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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SECURITY STRATEGY IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

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Abstract

In the context of the increasing interdependence in international relations, addressing security challenges at the regional and international levels has become an increasingly urgent issue. At present, it is evident that not only military factors, but also economic and environmental determinants play a leading role in enhancing states' influence in global politics. In an era of rapid scientific and technological advancement, the need to propose new approaches to understanding the nature of security challenges has become a vital necessity. Moreover, in recent years, the role and significance of non-state actors in the fields of security and defense have been steadily increasing.

Keywords

Security, United States, individual, society, security paradigm, security culture, regional security.

INTRODUCTION

Shaped by three fundamental characteristics its geostrategic location, the ideology of Kemalism, and the legacy of a great imperial past the Republic of Türkiye has altered the vector of its foreign policy several times over the past century. The initial phase was marked by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's rise to power and the renunciation of imperial ambitions, followed by a departure from socialist aspirations and a turn toward capitalism. This was subsequently influenced by the end of the Cold War, and, in the early twenty-first century, by the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the events of the "Arab Spring," which triggered profound changes in the political life of Middle Eastern states, also brought about a fundamental shift in Türkiye's defense and security strategy. In recent years, transformations in Türkiye's defense and security policies have been closely linked to its aspiration to expand its sphere of influence in the international arena as a regional actor and to enhance its military capabilities in order to effectively counter the threats emerging in its immediate environment. Accordingly, within the framework of this study, it is appropriate to provide a detailed analysis of the essence of Türkiye's security strategy, its main driving forces, objectives, and guiding principles.

It is widely acknowledged that in recent years Türkiye has undergone a profound transformation in its security strategy aimed at combating terrorism at both national and regional levels. The "Terror-Free Türkiye" security concept developed by the country in 2025 serves as clear evidence that concrete measures in this direction have been initiated. The peak of these transformations is often associated with the failed military coup attempt of 2016. Among the factors that triggered these fundamental changes are the imperative to safeguard national interests and the pursuit of an adequate strategic sphere of influence in the context of intensifying regional and global geopolitical competition.

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At the same time, Türkiye has demonstrated increasing activism in addressing numerous challenges as an integral component of its foreign policy. To this end, it has placed particular emphasis on advancing its defense industry. This can be observed, for instance, in the unexpected procurement of S-400 missile systems from the Russian Federation and in subsequent efforts to develop indigenous air defense systems capable of providing short- and long-range ground-based coverage. Naturally, these steps were met with disapproval by Türkiye's traditional partners, leading to tensions, diplomatic frictions, and the emergence of various ultimatums in bilateral relations.

A considerable body of research has been conducted with the aim of elucidating the essence of the profound transformations observed in Türkiye's defense and security strategy. These studies can be conditionally classified into three main groups.

The first group of scholars seeks to explain the existing changes from an individualistic perspective, linking them primarily to the leadership role in the decision-making process. According to this view, the observed transformations are regarded as the outcome of a rational policy aligned with the interests of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The second group of scholars rejects the individualistic approach and interprets the changes in military strategy as the culmination of the transformation of crises within the state and society following the failed military coup attempt of July 15. From this perspective, the post-coup period represents a critical turning point that reshaped Türkiye's defense and security policies.

The third approach argues that Türkiye's new military and defense strategy has undergone a two-stage transformation. Some analysts do not deny that global and regional geopolitical shifts in the international order, largely led by the United States, have influenced Türkiye's turn toward a more assertive strategy. Other scholars, however, associate the political instability observed in Türkiye's foreign and military policies with the internal crisis in Syria and the regional geopolitical changes that emerged in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring." This perspective suggests that Türkiye's foreign policy has been shaped as a reactive response to international and regional crises. Indeed, the prevailing circumstances created a necessity for Türkiye seeking to preserve its statehood to adopt a new foreign and military strategy.

When examining the formation of Türkiye's security strategy, particular attention must be paid to factors related to national, regional, and international security dynamics. Specifically, the changes in Türkiye's security strategy can be attributed, on the one hand, to the regional instability that emerged in the post–Arab Spring period and, on the other hand, to Ankara's aspirations to become a regional power center. In addition to these factors, it is also essential to consider Türkiye's desire to enhance its political influence on the international stage and to strengthen its military capacity in order to prevent potential security threats along its border regions.

Accordingly, in order to reveal the essence of the issue under consideration, it is appropriate to focus on the following two aspects in particular: the main objectives and directions of the security strategy, as well as the driving forces behind them; the external factors that give rise to efforts aimed at enhancing defense capabilities.

As is well known, the events of the "Arab Spring" led to significant changes in Türkiye's security strategy. Against the backdrop of the increased activity of non-state armed groups in the region, the growing threats to state sovereignty, the weakening of national borders, and intensified competition among regional states for leadership, the necessity emerged for Türkiye

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to further refine its defense strategy and to adopt a more assertive stance in foreign policy. The implementation of this strategy can be observed through the increased tempo of military operations abroad, the advancement of forward military postures, and intensified efforts to modernize the defense industry.

Recent geopolitical developments at the regional level, the impact of the Syrian civil war on Türkiye's national security, the escalation of rivalry among major power centers, and the economic, political, and security-related struggles between them are perceived as threats to Türkiye's national interests and its foreign policy strategy toward neighboring regions. Türkiye's current security strategy was shaped and developed within an environment of strategic and tactical competition between two major power centers against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war. As a result, under conditions of regional and global geopolitical transformation, Türkiye's security strategy has increasingly focused on preventing threats emanating from the Middle East and on pursuing policies based on the protection of national and regional interests through reliance on cross-border military capabilities. On the basis of the government's newly articulated foreign policy strategy, priority areas of the defense industry have begun to take shape, which, in turn, has become an integral component of the military's strategic outlook.

The transformations observed in Türkiye's new military and defense strategy are primarily characterized by changes at the national, regional, and international levels. At the national level, these changes stem from consistent transformations in the decision-making process and the state's evolving approach to geopolitical dynamics. Within the context of domestic political processes, a significant shift has occurred in the balance of power between civilian authorities and the armed forces in Türkiye. As a result, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have assumed a distinctive position in shaping state policy, particularly in the formulation of security strategy. The institutional protection and autonomy afforded to the military within Türkiye's military–industrial complex serve as a clear manifestation of this trend.

The "Red Book," dedicated to Türkiye's defense affairs, presents a number of valuable insights into the essence of national defense policy. According to this document, the range and nature of factors posing threats to Türkiye's security in the post–Cold War era differ markedly from those of earlier periods.

Following the end of the Cold War and as a consequence of competition among various power centers, efforts emerged to establish a new world order aimed at promoting globalization. This, in turn, elevated the scope and complexity of existing threats to a new level. Whereas at the beginning of the twenty-first century threats were perceived as clearly defined and large-scale phenomena, they have increasingly come to be understood as multidimensional and dynamic in nature. Today, within the framework of the traditional concept of security, a range of new threats has gained prominence, including:

- regional and ethnic conflicts;
-economic and political instability within states;
-the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missile systems;
-religious fundamentalism;
-the smuggling of arms and narcotics;
-international terrorism.

Owing to its geostrategic position, Türkiye is located in a region where the interests of major global power centers intersect, while simultaneously facing emerging threats and security challenges. Based on its geopolitical and natural characteristics, Türkiye seeks, within the

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framework of its defense policy, to safeguard its national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and vital national interests. Accordingly, within its national defense policy aimed at ensuring regional security, Türkiye places particular emphasis on the following objectives: attaining the status of a state capable of directly influencing the security architecture of the region and its surrounding areas;becoming a regional power center and assuming a balancing role within the regional order.

The defense policy founded on the principle articulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk "Peace at home, peace in the world" encompasses the following elements: mobilizing available resources and capabilities to resolve international conflicts and to promote just and sustainable stability; ensuring national independence and territorial integrity; actively participating in collective defense systems and fulfilling related obligations in full.

At this juncture, it is also pertinent to address Türkiye's military strategy. Military strategy encompasses four key components that serve to implement the state's defense policy:

Deterrence policy. The provision of military capabilities capable of deterring threats and risks arising from an unstable and uncertain regional environment constitutes the cornerstone of Türkiye's national military strategy.

Crisis management. A central element of Türkiye's defense strategy involves preventing the escalation of conflicts and restraining aggressor states through the use of economic, diplomatic, and other peaceful means. In this regard, maintaining and continuously enhancing the readiness of defense forces plays a crucial role in preventing threats to Türkiye's security.

Defense policy. The rapid detection of potential attacks and their prompt neutralization form the foundation of defense policy. Collective security. Active engagement within existing regional and international organizations constitutes a fundamental pillar of Türkiye's national defense strategy. In accordance with the concept of collective security, Türkiye places particular emphasis on contributing its armed forces to international organizations and alliances, establishing military cooperation, providing technical assistance, and strengthening military education and training.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as Türkiye's Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2009 and 2014, presented numerous insightful analytical observations in his scholarly works regarding the economic and political conditions observed in Türkiye in the early twenty-first century. According to Davutoğlu, the stagnation that characterized foreign policy during the Cold War, together with Türkiye's long-standing role in fulfilling NATO's strategic tasks in the region, constituted the primary causes of the internal crises experienced by the state.

Despite possessing favorable geopolitical opportunities, Türkiye continued for a considerable period to act as a secondary player in its region. However, the shifts in the balance of power that emerged in the post–Cold War era generated a pressing need for a fundamental reorientation of both domestic and foreign policy. In Davutoğlu's view, these transformations were primarily associated with the formulation of a comprehensive foreign policy концепт encompassing the Middle East, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean basins.

Indeed, in developing its foreign policy strategy, Türkiye did not blindly pursue the path of European integration from the perspective of its own values. Although strengthening political and economic relations with the European Union and the broader Western world has been of considerable importance for Türkiye, the country remains acutely aware of its identity as an integral part of the Middle Eastern and Near Eastern value systems. During the Cold War, Türkiye's rapprochement with the Western world resulted in the weakening of its ties with the Middle East region.

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Commenting on these reforms, Davutoğlu emphasized that "it is impossible to democratize domestic politics without democratizing foreign policy. In building a 'New Türkiye,' it is essential not only to respect the rights and freedoms of citizens at the domestic level, but also to respect the rights and freedoms of citizens in neighboring states, to establish stable relations with those states, and to develop effective economic and humanitarian cooperation."

Furthermore, on the basis of the foreign policy doctrine known as "Zero Problems with Neighbors," proposed by Davutoğlu, a set of guiding principles was developed. According to this doctrine, resolving disputes with neighboring states should be achieved by reducing tensions to zero, addressing domestic challenges, and promoting economic development. Through this approach, Türkiye sought to strengthen its geopolitical position by establishing close cooperative ties with the European Union, Central Asia, the Baltic region, and the Middle East. However, the negative impact of the Arab Spring on the region ultimately undermined the original essence of this concept.

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the aforementioned principles, three "methodological" and five "operational" approaches were also introduced. Each of these approaches merits detailed examination.

The first methodological approach rejected the "crisis-oriented" perspective that had dominated during the Cold War era and instead proposed solutions based on an "opportunity-oriented" framework. This approach is clearly reflected in Türkiye's policy toward the Middle East. Türkiye's distinctive approach to the region and its diplomatic activism demonstrate its capacity to act as an effective regional player. Examples include Türkiye's policy toward Lebanon, its mediation efforts between Israel and Syria, its initiatives aimed at resolving the Palestinian issue, its constructive stance on Iran's nuclear program, and its efforts to ensure Sunni participation in the parliamentary elections held in Iraq in 2005.

The second approach envisaged the systematic and consistent expansion of Türkiye's foreign policy across multiple regions of the world. In this context, particular attention was paid to ensuring that Türkiye's policy toward the Middle East did not conflict with its policies toward Central Asia, Africa, or the Balkan Peninsula. At the same time, Türkiye sought to establish active cooperation with neighboring states such as Iraq, Greece, the Russian Federation, and Syria.

The third approach was based on a distinctive diplomatic framework that facilitated the widespread application of Türkiye's "soft power" policy across the region. Although Türkiye remains one of the states possessing substantial military capabilities amid large-scale threats, it has generally refrained from employing coercive measures against other states. Instead, cooperation in the social and economic spheres has constituted the foundation of Türkiye's foreign policy.

On the basis of these approaches, five key principles guiding Türkiye's foreign policy activity were formulated. The first principle is grounded in maintaining a balance between security and democracy, whereby the legitimacy of any political regime is determined by its ability to ensure the security and freedoms of its citizens. The second principle is based on the "zero problems with neighbors" policy, which emphasizes that Türkiye's relations with neighboring states are constructed on economic foundations. The third principle focuses on proactive peace diplomacy, aiming to take swift preventive measures before conflicts emerge, escalate, and become deeply entrenched. The fourth principle is rooted in a multi-vector foreign policy approach, under which Türkiye's relations with major powers are not based on rivalry. For instance, strategic relations with the United States are maintained within the framework of

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bilateral cooperation and NATO membership. The fifth principle is embodied in the concept of "rhythmic diplomacy," whose primary objective is to enhance Türkiye's status as a significant actor in the international arena by increasing its active participation in international organizations addressing issues of global importance.

The role of the so-called "Red Book" is indispensable in examining the essence of Türkiye's security strategy, as it outlines the country's approaches toward the principal sources of threat. A noteworthy aspect of this issue is that, under existing conditions, the role of the military in state governance has gained particular prominence, while the development of the defense industry has become a top priority. The "Red Book" provides detailed information on the driving forces behind Türkiye's security strategy. According to the document, reforms in defense-related approaches have been driven by changes in the political environment at the national, regional, and international levels.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Türkiye has undertaken extensive and distinctive reforms in the fields of security and defense with the aim of presenting itself as an independent and powerful actor in the security domain and of expanding its sphere of influence. In this context, Türkiye has primarily sought to address national security threats by effectively utilizing its achievements in the national defense sector and by conducting unilateral military operations through the adoption of a compulsory military posture**.**

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