Turkish Strategic Participation: Counteracting Asymmetric Threat with Asymmetric Coalition-Building

S. B. AUBREY*

Abstract — This paper argues that Turkey's current hard power participation in its region can be understood as "Strategic Participation." It posits this approach is a shift in strategy, not goals from the "zero problems with neighbours" policy piloted by former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. It applies this argument to the case of increasing Russian regional intervention, and argues that Turkey's response to Russia is in line with the goal of Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth doctrine of leveraging historical identity and diversifying strategic relationships. It combines the "principal-agent" and "concordance" civil–military relations theories of Feaver and Schiff to clarify the AKP's role in foreign policy and employ's Walt's "balance-of-threat" theory to assess the Russian threat. It argues that civil–military relations after the Ergenekon and Bayloz trials enabled Strategic Depth to become established in the AKP, and that Turkish concerns over NATO commitment have created a security deficit that exacerbates the

Résumé — Cet article avance que la puissance coercitive exercée par la Turquie dans sa région est une forme de « participation stratégique ». Cette approche représente un changement des objectifs, mais non des tactiques en place depuis la politique « zéro problème avec les voisins » proposée par l'ancien premier ministre turc, Ahmet Davutoğlu. L'article évalue cette proposition dans le contexte des interventions russes dans la région. De plus, l'article soutient que la réponse de la Turquie à la menace russe suit la doctrine de la « profondeur stratégique » de Davutoğlu. Suivant cette doctrine, la Turquie doit tirer profit de son identité historique et diversifier ses relations stratégiques. L'article combine les théories des relations civil–militaire de Feaver et de Schiff — c'est-à-dire la théorie de « l'agent principal » (*principal-agent*) et celle de « la concordance » respectivement — pour établir le rôle de l'AKP dans la politique étrangère de la Turque. De plus, l'article fait appel à la théorie de Walt, soit celle de « l'équilibre de la menace » pour

* S. B. Aubrey is a Master's candidate at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, working on his thesis which examines the role of insurgency on Turkish civil-military relations. In 2016, he completed a double major with honours in Political Science and History at the University of Victoria. He has previously written for the Canadian Naval Review and On Politics, and has presented his research on Turkish civil-military relations on panels at the MEICON-BC Conference and the NPSIA Academic Conference.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article represent solely the views of the author, and do not represent the views of the author's employer or academic institution. This article was written in March 2017 for the CEPSI-CIPSS 2017 Graduate Conference and submitted to *Potentia* in April 2017.

* S. B. Aubrey est candidat à la maîtrise à l'École des affaires internationales de Norman Paterson (NPSIA). Dans le cadre de son mémoire de maîtrise, il étudie le rôle de l'insurrection dans les relations civil-militaire en Turquie En 2016, il a obtenu un baccalauréat (avec distinction) en science politique et en histoire de l'Université de Victoria. Il a publié dans le Canadian Naval Review et On Politics. Il a également présenté sa recherche sur les relations civil-militaire turques lors de la conférence MEICON-BC (Middle East and Islamic Consortium of British Columbia) et la conférence académique de NPSIA.

Les opinions exprimées dans ce texte n'engagent que l'auteur et ne représentent pas les opinions de l'employeur de l'auteur ni celles de son université. Ce texte a été redigé en mars 2017 pour le Colloque étudiant 2017 du CEPSI-CÉPI et a été soumis à *Potentia* en avril 2017.

asymmetric Russian threat. It then surveys Turkish relations with four states — Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and Iraq — along three indicators: shared threat; military co-operation; and economic dependence. It concludes that Turkey is working to bolster co-operation with key regional states to compensate for the perceived "security deficit" in the face of asymmetric threat from Russia, in line with the strategic diversification objectives required under Strategic Participation.

Keywords: Turkey; asymmetry; balance of threat; grand strategy; security deficit; foreign policy; civil–military relations; Ahmet Davutoğlu; Strategic Depth.

évaluer la nature de la menace russe. Cet article soutient que la nature des relations civil–militaire turques post-procès d'Ergenekon et de Bayloz rend possible l'intégration de la profondeur stratégique dans la politique étrangère de l'AKP. De plus, les craintes de la Turquie quant aux engagements de l'OTAN ont créé un déficit sécuritaire qui amplifie l'asymétrie existant entre la Turquie et la Russie. Enfin, l'article examine les relations de la Turquie avec quatre autres pays — l'Azerbaïdjan, la Géorgie, l'Ukraine et l'Irak — utilisant trois variables : les menaces partagées, la coopération militaire et la dépendance économique. L'article conclut que la Turquie tente de renforcer sa coopération avec certains pays régionaux pour contrebalancer le « déficit sécuritaire » ressenti dû à la menace asymétrique posée par la Russie. Ces tentatives concordent avec les objectifs de la diversification stratégique requise par la théorie de la « participation stratégique ».

Mots-clés : Turquie ; asymétrie ; équilibre de menace ; grande stratégie ; déficit sécuritaire ; politique étrangère ; relations civil–militaire ; Ahmet Davutoğlu ; Profondeur stratégique.

Introduction

This paper proposes that the Turkish response to Russian intervention in Syria can be described as Strategic Participation. This model suggests that, contrary to popular analysis, the Davutoğlu-era doctrine of Strategic Depth has not disappeared from Turkish foreign policy, and remains in a new, increasingly reactive and defensive form. This paper argues that this new approach developed over the course of 2015, and became particularly intense following the September beginning of Russian intervention in Syria. This Russian threat pushed Turkey to retrench former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's strategic concepts, and engage in asymmetric balancing to hedge against the Russian threat.

The paper argues that Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth concept has one primary goal — the development of Turkey into a "central" transnational strategic actor — and two primary methods: (1) leveraging historical identity and (2) diversifying strategic relationships. Since at least 2009, Turkish foreign policy has followed these basic approaches. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has heavily engaged in the first of these domestically, most notably in garnering popular support to suppress the influence of non-party sources, like the pre-2009 Turkish Armed Forces (TSK). The second, however, makes up the bulk of this paper's analysis. Turkey has preferred to bolster its relationship with weaker states, those with which it has an asymmetric advantage, to manage its relationship with its significantly more powerful neighbour, Russia, rather than rely on a

relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that the AKP increasingly sees as unreliable.

This paper is divided into six sections: (1) an overview of Strategic Depth and its implementation in Turkish foreign policy; (2) a theoretical outline of Strategic Participation, and the theoretical tools that will be used to assess it; (3) an assessment of Turkish civil–military relations (CMR), and the effect it has had on solidifying Strategic Depth in Turkish policy; (4) an assessment of the form of Russian threat to Turkey and the impact of NATO "estrangement" on creating a security deficit; (5) an overview of Turkish asymmetric balancing [1] against this threat with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq; and (6) concluding remarks.

Evolution of Strategic Depth

The Strategic Depth doctrine was a grand strategy concept advocated by former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. He originally outlined the concept in his 2001 book *Stratejik Derinlik* (*Strategic Depth*), and his thinking was central to Turkish foreign policy from 2003 to 2015, most famously under the motto "zero problems with neighbours." At its core, this policy has aimed to bolster Turkey's ability to shape regional politics through two primary methods: (1) domestic consolidation of Turkey's "historical identity" and (2) strategic diversification of economic and political relations towards non-traditional partners — that is, reducing the Cold War dependency of Turkey on a Western-oriented policy.

Stratejik Derinlik argues that Turkey's geopolitical situation as a trans-regional power with its historical Ottoman–Turkish legacy place it in a strategic basin between the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Balkans. This position provides Turkey with unique potential, and make a peripheral geopolitical position for Turkey impossible (Walker, 2011, pp. 7–8). Davutoğlu's argument is highly critical of the inward-looking foreign policy of the "Kemalist century," arguing instead that Turkey should leverage its position and history to make it a "central" actor in trans-regional affairs, rather than act as a geopolitical bridge.

Davutoğlu was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2009, but acted as now-President Erdoğan's chief foreign policy advisor since 2003 (Aras, 2009, pp. 128–129). He had consistently called for the end to Turkish "alienation" with its neighbours that stemmed from negative perceptions of Turkey under the Ottoman Empire and the Republic, outlining his conception of foreign policy in an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine (Davutoğlu, 2010). This "zero problems with neighbours" approach aimed to improve Turkish soft power leadership by downplaying regional disputes, and is founded on the idea that Turkey's historical conflicts with its neighbours wasted resources and effort.

For the AKP, zero problems meant two things: (1) consolidation and expansion of the neoliberal policies that overturned the economic instability of the 1990s, and (2) the

---

[1] "Asymmetric balancing" simply refers to traditional balancing behaviour against a threat that is geared exclusively towards less powerful partners. It is behaviour aimed at ensuring a more reliable coalition for the threatened state by ensuring that its role is top-of-mind for the security of participating states.

maintenance of co-operative relations with neighbours to allow the expansion of trade to make Turkey a regional mediator. The AKP used policy to secure itself against the traditional Kemalist centre-right of Turkish politics that dominated the military, which in 1997 used the Erbakan government's Islamist ideology and a deteriorating economy to justify intervention. Neoliberal policies consistently increased the AKP's vote share by directly associating it with Turkey's strong economic performance. The economic crises of 2001 and 2008 played directly into support for the AKP's "regulatory neo-liberalism," which zero problems was designed to augment (Öniş, 2012, 145). Critics have called this approach an economic policy disguised as a foreign policy, geared towards domestic audiences (Yavus, 2009, pp. 135–136).

The use of trade as a foreign policy tool was vigorously pursued by the AKP once it gained its majority in 2002 (Hale, 2013, pp. 253–255). Davutoğlu's conception of Turkey as a central power was tied to its ability to develop economic and diplomatic connections with its surrounding regions, and economic factors took precedence after 2008 financial crisis. That year, Turkish exports shrank by 5% and its imports by a full 14.3%, EU accession talks ground to a halt over the Cyprus question, and the Turkish Industry and Business Association began to criticize AKP governance (World Bank, 2017; Öniş, 2012, pp. 143–145). Trade came to dominate Turkey's method of both improving domestic support for its Islamic-democratic conception of Turkish identity and expanding foreign relations (Kutlay, 2011, pp. 78–79).

The 2011 Arab Uprisings radically shifted Turkish policy away from this economically oriented foreign policy. Calls across the Arab world for democratization and dignity opened speculation on the exportation of the "Turkish model," combining Islam, democracy and economic growth (Tuğal, 2016, 175). Turkey initially attempted to retain its zero problems approach, resisting calls for international intervention. However, with NATO intervention in Libya and the success of a Turkish model-friendly party in the Egyptian Brotherhood, Turkish policy shifted (Hale, 2013, pp. 242–245). The economically focused zero problems strategy was no longer the path to trans-regional centrality; Turkey would link its soft power to the Turkish model, fostering a friendlier region that might look to Turkey for leadership.

By 2015, however, hope for the success of the model had faded. Many authors began announcing the "end" or "fall" of the Turkish model, arguing that increasingly authoritarian tendencies in the AKP after the 2014 Gezi Park protests, corruption scandals, and the failure of foreign attempts to implement the model in Egypt and Tunisia made it unworkable (Taspinar, 2014, pp. 50–56). Any possibilities for the Turkish model approach were put to rest in the summer and fall of 2015.

The June 2015 resumption of conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) caused a shift in Turkish policy. While it had watched the successes of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria with concern for some time, its links to the PKK changed the equation entirely. While Turkey still hoped that rebel forces in Syria could bring down Assad and permit the exportation of a Turkish model to Syria, it became focused on preventing the PYD from "seizing" northern Syria (Pamuk, 2015).

The final blow to the Turkish model came at the end of September 2015. After the 2013 fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the 2014 electoral defeat of Ennahda in Tunisia, and the collapse of Libya and Yemen to civil war, Syria was the last site of a movement that might advance the Turkish model. After months of losing ground to rebel forces, and unable to muster the manpower to launch an offensive, the Syrian government appeared weak. However, Russian military intervention in September rapidly reversed the regime's fortunes. Turkey's focus shifted away from Assad as it became clear toppling Damascus would bring Turkey into conflict with Russia (Humud, Blanchard, & Nikitin, 2017, pp. 7–8). As Erdoğan asserted in October 2015:

All [the PYD] want[s] is to seize northern Syria entirely … We will under no circumstances allow northern Syria to become a victim of their scheming. Because this constitutes a threat for us, and it is not possible for us as Turkey to say "yes" to this threat. (Pamuk, 2015).

In August 2016, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) into Syrian territory. This intervention was not concerned with the departure of Assad, over which Turkey recognized it had little influence. Instead, it appeared designed to counteract the military gains of the PYD's Personal Protection Units (YPG), arrest Islamic State (IS) cross-border activity, and allow for greater control of refugee flows (Zanotti & Thomas, 2017, pp. 3–4).

This policy is a dramatic change from Turkey's previous approach. However, it does not necessarily throw out the precepts of Strategic Depth despite reversing the tactics of the zero problems and Turkish model approaches.

Strategic Participation

Strategic participation is remains a vital strategic interest for future Turkish growth. The current policy is a response to the crises of 2015, when Russian intervention into Syria ended the final hope for the Turkish model. It aims to retain or regain as much of Turkey's 2003–2011 AKP foreign policy success as possible. Regarding relations with Russia, it argues that despite apparent recent improvements in relations between Turkey and Russia, Ankara remains deeply concerned with the Russian threat. While the Syrian Kurdish question has taken centre stage with Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield that brought Turkish military forces into northern Syria, Turkish foreign policy remains notably geared toward the Russian question.

As outlined in *Fig. 1*, Strategic Participation is an adaptive, not paradigmatic, policy shift. A changed security environment shifted Turkish foreign policy toward eliminating domestic threats perceived as more pressing. Turkish strategic diversification has shifted towards engagement with new strategic partners, emphasizing shared security interests over ideological solidarity.

Most notably, Turkish policy orientation has ceased being offensive — that is, it is no longer the proactive foreign policy heralded on the appointment of Davutoğlu to the Foreign Ministry. Instead, the difficulties encountered in the previous approaches have

fostered an approach to foreign policy that is more reactive. Along with this shift in intention, Turkey increasingly relied on hard power tools to accomplish its objectives. While these tools were pioneered under the Turkish model period, particularly with the arming of Syrian rebel groups, they dominated Turkish policy towards the region from 2015 onward.

Changes in Strategic Depth

Objective	Trans-Regional "Centrality"		
Policy	Zero Problems (2009–2011)	Turkish Model (2011–2015)	Strategic Participation (2015–2017)
Historical Identity	Economic hub of "post-Ottoman space."[2]	Development model for the Muslim world.	Elimination of perceived domestic threats.
Strategic Diversification	Expanded trade with non-traditional partners.	Political support of friendly sub-state actors.	Engage with potential strategic partners.
Orientation	Offensive	Offensive	Defensive
Employed Power Type	Soft Power	Soft Power Some Hard Power	Hard Power

Figure 1. Different policy implementations of Strategic Depth.

The broad goals of Strategic Participation, then, are the same as in each of the others: leverage historical identity and diversify strategic partners. The first of these is primarily a domestic issue, and will only be briefly assessed in this paper. However, it is important, as Strategic Participation is not possible without the AKP's conception of Islamic democratic nationalism. Assessing this element — leveraging historical identity — requires an assessment of shifting CMR in Turkey using the concordance game model. Concepts employed by a former Prime Minister only remain relevant because of the uniquely powerful role he played in formulating contemporary Turkish foreign policy, enabled by fall of military tutelage.

The second element will take up the bulk of this paper. It concerns the Turkish response to Russian regional activism. A notable element of this policy has also included reaching out to partners over which Turkey has asymmetric leverage, outside of traditional allies in NATO, which it can use to counteract threat from Russia on its own. This paper assesses the form of the Russian threat to Turkey and the Turkish response using Walt's balance-of-threat theory.

[2] This phrase is not used by government sources for diplomatic and political reasons, but is outlined conceptually throughout *Strategik Derinlik* (Davutoğlu, 2001, 22–23) and by observers noting the emphasis on shared historical and cultural relations in the policy.

Concordance Game

The concordance game attempts to directly incorporate balance-of-power analysis in CMR theory. A shift in power is essential to this analysis, as the TSK historically exerted substantial control on policy, directly through coups or indirectly through political pressure and links to civil society. Strategic Depth was only enabled by the removal of this obstacle and its absence allows Strategic Depth to influence post-Davutoğlu policy.

This paper employs Schiff's concordance theory, modified to incorporate a concept of balance-of-power. Schiff's model argues that likelihood of military intervention is determined by the ability of three partners — the military, political elite and citizenry — to reach "concordance," defined as agreement on four indicators: the composition of the officer corps, political decision-making process, recruitment method, and military style (Schiff, 2009, p. 43). Discordance on any indicator increases intervention likelihood. To understand this in a balance-of-power context, two issues must be resolved: (1) Schiff's actors are heterogeneous, but treated as unitary in agreement, and (2) she lacks a mechanism to identify concordance.

Nye's conception of soft power resolves the first issue. He conceptualizes power as the ability to either alter behaviour through coercion or persuasion by employing a resource — hard or soft power (Nye, 2004, 8) [3] In this context, the more heterogeneous a concordance partner is, the less able it will be to convert power resources, and the less powerful it will be.

For the second issue, Feaver's principal-agent theory is used (Feaver, 2005, p. 5). He argues CMR is a game between civilian principal and military agent. The principal punishes or rewards the agent, who "works" or "shirks" based on the cost/benefit of pursuing its interests versus the principal's punishments and rewards. In the concordance game model, this becomes a three player "game" to explain concordance outcomes, but not decisions. See the game in *Fig*. 2.

[3] This means that resources themselves are not defined as power until they are used to influence behavior.

Concordance Indicator Game including 'Balance-of-Power' Concept

			Citizenry			
			Decision based on interests and available information.			
			Support		Fail to Support	
			Political Elite		Political Elite	
			Decision based on available information of military's relative power.		Decision based on available information of military & citizenry's relative power.	
			Reward	Punish	Reward	Punish
Military	Decision based on available info. of elite & citizenry relative power.	Work	Full concordance	'Coercive concordance'	Elite-military concordance.	Elite-military 'coercive concordance'
		Shirk	Appeased discordance	Coerced discordance	Appeased citizenry-military discordance	Coerced citizenry-military discordance

Figure 2. The Concordance Game Model.

This game is played out across Schiff's four indicators, which are then assessed in sum to determine whether concordance exists, and to what degree. However, for the purposes of this paper — foreign policy analysis — only political decision-making will be assessed. This paper will briefly use this model to show that modern Turkish CMR should be considered as a coerced concordance under this model, where the political elite under AKP leadership are dominant.

Balance-of-Threat Theory

Stephen Walt's "balance-of-threat" theory emerged from his 1987 study of alliance patterns in the Cold War Middle East, *The Origins of Alliances*. He argued that, rather than aligning purely against power, states factor in numerous other elements when determining their alignment. He cites four main sources of threat: (1) aggregate power, defined by traditionally neorealist methods; (2) geographic proximity; (3) offensive power, defined as the proportion of aggregate power most capable of being used offensively against the aligning state; and (4) aggressive intentions, defined as the aligning states perception of others' intentions (Walt, 1987, p. 22). His inclusion of these additional factors was intended to account for alignments which could not be accounted for under the traditional balance-of-power model.

The model is well suited to the Turkish case. Turkish foreign policy has historically fluctuated between concentration on the threat of the Soviet Union and smaller, more pressing threats, such as Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, and Kurdish separatism. It seems reasonable that Walt's model would be relatively effective at charting the course of Turkish policy under the current threat environment with Russia. Turkish balancing policies are designed to increase the cost of attacks through internal balancing and assertive efforts to prevent a threat from taking any additional ground while finding more reliable partners for case-specific issues.

Consequently, this paper assesses the threat of Russia, in the context of declining Turkey–NATO relations, along Walt's four indicators. It then expands this assessment to Turkish relations with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine, and Iraq in the form of the KRG. This section assesses Turkey's employment of asymmetric balancing along three issues — shared threat, military co-operation, and economic dependence — to assess how recent developments fit into the Strategic Participation concept.

Turkish CMR and AKP Foreign Policy

This section deals with the recent history of Turkish CMR in a cursory fashion. It is merely sufficient to explain that near-exclusive civilian–AKP control over foreign policy has only recently become a feature of Turkish government. It explains this with reference to the Concordance Game model described above in section 3.1. While this explanation is brief, it is necessary to explain how Davutoğlu is relevant to current policy.

Concordance Game and AKP–TSK relations

While AKP–TSK relations were terse from its 2002 election, when the AKP came to power, it actively pursued EU membership with military approval. This included reforms that dismantled the TSK's relationship with civil society that had been central to the success of the 1997 coup that removed the AKP's predecessor party, Refah, including the civilianization of the National Security Council (Tezcür, 2009, pp. 321–324).

In the 2007 presidential election, the AKP chose Abdullah Gül, the AKP's deputy PM and a former Refah Party member of the Grand National Assembly, as its candidate. The military, which preferred the presidency to be pro-Kemalist, was deeply concerned. However, because polls had unusually favourable margins for the AKP and the military lacked the soft power to boost popular support, the military decided against intervention (Ahmad, 2014, p. 204).

This shifted Turkish CMR to its current status: coerced concordance. The military co-operated only under the threat of publicly supported government punishment. The Ergenekon and Bayloz trials served to remove officers suspected of involvement with the "deep state," a civil–military–criminal triad that purportedly controlled Turkish affairs prior to the trials.[4] The military replaced the removed Kemalist officers with those more amenable to the AKP's conception of Islamic nationalism, and who would accept the new balance-of-power that favoured the civilian government.[5]

---

[4] Most officers arrested and convicted during these trials were later released, with numerous allegations of court bias and AKP overreach (BBC, 2016).

[5] Notable is that the AKP government's current official position on these proceedings is that they were "sham trials," orchestrated by followers of Fetullah Gülen that had infiltrated the judiciary and law enforcement and fabricated most of the evidence. Similarly, many of the new officers brought in following the Ergenekon trials have been accused of being Gülenists responsible by for the July 2016 coup attempt.

The 2016 July coup then shifted the control of the political elite into the hands of the AK Party. While the true nature of events is not clear, the coup-plotters do not appear to be those "missed" by the previous trials. Instead, the government has blamed followers of Fetullah Gülen, a preacher located in Pennsylvania, claiming Gülen used his previously close relationship with the AKP and his religious schools to build a "parallel state" in Turkey (Zanotti & Thomas, 2017, 6–7). Whatever the coup-plotters affiliation, the post-coup crackdown highlights the AKP's successful use of punishment techniques against the military, shifting the balance-of-power firmly in the AKP's favour and defining current Turkish CMR as coerced concordance.

Implications for AKP Foreign Policy

Without the removal of the Kemalist military oversight, it is not clear that Strategic Depth could have been implemented as it was in 2009. The military historically has intervened in domestic politics when it perceived the government was in crisis, or being reckless in foreign relations. This tutelary role has resulted in at least four coups, depending on definitions.

Removing this tutelage has been essential for Davutoğlu's ideas to become entrenched in Turkish policy. He was central in shaping the international approach of now-President Erdoğan, despite their 2016 conflict that led to Davutoğlu's resignation from AKP leadership and the Prime Ministership. Davutoğlu was the pioneer of the first truly civilian foreign policy of the AKP. This "first-to-bat" role has meant that his broad objectives remained within the AKP.

Erdoğan's increasingly tight grip on the foreign policy of Turkey has, counterintuitively, increased the role of Strategic Depth. Davutoğlu's concepts have been derided by some in the foreign policy establishment too removed from foreign policy reality to function (Çandar, 2016). However, the apparent weakening influence of these elements over the President means AKP priorities remain Turkish foreign policy priorities.[6]

Russia and the Security Deficit

This section outlines the manner of threat posed to Turkey by Russia, and the implications it has for the strategic diversification element of Strategic Depth policy. It employs a balance-of-threat analysis to establish that Russia constitutes a sufficiently asymmetric threat that it should be balanced by a Turkish government operating under Strategic Participation. It outlines the threat in aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions, noting that Russia poses some form of threat in all

---

[6] The Turkish foreign policy establishment has been historically closely linked with the military. While this connection has weakened after the Ergenekon and Bayloz trials, the bureaucracy cannot yet considered to be entirely in line with the AKP. With Erdoğan increasingly taking a personal hand in issues of foreign policy, however, the AKP–bureaucracy distinction is decreasingly relevant. See Hale, 2013, 246–248.

categories. The section ends by briefly assessing deteriorating relations between Turkey and NATO, and the impact this has on Russo–Turkish asymmetry.

It should be noted that the consequence of balance-of-threat analysis is an emphasis on Russo–Turkish enmity. This section does not describe the relationship in its entirety, instead focusing on elements that are relevant to the Russian threat to Turkey. The two states have significant economic and cultural relations, with Russia being the third largest origin for Turkish imports in 2015, with imports worth USD 12.1 billion (Simoes & Hildalgo, 2017). Turkey also relies on Russia for its energy supply. However, threat is a factor of any international relationship, and is the issue relevant to this study.

Aggregate Power

Russian power remains substantially greater than Turkey's. While Turkey remains economically and militarily potent, the Russian Federation outmatches it by most measures. The Russo–Turkish relationship has been asymmetric since the latter days of the Ottoman Empire, and there is no significant shift in this respect.

However, as France and Britain intervened in the Sublime Porte's favour during the Crimean War, so now does the West make up the power deficit. Turkish interest in military alignment with the West emerged immediately following the conclusion of WWII, when Soviet power was extended to the western Turkish border. While Turkish entry into NATO was complicated — and sealed only when Turkey threatened neutrality in a Soviet–US war — it institutionalized Turkey's relationship with the West against Russia (Ahmad, 2014, pp. 106–107).

As *Fig. 3* shows, while Russo–Turkish relationship is highly asymmetric, the power of NATO shifts the balance of aggregate power firmly in Turkey's favour. Despite this, the sum power of NATO would not be deployed to Turkey in the case of a NATO–Russia conflict, and balancing is only as effective as alliance support is credible. Due to recent tensions, Turkey appears to be increasingly doubtful about whether it can rely on NATO for its defence. Consequently, for matters of aggregate power, Turkey must assess its security along the single, asymmetric dyad between itself and Russia, without fully relying on NATO.

2015 Turkish and Russian Aggregate Power

Country	Population (millions)	GDP (billions current USD)	Active personnel (thousands)*	Defense spending (billions current USD)
Russia	142.4	1,270	771.0	66.1
Turkey	81.6	718	510.6	12.0
USA	323.9	18,600	1,433.1	590
NATO**	923.9	36,211	3,192	891.7

* Paramilitary personnel excluded.

** NATO data from NATO and World Bank

Data taken from The Military Balance, 2015 and 2017. NATO data from the NATO database and the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

Figure 3. Russo–Turkish Balance of Aggregate Power.

Geographic Proximity

Russia has been the predominant geographic threat to Turkey since the birth of the Republic in 1923. Soviet–Turkish relations followed a period of intense competition between both regimes' imperial predecessors that saw Imperial Russia consistently undermine or annex Ottoman territories in the Caucasus and the Balkans. While the Soviet Union appeared more amenable to Turkish interests, and even supplied materiel during Turkey's Civil War after the 1921 Treaty of Moscow, Turkish policy-makers consistently feared communist invasion or subversion (Ahmad, 2014, 100). Since the USSR's collapse, Turkey and Russia have significantly improved their ability to co-operate on issues of transnational crime and security.[7] However, the geographic proximity of both nations' least stable regions creates a mutual threat.

For instance, during Turkey's conflict with the PKK in the 1990s, Moscow appeared to be leaning toward allowing the opening of a Kurdish House in Moscow, attended by the PKK. Conversely, Turkey reportedly rendered material assistance of USD 20 million to Turkish Chechen volunteers fighting the Russians in 1994. While urgent diplomatic efforts by both parties eventually allowed both to come to accord in February 1995,[8] travel across the Black Sea or over the Caucasus provides a bridge between the most unstable regions of Russia and Turkey. This bridge is central to Turkish and Russian mutual security concerns.

Further, Russian Black Sea trade and naval vessels must pass through the Turkish-controlled Bosporus and Dardanelles. There is currently no real threat of Russia pushing for control of these straits as there was during the imperial and post-WWII period; the 1936 Montreaux Convention effectively regulates passage through the straits in a manner agreeable to both parties (Köknar, 2003, pp. 100–101). However, Turkey remains concerned about Russia attempting to dominate Black Sea security, with Erdoğan warning NATO that refusal to step up its activity in the region could make the sea a "Russian lake" (Jones & Hille, 2016). Particularly with the 2015 Russian Maritime Doctrine calling for significantly increased participation in the region, the Black Sea links Turco–Russian security interests more closely than physical distance would indicate.

Russian intervention in Syria has only exacerbated this threat, as attested by the repeated Russian breaches of Turkish airspace between October and November 2015 that culminated in the downing of a Russian warplane (BBC, 2015). With both states deeply interested in different outcomes in Syria, the proximity of Turkish and Russian military forces significantly raises the potential for misunderstandings in the regions surrounding OES and Idlib. Russian forces are deployed in the PYD-held Afrin canton and Russian-

---

[7] Notably, including the development of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization that benefitted both nations significantly. See Öniş & Yılmaz, 2015, pp. 79–80.

[8] The agreement saw Turkey cease weapons sales, halt volunteer travel, and place political pressure to negotiate on the Chechen President in exchange for Russia rejecting the Kurdish House and preventing activities in Russia directed against Turkey. See Olson, 1998.

backed Syrian forces form a barrier between Turkish forces and the PYD-backed Manbij Military Council.[9] The Russian presence makes any Turkish misstep notably more risky.

Offensive Power

Direct offensive power is the least concerning factor of the Russian threat towards Turkey. There is very little likelihood that tensions between Turkey and Russia will escalate into full scale conflict. However, the disparity is still relevant for Turkish security.

There are five Russian airbases within 400 kilometres of Turkey's eastern border. One of these is located in Armenia, and Russian forces are deployed in Armenia to ensure its borders against Turkey, with Russia's strategically located 102 Gyumri Base less than 10 kilometres from the Turkish border (Janes IHS, 2017). Russia similarly has military bases in the Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Together, these bases place 18 Russian aircraft immediately proximate to the Turkish border. Furthermore, Russian forward deployments are such that even short-range missile launchers like the SS-21 Scarab can theoretically reach eastern Turkish towns like Kars, while medium-range missiles would be within reach of Trabzon on Turkey's northeastern coast (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017). These locations also provide logistical points from which Russian military equipment could theoretically enter Turkey, and are situated in territories that would make Turkish retaliation politically complicated.

Russia also is deployed in Syria, but can only be effectively supplied with adherence to the Montreaux convention. Consequently, these forces do not constitute a significant component of Russia's offensive power against Turkey. While offensive power should not be overstated in describing the Russian threat, Turkey is far less capable than Russia of responding to any threat in the Caucasus, and its closest military base in Erzurum is over 170 kilometres from the nearest point on its northeastern border. While not a major concern, this feeds into Russo–Turkish asymmetry.

Aggressive Intentions

Aggressive intentions are significantly more difficult to assess than any other factor of the Russo–Turkish balance-of-threat. Lacking confidential information, it is not possible to fully ascertain whether Russian intentions in Turkey's immediate neighbourhood should be considered aggressive under Walt's model. However, its intentions absolutely run counter to Turkish aspirations for Strategic Depth. Consequently, Russian intentions should be considered at least partially aggressive under Walt's model.

In June 2016, Erdoğan apologized for the downing of Russia's jet in October the previous year, and in the following month detained those responsible, asserting they were linked to Fetullah Gülen.[10] While a potential détente between Russia and Turkey in Syria has been widely discussed, the extent of co-operation is unclear. There has been significant

---

[9] The deal between the Syrian forces and Mabij was reportedly sponsored by the Russian Defence Ministry. See Sputnik, 2017.

[10] This claim did not occur until after the July coup attempt. See Al Jazeera, 2016a.

contact between the military and intelligence infrastructures of both countries over the Syrian question, which President Putin hailed as "efficient and close" (Deutsche Welle, 2017). In October 2017, Putin and Erdoğan met personally in Moscow, and in the ensuing press conference, at which Erdoğan stated that the two countries were in "full cooperation" militarily (Dyomkin & Gumrukcu, 2017). The two also managed — without American input — to broker a deal with Syrian rebels — on evacuating civilians from Aleppo.

Russia's primary interest appears to be in enhancing its reputation as a regional deal-maker. While the West is sidelined, Russia can dominate the course of the Syrian war. Its prime interest is in appearing to be the power that directly oversees the war's end. Current Turkish interests, which have shifted towards pushing the YPG and its affiliates back from its border and from linking up with other Kurdish Cantons in Afrin, may not be compatible with this end-state. Turkey appears to hope that co-operation with Russia and the Assad regime may lead to future co-operation against the PYD in Rojava.[11] However, this would be enormously costly for the Assad regime to accomplish, given the entrenched position of PYD-affiliated fighting forces and Syria's limited manpower, heavy reliance on militias, Hezbollah, and Russian and Iranian aid (Samaan & Barnard, 2015).

Even a deal that does manage to get Turkey onside places it in a significant strategic dilemma. Its efforts must then focus increasingly on the domestic PKK, providing Russia and Iran functionally free reign in Syria, with only some Turkish-backed militias in and around Idlib providing Turkish influence in the country. Russian dominance in Syria means that Turkey will have limited means by which to bring Syria into accord with its positions on Rojava or Iran, making it highly unlikely that the post-war regime in Syria — whatever form it takes — will turn to Turkey as a broker. While Turkey may accept this, it constitutes a significant threat to Strategic Depth and will likely harm the AKP's domestic popularity given its dedication since 2011 to remove the Assad regime.

NATO and the "Security Deficit"

Turkey's current co-operation with Russia on the question of Syria should not be surprising. NATO allies, particularly the United States, have been decreasingly focused on protecting Turkish regional interests, despite continued rhetorical support for the Turkish alliance. While this is clearly not solely the fault of the West, it has made NATO protection less credible in the eyes of the AKP.[12] This creates a security deficit in terms of aggregate power that exacerbates the asymmetry between Russia and Turkey, making staunch Turkish opposition to Russia strategically problematic.

Post–Cold War Turkish–American relations have remained relatively strained. The 2003 parliamentary rejection of a bill to allow the US to open a separate front against Iraq

---

[11] An unnamed senior Turkish official reportedly told Reuters that Turkey's priority was no longer to remove Assad, but to end terrorism. He hoped that Russia would help Turkey against the "PKK in Syria." See Osborn & Coskun, 2016.

[12] NATO governments' support of the YPG is the dominant issue in this regard. Erdoğan considers arming the organization of the NATO treaty, remarking that the treaty should be revised if the US would act against Turkey's interests. See Hürriyet 2017.

showed the US it could not fully depend on its legacy of co-operation with the TSK in a post-Soviet world.[13] The rejection was due in part to a sentiment of "estrangement" in Turkey, that the US employed strong alliance rhetoric towards Turkey but was restrained in political and military support after the Soviet collapse (Uslu, 2003, pp. 290–291).

The July coup attempt exacerbated this estrangement. It took the United States three hours to denounce the coup, and notably only did so after General Çolak of the First Army denounced the coup and stated the putschists were only a small faction in the military (Reuters, 2016). The post-coup response from the West was equally troubling to Turkey, with the US State Department and many European governments cautioning or criticizing the Turkish crackdown in the coup's aftermath (Karadeniz & Pamuk, 2016). These responses have been sharply criticized by the AKP government, with Erdoğan accusing them as "taking sides" with the coup (Al Jazeera, 2016b).

Equally problematic is the Turkish perception that the West does not see Turkey as "the West." The EU Parliament passed a symbolic vote to suspend EU accession talks in the November following the coup attempt, but it only formalized an already faltering process (Kanter, 2016). While major moves were made earlier under the AKP, current efforts have slowed, especially over EU political criteria and Cyprus.[14] The AKP leadership is increasingly disinterested in the deal, and there has even been limited discussion that Turkey may seek a referendum to end the accession process (Tokabay, Gumrukcu, & Tattersall, 2016).

Finally, regional security interests have increasingly diverged. Most significant is the United States reliance on the PYD, a policy that directly contradicts Turkish security interests. US involvement in Rojava, which included the deployment of US Special Forces to Manbij, has severely harmed Turkey's perception that it can rely on the US for its own security interests. The overwhelming focus on defeating IS has made Turkish security a side issue for most NATO members involved in the coalition.

While these issues do not threaten continued NATO–Turkish co-operation, they mean that Turkey must strategically diversify to gain support on a case-by-case basis to make up the "security deficit." Turkish relations with smaller powers are not a replacement for NATO, but provide a mechanism for Turkey to more gather the support for its initiatives that is noticeably lacking in among its traditional allies.

Asymmetric Balancing

The most important element of Strategic Depth is strategic diversification. In the face of a potential Russian threat, Turkey would need to expand relations with other actors beyond the mediating role advocated under zero problems. If Strategic Participation reflects current Turkish strategy, it should not attempt to restore relations with traditional partners,

---

[13] This bill was voted down by about 100 AKP members, against the will of the party leadership. The TSK, on the other hand, opposed allowing the US to use Turkish territory. See Cagaptay & Parris, 2003.

[14] The majority of the problems cited in the 2016 progress report focused on Turkey's difficulty with the political criteria. See European Commission, 2016.

preferring instead smaller actors. This targeted focus is what is meant by "asymmetric balancing."

The following section assesses Turkish relations with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and the KRG in Iraq. It attempts to establish the presence of Turkish asymmetric balancing against Russia in each of these cases. It assesses the relationship with each state along three indicators: (1) shared threat; (2) military co-operation; and (3) economic dependence. Each section closes each analysis with an overall assessment of Strategic Participation in these countries,

Azerbaijan

In the aftermath of the Soviet breakup, the Azeri–Armenian conflict posed Turkey with a serious challenge. Turkish public sentiment was fully in support of Azerbaijan, but Turkey initially attempted a mediating approach to preserve relations with NATO and Russia. This approach repeatedly alienated the Azeri administration. In fact, when President Ilham Aliyev assumed power in 2003, it was widely viewed as a Russian success (Aydin, 2010, pp. 767–770). Azeri–Turkish relations remained frosty under the AKP, which worked towards normalization of relations with Armenia even before 2009. The zero problems approach was equally troubling for Aliyev (Murinson, 2010, pp. 120–121).

Shared threat: Russia and Azerbaijan have a long-lasting, but complicated security relationship. Russia–Armenia ties make the potential threat of Russia — that is, what its end position will be — deeply problematic to Azerbaijan. While it has historically attempted to balance Turkish and Russian influence, in 2008, Azerbaijan asserted that Russia was involved in extensive arms transfers to Armenia. These allegations were denied, though the Azeri Defence Minister has claimed that his Russian counterpart admitted to the transfers during a visit to Moscow (Guardian, 2010). Continued and expanding Russia–Armenia security ties and intensifying Russian involvement in Georgia and Ukraine has made distinct the possibility that Russia might increase its involvement in the Azeri–Armenian contest over the Nagorno-Karabakh region on the Armenian side.

Military co-operation: Turkish–Azeri military relations have existed since 1992, but in 2010 the two states signed a Strategic Partnership agreement that included USD 200 million in military assistance to Baku and a security guarantee (Janes IHS, 2017b).[15] Particularly since 2015, these relations have expanded, with two major joint military exercises, TurAz Qartali and TurAz Shahini being held as part of a bilateral defence review in 2015 and 2016 (AzerNews, 2016). Expanded exercises are anticipated and will likely include Georgian participation. Turkey also appears to be working towards a full trilateral military co-operation agreement with the two states (Hürriyet, 2016). These moves are in line with strategic diversification balancing behaviour.

Economic dependence: Turkish–Azeri co-operation in economic affairs is extensive, particularly regarding energy. The largest Turkish public investor in Azerbaijan is the state

[15] Notably, shortly following this agreement, Russia and Armenia signed an extension of their defence agreement. See O'Rourke, 2010.

energy company, TPAO, with investment of over USD 3.4 billion (Ibrahimov, 2015, pp. 84–87). Azerbaijan's SOCAR is similarly involved in Turkey. Azerbaijan is also central to Turkey's efforts to diversify its energy suppliers and increase energy corridors from Central Asia through Turkey, particularly since the 2006 and 2007 completions of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan and Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum pipelines (Ibrahimov, 2015, p. 89). These relations have intensified in recent years, with construction starting on the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline in 2015 and Turkey stating that it hoped to more than triple its trade from 2014, worth USD 4 billion, by 2023 (Hürriyet, 2015).

Assessment: The Turkish–Azeri relationship has undergone significant improvements since Azerbaijan began to consider in 2008 that it may not be able to prevent Russian involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict alone. Significant post-2015 expansion of military co-operation and high levels of economic dependence make Azerbaijan the most prominent example of strategic diversification. While relations began before implementation of Strategic Depth, they have intensified since 2015, when Turkey began to abandon its soft power approach.

Georgia

Turkey was the first state to recognize Georgia, doing so one month after it recognized Azerbaijan. It has been relatively supportive of Georgian territorial integrity over the questions of the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia provinces, but has attempted, ineffectually, to act as a mediator. The 2008 Russian intervention in Georgia made it increasingly clear that mediation was not a viable strategy for Turkey. Turkey attempted to respond to the crisis with a "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform," which rapidly petered out and left room for France to step in and resolve the crisis (Balci, 2014, pp. 50–51). Turkey's significant asymmetric weaknesses highlighted the challenges of the zero problems approach to taking a leading role during crises, particularly when stronger actors became involved.

Shared threat: Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia fundamentally reshaped Georgian–Russian relations. Russian support for Abkhazia and South Ossetian secessionists had characterized the relationship since the dissolution of the USSR, but Tbilisi and Moscow had reached a near-stable peacekeeping arrangement in 2004 (Aydin, 2010, pp. 777–780). After the invasion, it was no longer a question; Russia could not be relied on to preserve Georgian integrity. Georgia currently considers Russia to be illegally occupying its territory since it recognized the two breakaway regions as states in August 2008 (RFE, 2008).

Military co-operation: The Substantial NATO–Georgia Package offered to Georgia in 2015 provides significantly expanded opportunities for Turkish–Georgian military co-operation, including eventual membership in the alliance (NATO, 2016). However, in line with Strategic Participation, these efforts are being combined with the expansion of bilateral security relations. Turkey is actively working towards entrenching trilateral military co-operation between itself, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Waller, 2016).

Economic dependence: Turkey is Georgia's largest trade partner with USD 1.33 billion in trade as of 2016 (MFA, 2016). For Georgia, developing export access in Turkey is especially important. This has historically forced Georgia to turn a blind eye to the trade relations that Turkey has cultivated with Georgia's breakaway region, Abkhazia, to counterbalance Russian influence (Kapanadze, 2014). Like Azerbaijan, a cornerstone of the Turkey–Georgia trade relationship is energy, with each of the major pipelines through Azerbaijan and Turkey being bridged through Georgia. This makes Georgia a state of fundamental strategic importance to Turkey and forces Georgia to protect its relations with the two Turkic states it neighbours.

Assessment: Georgia is an essential counterbalance to Russian regional influence for Turkey. It is highly dependent on Turkey for its economic and military security, both of which have significantly expanded in recent years. While it is difficult to label relations with Georgia as strategic diversification given the long history of security co-operation, the inclusion of Tbilisi in trilateral military co-operation with Ankara and Baku indicates asymmetric balancing.

Ukraine

Turkish economic volatility prior to 2002 made the development of strategic relations between it and Ukraine difficult. Ukraine was significantly more interested in managing the balance between Russian and European influence than fostering relations on the other side of the Black Sea (Yülek & Yatsenko, 2013, pp. 75–76). However, in 2003, Turkey identified Ukraine as a priority country, and has since made efforts to improve relations. These efforts include the 2011 creation of a High-Level Strategic Council and the expansion of human rights co-operation over Turkic Crimean Tatars (MFA, 2013).

Shared threat: The overthrow of President Victor Yanukovych in 2014 during the Euromaidan revolt shifted Russo–Ukrainian relations from highly co-operative to deeply antagonistic. In March, a month after Yanukovych's removal, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula. It then began to support rebel movements in Luhansk and Donetsk by late summer, placing Ukraine and Russia deeply at odds. While the Minsk ceasefire agreements brought a halt to most serious fighting, Russia is aiming towards constitutional protection of Russians in Ukraine. Such constitutional protection could provide it with significant leverage over Ukraine, making Russia a significant threat (Loshkariov & Sushentsov, 2016, p. 86).

Military co-operation: Less than a year following the Russian intervention in Syria, Turkey and Ukraine signed a military co-operation agreement in May 2016 that will last until 2020 (Interfax-Ukraine, 2016). The agreement followed on the January visit of Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksandr Turchynov to the Turkish National Security Council and an April visit of two Turkish frigates to Odessa (Wahbi, 2016). While there has been notable discussion that strategic ties would peter out following the Russia–Turkish reset, military relations have remained (Balcer, 2016). Ukrainian News reported in December 2016 that the Ukrainian ambassador to Turkey oversaw a deal in which Turkey would allocate USD 3 million annually to purchase military equipment for the Ukrainian military (Ukrainian News, 2017).

Economic dependence: Turkish–Ukrainian economic relations are not yet at the level of dependence, but have significantly expanded in recent years. In 2016, Turkey was the second largest destination of Ukrainian exports, worth USD 2.5 billion, and Turkish investments in Ukraine amounted to USD 260 million (DEIK, 2017). Notably, Turkey offered Ukraine a USD 50 million loan to cover its deficit in 2015, alongside a USD 10 million package for humanitarian assistance (Zinets & Prentice, 2015).

Assessment: Turkish–Ukrainian relations significantly expanded following Russia's 2014 intervention in Crimea and Donbass, particularly in the realm of military affairs. Popular concerns that a cooling of Turkish–Ukrainian relationship would be central to Russian demands in the post–July coup Russo–Turkish détente do not appear to have manifested. Co-operation with Ukraine provides Turkey with much needed leverage vis-à-vis Russia, and recent improvements will not likely be abandoned.

Iraq (KRG)

The central theatre for Turkish co-operation in Iraq is not with the Iraqi state at all. In fact, Iraqi–Russian relations are largely positive, and are characterized by a close intelligence relationship in operations against IS (Khan, 2015). Instead, Turkey's asymmetric partner in Iraq is the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with which Ankara has developed extremely close relations. While the KRG is distant from Russian intervention in the region, it is also concerned over developments in Syria as they relate to the Assad regime and the PYD in Rojava.

Shared threat: For the KRG, the major Russian threat is the lack of clarity about the position it will take between the KRG and the Baghdad government. The KRG appears concerned that Iranian involvement in Iraq will see it leverage its relationship with Baghdad to stop any future moves by the KRG towards independence or increased autonomy (Zaman, 2016). Iranian connections with the PKK and the Patriotic Union Party (PUK), both rivals to the ruling Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), are deeply concerning Erbil, whose institution-building efforts are hampered by the presence of PKK affiliates and a discontent PUK (Wahab, 2017). Russian intervention in Syria raises the possibility that it may choose to back Iran and the Baghdad government over KRG autonomy as well, despite expanding joint energy development between the KRG and Russia's Gazprom and Rosneft Corporations (Iraq Business News, 2016; 2017).

Military co-operation: Turkey's shift to Strategic Participation initially strained relations with the KRG. Turkish airstrikes hit numerous PKK targets in northern Iraq in summer 2015 elicited condemnation from the KDP (Al Jazeera, 2015). However, in the ensuing months, the KRG began to take an increasingly hard position on the PKK, and has deployed elements of its Peshmerga fighting forces to counteract PKK influence in northern Iraq. The PKK has condemned economic relations between Turkey and the KRG, and is serving as a jumping off point for increasing Turkish–KRG military co-operation (Natali, 2017). Turkey has deployed approximately 2,000 soldiers to the KRG, serving largely in a training and advisory role, and called for Turkish participation in the Mosul Operation against IS (Idiz, 2016). However, this does not appear to have come to fruition.

Economic dependence: Economic relations are the cornerstone of the Turkey–KRG relationship. Turkey is highly dependent on Russia and Iran for gas and oil, but the increasing autonomy of the KRG to conduct trade deals has made it highly valuable for Turkish energy security. It became deeply concerned in 2009 that KRG energy exports would go through Syria, and lobbied strongly for a northern route through Turkey.[16] After the outbreak of the Syrian war, the Syria route became nearly impossible, making Turkey the only viable option for KRG exports westward (Romano, 2015, p. 96). Turkey has also become the largest investor in the region with annual trade at over USD 8 billion, and the KRG selected the Turkish state bank, Halkbank, to open its energy revenue-sharing account against Baghdad's protests (Özdemir & Raszewski, 2016, pp. 131–133).

Assessment: Turkish–KRG relations are more heavily predicated on the question of the PKK and energy trade, but it still constitutes an element in Turkey asymmetric balancing. The PKK is heavily dependent on Turkey for its economic security, and it is concerned that Russia might join Iranian overtures to its rivals in Baghdad, the PUK and the PYD. For Turkey, this dependence and concern provide it with a mechanism by which to reduce its dependence on Russian energy, a key element of diversification under Strategic Participation.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that current Turkish foreign policy towards Russia is explainable in terms of a continuation of Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth. It has shifted from the zero problems conception towards a more reactive, more security-oriented policy of Strategic Participation. That being said, Turkish foreign policy remains in line with two elements that define Strategic Depth: (1) leveraging the historical identity and (2) diversifying strategic relations.

This paper has further argued that in the face of highly asymmetric threat from Russia, and given a perceived lack of NATO support, Turkey has significantly expanded its relations with smaller states. Turkey possesses far more leverage over these states, and sees them as a valuable element of strategic diversification. While Turkey certainly has no plans to replace NATO with smaller state coalitions, these states provide valuable leverage for Turkey in its relations with Russia, and do not lack commitment as Turkey perceives the US does.

This paper's argument has significant limitations. Most significant is the attempt to draw a connection between Davutoğlu and current Turkish foreign relations. Many commentators have pronounced the death of his foreign policy, and with good reason. The zero problems approach failed spectacularly in the face of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, and after Davutoğlu resigned as PM, he is no longer a prominent player in AKP decision-making. However, this misses the influence of Davutoğlu that goes beyond soft power and

---

[16] Turkey also advocated that the KRG should have autonomy over its exports at this time, as it was growing increasingly concerned about the influence that Iran might have over then–Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Iranian–Syria relations made Iranian lobbying for a Syria pipeline a distinct possibility. See Romano, 2015, pp. 93–94.

zero problems. Strategic Depth is more than one foreign policy. It is grand strategy, which definitionally has multiple paths to realization.

Second, the balance-of-threat framework that forms the bulk of my analysis has its own problems. Like most analyses drawn from neorealist sources, the approach overemphasizes threat, missing the smaller scale elements of diplomacy and culture that impact strategic relations. It treats Turkey and each of the four countries examined as part of asymmetric balancing as unitary entities, with direct and identifiable security interests.

Third, the case study size is limited. Because of the nature of this project, the case study analysis had to be limited to only the four relationships most relevant to the Russian question. Consequently, this analysis misses important improving relations with states like Israel, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. It limits itself to the Russian threat, and underemphasizes other sources of threat like the PKK and Greece. Further research is necessary to investigate whether the Strategic Participation hypothesis holds in more distant states or regarding threats other than Russia.

Despite these challenges, strategic diversification is still a priority for the AKP. Turkey no longer feels that the relationship with the US and NATO are sufficient for its security interests as it did during the height of military tutelage in the Cold War, and continues to look for ways to ensure it can better harness leverage towards its own security.

References

Ahmad, F. (2014). *Turkey: The quest for identity* (rev. ed.). London, England: Oneworld.

Al Jazeera. (2015, July 26). Kurds condemn Turkish air strikes inside Iraq. *Al Jazeera News*. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/iraqi-kurds-pkk-condemn-turkish-air-strikes-iraq-150725155340811.html.

Al Jazeera. (2016a, July 19). Turkish pilots who downed Russian jet detained. *Al Jazeera News*. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/turkish-pilots-downed-russian-jet-detained-160719132950496.html.

Al Jazeera. (2016b, August 2) Turkey's Erdogan: The West is taking sides with coup. *Al Jazeera News*. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/turkey-erdogan-west-sides-coups-160802141241644.html.

Aras, B. (2009). The Davutoglu era in Turkish foreign policy. *Insight Turkey, 11*(3), 127–142.

Aydin, M. (2010). Relations with the Caucasus and Central Asia. In B. Oran (Ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1919–2006* (M. Aksin, Trans.) (pp. 750–816). Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.

AzerNews. (2016, March 7). Azerbaijan, Turkey start joint military exercises. *AzerNews.* http://www.azernews.az/nation/93749.html.

Balcer, A. (2016, September 19). Turkey and Ukraine. The end of the love affair? *New Eastern Europe*. http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/2124-turkey-and-ukraine-the-end-of-the-love-affair.

Balci, B. (2014). Strengths and constraints of Turkish policy in the South Caucasus. *Insight Turkey, 16*(2), 43–52.

BBC. (2015, December 1). Turkey's downing of Russian warplane — what we know. *BBC News*. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34912581.

BBC. (2016, April 21). Turkey Ergenekon: Court quashes "coup plot" convictions. *BBC News*. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36099889.

Cagaptay, S., & Parris, M. (2003). Turkey after the Iraq War: Still a U.S. ally? *Washington Institute Policy Analysis*. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-after-the-iraq-war-still-a-u.s.-ally.

Çandar, C. (2016, May 3). The Davutoglu era is over. *Al-Monitor*. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/turkey-erdogan-time-of-davutoglu-over.html.

Davutoğlu, A. (2010). Turkey's zero-problems foreign policy. *Foreign Policy*. http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy.

DEIK. (2017, March 15). New period in Turkey–Ukraine economic relations. *Turkish Foreign and Economic Relations Board* [Press Release]. https://www.deik.org.tr/press-releases-new-period-in-turkey-ukraine-economic-relations.

Deutsche Welle. (2017). Putin, Erdogan working "in full cooperation" in Syria. *Deutche Welle*. http://www.dw.com/en/putin-erdogan-working-in-full-cooperation-in-syria/a-37893156.

Dyomkin, D., & Gumrukcu, T. (2017, March 10). Turkey seeks to build Syrian military cooperation with Russia. *Reuters*. http://in.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idINKBN16H0SF.

European Commission. (2016). *Turkey 2016 Report*. Brussels, Belgium: Commission Staff Working Document to the European Parliament.

Feaver, P. (2003). *Armed servants: Agency oversight and civil-military relations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guardian. (2010, December 1). Embassy cables: Truth about Putin and Medvedev — over a bottle of vodka. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/ world/us-embassy-cables-documents/197735.

Hale, W. (2013). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774*. London, England: Routledge.

Humud, C., Blanchard C., & Nikitin, M. B. (2017). *Armed conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. response*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service.

Hürriyet. (2015, May 13). Azeri oil firm to invest $10 billion in Turkey's Petkim. *Hürriyet Daily*. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/azeri-oil-firm-to-invest-10-billion-in-turkeys-petkim.aspx?pageID=238&nID=82352&NewsCatID=348.

Hürriyet. (2016, May 16). Azerbaijani, Georgian, Turkish military agreement 'on the agenda'. *Hürriyet Daily*. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/azerbaijani-georgian-turkish-military-agreement-on-the-agenda-aspx?pageID= 238&nID=99246&NewsCatID=510.

Hürriyet. (2017, June 25). Turkey to US: Providing arms to YPG violation of NATO rules. *Hürriyet Daily*. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-us-providing-arms-to-ypg-violation-of-nato-rules.aspx?PageID=238&NID=114724& NewsCatID=510.

Ibrahimov, R. (2015). Turkish–Azerbaijani energy relations: Significant leverage in the implementation of the foreign policy interests of both countries. *Insight Turkey, 17*(2), 83–100.

Idiz, S. (2016, October 25). Why KRG will remain Turkey's main ally in Iraq. *Al-Monitor*. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/10/turkey-iraq-kurdistan-regional-government-main-ally.html.

Interfax-Ukraine. (2016, May 16). Ukraine, Turkey armies sign military cooperation roadmap until 2020. *Kyiv Post*. https://www.kyivpost.com/ article/content/ukraine-politics/ukraine-turkey-armies-sign-military-cooperation-roadmap-until-2020-413826.html.

International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2015). *The military balance*. London, England: Institute for Strategic Studies.

International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2017). *The military balance*. London, England: Institute for Strategic Studies.

Iraq Business News. (2016, March 18). Gazprom takes over as operator of Garmian Block. *Iraq Business News*. http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2016/03/18/gazprom-takes-over-as-operator-of-garmian-block.

Iraq Business News. (2017, February). Rosneft and KRG sign oil deal. *Iraq Business News*. http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2017/02/22/rosneft-and-krg-sign-oil-deal.

Janes IHS. (2017a). Russian Federation Army. *Information Handling Services — Jane's*. https://janes.ihs.com/WorldArmies/Display/1319294.

Janes IHS. (2017b). Turkey — External Affairs. *Information Handling Services — Jane's*. https://janes.ihs.com/EasternMediterranean/Display/1303426# (Relations with Azerbaijan).

Jones, S. and K. Hille. (2016, May 13). Russia's military ambitions make waves in the Black Sea. *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/1b9c24d8-1819-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e.

Kanter, J. (2016, November 24). European Parliament votes to suspend talks with Turkey on E.U. membership. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/24/world/europe/european-parliament-turkey-eu-membership.html.

Kapanadze, S. (2014, December 27). Turkish trade with Abkhazia: An apple of discord for Georgia. *Hürriyet Daily*. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ turkish-trade-with-abkhazia-an-apple-of-discord-for-georgia.aspx?pageID=449&nID =76148&NewsCatID=396.

Karadeniz, T., & Pamuk, H. (2016, July 29). Turkey's Erdogan slams West for failure to show solidarity over coup attempt. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-idUSKCN10912T.

Khan, I. (2015, September 27). Iraq, Russia, Iran and Syria coordinate against ISIL. *Al Jazeera*. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/iraq-russia-iran-syria-coordinate-isil-150927125919507.html.

Köknar, A. M. (2003). Turkey and the Caucasus: Security and military challenges. In M. S. Radu (Ed.), *Dangerous Neighbourhood: Contemporary Issues in Turkey's Foreign Relations*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Kutlay, M. (2011). Economy as the "practical hand of 'new' Turkish foreign policy": A political economy explanation. *Insight Turkey, 13*(1), 67–88.

Loshkariov, I. D., & Sushentsov, A. A. (2016). Radicalization of Russian is Ukraine: From "accidental" diaspora to rebel movement. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 16*(1), 71–90.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2013). *Relations between Turkey and Ukraine*. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-ukraine.en.mfa.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2016). *Economic relations between Turkey and Georgia*. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/economic-relations-between-turkey-and-georgia.en.mfa.

Murinson, A. (2010). Turkey's entente with Israel and Azerbaijan: State identity in the Middle East and Caucasus. London, England: Routledge.

Natali, D. (2017, January 3). Is Iraqi Kurdistan heading toward civil war? *Al-Monitor*. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/kurdistan-civil-war-iraq-krg-sulaimaniya-pkk-mosul-kurds.html.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2016, February). *Substantial NATO–Georgia package factsheet*. http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_12/20151209_151209-factsheet-nato-georgia-package.pdf.

Nye Jr. J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in World Politics*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.

Olson, R. (1998). Turkish and Russian foreign policies, 1991–1997: The Kurdish and Chechnya Questions. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 18*(2), 209–227.

Öniş, Z. (2012). The Triumph of conservative globalism: The political economy of the AKP era. *Turkish Studies, 13*(2), 135–152.

Öniş, Z., & Yılmaz, Ş. (2015). Turkey and Russia in a shifting global order: Cooperation, conflict and asymmetric interdependence in a turbulent region. *Third World Quarterly, 37*(1), 71–95.

O'Rourke, B. (2010, August 20). Armenia, Russia sign extended defense pact. *Radio Free Europe*. http://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_President_Medvedev_To_Visit_Armenia/2131915.html.

Osborn, A., & Coskun, O. (2016, December 28). Russia, Turkey, Iran eye dicing Syria into zones of influence. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-deal-idUSKBN14H12V.

Özdemir, V., & Raszewski, S. (2016). State and substate oil trade: The Turkey–KRG deal. *Middle East Policy, 23*(1), 125–135.

Pamuk, H. (2015, October 24). Erdogan says Turkey won't let Kurds "seize" northern Syria. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/us–mideast-crisis-turkey-erdogan-idUSKCN0SI0IZ20151024.

Reuters. (2016, July 15). Timeline — Turkey's attempted coup. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-security-timeline idUSL8N1A158X.

RFE. (2008, August 26). Russia recognizes Abkhazia, South Ossetia. *Radio Free Europe*. http://www.rferl.org/a/Russia_Recognizes_Abkhazia_South_Ossetia/1193932.html.

Romano, D. (2015). Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey: Temporary Marriage? *Middle East Policy, 22*(1), 89–101.

Samaan, M., & Barnard, A. (2015, July). Assad, in rare admission, says Syria's army lacks manpower. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/world/middleeast/assad-in-rare-admission-says-syrias-army-lacks-manpower.html.

Schiff, R. (2009). The military and domestic politics: A concordance theory of civil–military relations. London, England: Routledge.

Simoes, A., & Hildago, C.A. (2011). The economic complexity observatory: An analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of economic development. *Workshops at the Twenty-Fifth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, 39–42. https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/WS/AAAIW11/paper/view/3948.

Sputnik. (2017, March 4). Syrian army creates buffer zone between Kurds and Turkish military. *Sputnik International*. https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201703041051265010-syria-army-kurds-manbij.

Taspinar, O. (2014). The end of the Turkish model. *Survival, 56*(2), 49–64.

Tezcür, G. M. (2009). Judicial Activism in Perilous Times: The Turkish Case. *Law and Society Review, 43*(2), 305–336.

Tokabay, E., Gumrukcu, T., & Tattersall, N. (2016, November 14). Turkey could put EU talks to a referendum next year: Erdogan. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-eu-erdogan-idUSKBN1391H4.

Tuğal, C. (2016). The fall of the Turkish model: How the Arab uprisings brought down Islamic liberalism. London, England: Verso.

Ukrainian News. (2017, February 28). Turkey to assign USD 3.1 million yearly for needs of Ukrainian army till 2022. *Ukrainian News Agency*. http://ukranews.com/en/news/482221-turkey-to-assign-usd-31-million-yearly-for-needs-of-ukrainian-army-till-2022.

Uslu, Nasuh. (2003). The Turkish–American relationship between 1947 and 2003: The history of a distinctive alliance. New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Wahab, B. (2017). Iran's warming relations with the PKK could destabilize the KRG. *Washington Institute Policy Analysis*. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-warming-relations-with-the-pkk-could-destabilize-the-krg.

Wahbi, L. (2016, May 26). Turkey and Ukraine teaming up: How the new alliance is combatting Russian aggression. *NATO Association of Canada*. http://natoassociation.ca/turkey-and-ukraine-teaming-up-how-the-new-alliance-is-combatting-the-russian-aggression/.

Walker, J. W. (2011). Introduction: The sources of Turkish grand strategy —
"Strategic depth" and "zero-problems" in context. In N. Kitchen (Ed.), *Turkey's Global Strategy*. (pp. 6–12). LSE IDEAS Special Report: London.

Waller, N. (2016, May 16). Georgia to hold joint military exercises with Turkey, Azerbaijan. *Georgia Today*. http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3799/Georgia-To-Hold-Joint-Military-Exercises-wi.

Walt, S. M. (1987). *The origins of alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

World Bank. (2017). *World development indicators dataset* [Data file]. http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators.

Yavus, M. H. (2009). *Secularism and Muslim democracy in Turkey*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Yülek, M., & Yatsenko, O. (2015). Globalization, Crises and Policy Reform: Lessons from the Turkish Experience. *International Economic Policy, 23*(2), 73–101.

Zaman, A. (2016, December 15). KRG PM: Talk of Iraqi Kurdish independence red line for Iran, but not Turkey. *Al-Monitor*. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/krg-iraq-kurdistan-region-nechirvan-barzani-iran-turkey.html.

Zanotti, J., & Thomas, C. (2017). *Turkey: Background and U.S. relations in brief*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service.

Zinets, N., & Prentice, A. (2015, March 20). Turkey offers Ukraine $50 mln loan: Ukraine's Poroshenko. *Reuters*. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-turkey-loans-idUSKBN0MG1XT20150320.