • April 2018: Chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta triggers air strikes by the US, France and the UK against Syrian chemical weapons facilities. Turkey supports the strikes.
Regional developments	• Muslim Brotherhood (MB) leader Morsi elected President in Egypt (2012), boosting Erdogan's regional power credentials. • US Benghazi terror attack in September 2012 creates a wedge between the US and Turkey over their willingness to arm 'moderate' opposition groups in Syria.	• President Morsi ousted in Egypt: Turkey loses its regional leverage and ideological influence. • March 2014: Russia annexes and militarizes Crimea. Turkey conducts a low-level political response, avoids sanctions and remains reluctant to balance militarily. • Increased Russia-Turkey rivalry in the Middle East, the Black Sea and the Caucasus following the fighter jet incident. Russia lets PYD re-open office in Moscow in February 2016.	• January 2017: Trump inaugurated US President. No changes in US support to the YPG. • Numerous Ankara-Washington political and legal disputes • June 2017: Turkey strengthens security relations with Qatar in the GGC dispute, going against its former Sunni ally Saudi Arabia • September 25, 2017: Independence referendum passes in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, straining relations with Ankara and Baghdad.	