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# Turkey's view on NATO through the scope of strategic culture theories (2009-2016)

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GeT MA Working Paper Series  
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# Turkey's view on NATO through the scope of strategic culture theories (2009-2016)

CESAR VINKEN

Die Arbeit untersucht und erklärt mithilfe der Strategic Culture Theory, einer konstruktivistischen Annäherung an Sicherheitsstudien, die Sichtweise der Türkei auf die eigene NATO-Mitgliedschaft. Eine strategische Kultur besteht aus einer Mischung von Narrativen, die die Vorstellungen eines Landes von Sicherheit beeinflussen und wiederum die Grundlage für seine außenpolitischen Entscheidungen bilden. Im Falle der Türkei lässt sich feststellen, dass seit den 1980er Jahren ein alternatives Narrativ der 'Regionalmacht' zu dem während der längsten Phase des 20. Jahrhunderts gültigen Narrativ der 'nationalen Einheit' an Bedeutung gewinnt. Die Jahre, in denen Ahmet Davutoğlu Außen- und Premierminister war (2009-2016), markieren eine Zeitspanne, während derer das Regionalmachtsnarrativ eindeutig an Einfluss in der Strategiekultur der Türkei gewonnen hat.

In der vorliegenden Analyse wird gezeigt, dass die sich herausbildende Strategiekultur der Türkei die Art der Selbstwahrnehmung als NATO-Mitgliedsstaat und die Verhaltensweise innerhalb der Allianz verändert. Während Strategic Culture Theories die Zukunft der türkischen Außenpolitik nicht vorhersagen können, bieten sie doch eine Bandbreite möglicher erwartbarer Verhaltensweisen an. Die Arbeit veranschaulicht diese Verhaltensweisen und ihre Funktionen im Hinblick auf Diskurse und Handlungen der Türkei in Beziehung zur Einmischung der NATO in Konflikte in Libyen, der Ukraine und Syrien während der Davutoğlu-Jahre.

**Stichworte:** Strategiekultur, Außenpolitik der Türkei, NATO, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Neo-Ottomanismus

This analysis examines and explains the way in which Turkey views its own NATO membership by making use of strategic culture theory, a constructivist approach to security studies. A strategic culture consists of a mixture of narratives that shape a country's ideas on security which, in turn, form the basis for its foreign policy decision making. In the case of Turkey, it is pointed out that while its strategic culture has during most of the 20th century been dominated by a 'national unity' narrative, an alternative 'regional power' narrative has been gaining prominence since the 1980s. The years of Ahmet Davutoğlu as foreign and prime minister (2009-2016) mark a period during which the regional power narrative clearly gained influence in Turkey's strategic culture.

In this analysis it will be shown that Turkey's evolving strategic culture is changing the way it sees itself as NATO member and the way it behaves within the alliance. While strategic culture theories cannot predict the future of Turkish foreign policy, it can offer us a certain range of probable behaviour. How this works exactly, is illustrated by looking at Turkey's discourse and actions in relation to NATO's involvement in conflicts in Libya, Ukraine and Syria during the Davutoğlu years.

**Keywords:** Strategic culture, Turkish foreign policy, NATO, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Neo-Ottomanism

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# 1. Introduction

In 2009 Turkey's foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu declared: "Turkey is no longer a country that reacts to crises, but one that senses crises before they materialize, that can intervene in them effectively, and that creates order around itself."<sup>1</sup> These are words that fit the self-confidence of Turkey about its position in the world, less than a century after it arose from the collapsed remnants of the Ottoman Empire.

On 24 November 2015 Turkey shot down a Russian military plane at the Syrian border, which was presumably violating Turkish airspace. As Turkey is part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), such an action does not stand on itself. Article 5 of the alliance's North Atlantic Treaty considers an attack against any of the members an attack against all, and requires therefore other member states to come to the aid of the assaulted member.<sup>2</sup> Although Turkey did not call upon this article, the Russian-Turkish incident contained all the ingredients to further deteriorate the relations between Russia and NATO. Officials quickly tried to prevent escalation. Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn of Luxembourg said, "NATO cannot allow itself to be pulled into a military escalation with Russia as a result of the recent tensions between Russia and Turkey"<sup>3</sup>, while NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg stated "I think I've expressed very clearly that we are calling for calm and de-escalation."<sup>4</sup>

Turkey's risky assertiveness is interesting, as it presents us the consequence of the confidence we encountered in the quotation from Davutoğlu: an internationally assertive Turkey might fulfil a very different role in NATO than it did in the days of the Cold War. This is a relevant topic, as not only Turkey has been changing, but NATO entered a new era as well. In this thesis we will examine how the two will get along together.

Turkey has been part of NATO since 1952, when the alliance had been in existence for only a few years. Even though Turkey has been trying to become part of the European

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1 Cyprus Press and Information Office 'Turkish Mass Media Bulletin 1-4/05/2009; Davutoglu explains the foreign policy to be followed after taking over from Babacan'. For the sake of readability web links will not be displayed in the footnotes, but can all be found in the bibliography section.

2 NATO, 'The North Atlantic Treaty', 1949.

3 'Putin vs. Erdogan: NATO Concerned over Possible Russia-Turkey Hostilities', Der Spiegel, 19 February 2016.

4 Ibidem.

Union (EU) for almost as long, it has in a military sense been part of the Western bloc for over sixty years. During the Cold War the conflict between the Western world and the communist world strongly shaped Turkey's security policies and put the country geopolitically in the west.

After the end of the Cold War and the implosion of the Soviet Union, many questioned what would remain of NATO.<sup>5</sup> Although the alliance expanded into Central and Eastern Europe and also remained military active, for instance in Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001-2014), NATO struggled to find and defend a *raison d'être*.<sup>6</sup> In recent years however, geopolitics in a changed, multipolar world, from the turmoil in the Middle East to the increasing assertiveness of Putin's Russia, has pressured NATO to reinvent itself. With (military) security back on the agenda in its European member states, NATO is trying to form an answer to the question how it can and should coherently act in this new reality.

In this re-energised NATO the role of Turkey is of great importance, as it holds a special strategic position as the alliance's easternmost nation. Because of this geographical characteristic, Turkey cannot but being involved in many of the recent pressing security issues. It is neighbouring war struck Syria and is very close to the fighting efforts against Daesh (also known as ISIL or ISIS)<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, as a host and transit for millions of refugees, Turkey has a part to play in this crisis as well, which is having many political and security implications across NATO countries. At the Russian stage too, particularly tense since the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Turkey has been involved, especially after the plane shooting incident which we mentioned earlier.

With Turkey on the foreground in NATO matters, it is relevant to be able to clearly understand the country's NATO membership. By analysing the development of the relation between the two actors I will seek to fill a gap in the literature, as surprisingly little has been written about Turkey and NATO since the end of the Cold War. Although the academic literature has regularly examined Turkey's (security) relations with the

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5 Celeste A. Wallander, 'Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War', *International Organization*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2000), 705-35; Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1993), 44-79.

6 Andrew T. Wolff, 'The Structural and Political Crisis of NATO Transformation', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2009), 476-92.

7 While the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is known under several names, I will refer to it as Daesh, which is the name used in the Arab world, by the Turkish government as well as NATO member states such as France and the UK.

EU or the US, or its alignment to the idea of European defence, the analysis of its position in NATO has been rather neglected. Of the academic work that we do find on the topic, a large part of the studies from the 2000s examined the position of Turkey in NATO in the context of EU-NATO relations. The gradual establishment of the EU as international actor raised questions on what would happen to NATO as umbrella for European defence. Scholars such as Pinar Bilgin, Şeyda Hanbay, Graeme Herd, Ishan Kızıltan and Antonio Missiroli contemplated on where Turkey would fit in with these developments.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, scholars have started to focus on the expanding range of Turkey's foreign policy and its consequences for Turkey's relationship with NATO. Gülnur Aybet argued that this relationship has especially transformed from 2007 onwards, as NATO became more technocratic and Turkey more pro-active. She expected that both actors would be able to adjust to a new relationship in which Turkey could take up a more driving role.<sup>9</sup> According to Serhat Güvenç and S. Özel's assessment from 2012,

Turkey has increasingly been including NATO in its security calculations, while it at the same time consolidated its position and agenda-setting capabilities within the alliance. Although the authors noted that the transformation process in the Turkey-NATO relationship was marked by some notably independent behaviour by Turkey during 2007-2010 they conclude that "after two decades of deepening ambivalence towards the Atlantic Alliance and its strategic orientation, Turkey made [especially from 2010 onwards] its final choice for the relevant future to stay in the Western security community."<sup>10</sup> Tarık Oğuzlu published several articles on the topic, which rather contradict that conclusion. He observed that 'interest' has replaced 'identity' as source of Turkey's commitment to the alliance. Therefore, Turkey's cooperation with NATO will

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8 Pinar Bilgin, 'The "Peculiarity" of Turkey's Position on EU-NATO Military/Security Cooperation: A Rejoinder to Missiroli', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2003), 345-49; Antonio Missiroli, 'EU-NATO Cooperation in Crisis Management: No Turkish Delight for ESDP', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2002), 9-26; Graeme P. Herd, 'EU-Turkey Clashing Political and Strategic Cultures as Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Accession?', in *Perceptions and Misperceptions in the EU and Turkey - Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Accession.*, ed. by Peter Volten, Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) Harmonie Paper 23 (Groningen, 2009), pp. 47-68; Ishan Kızıltan, 'Improving the NATO-EU Partnership: A Turkish Perspective', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 2008, 33-46; Şeyda Hanbay, 'Involvement of Non-Eu European Nato Members in CSDP: The Turkish Case', *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, 2010, 1-26.

9 Gülnur Aybet, 'The Evolution of NATO's Three Phases and Turkey's Transatlantic Relationship', *Perceptions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2012), 19-36 (pp. 34-35).

10 Serhat Güvenç and S. Özel, 'NATO and Turkey in the Post-Cold War World: Between Abandonment and Entrapment.', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2012), 533-53 (p. 551).

increasingly depend on the extent to which the alliance is still relevant to Turkey's capabilities to reach its own foreign policy goals.<sup>11</sup>

Although Oğuzlu underlined that the ruling the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has repeatedly stressed that Turkey's membership to NATO (and its EU accession process) have no alternatives,<sup>12</sup> his findings do suggest that differing perceptions of interests between Turkey and NATO could jeopardise relations, because of the changed nature of Turkey's commitment to NATO. It seems therefore worthwhile to examine how in recent years Turkey's focus on its own direct foreign policy interests have held up with its membership in NATO.

Although I follow Oğuzlu's basic assessment of change in Turkey's approach to NATO, I would argue that his labelling of an 'interest' and an 'identity' approach is inaccurate as it suggests that the latter would *not* be an attempt to follow Turkey's interests. Jutta Weldes wrote on interest formulation that "determining what the particular situation faced by a state is, what if any threat a state faces, and what the 'correct' national interest with respect to that situation or threat is, always requires interpretation."<sup>13</sup> This means that both the approaches Oğuzlu described tried to follow Turkey's national interest, albeit in a different interpretation of what the national interest is.<sup>14</sup>

The theoretical framework which I will use in this thesis will be suitable to overcome this structural problem on national interests. I will set about my analysis of the change in Turkey's relationship with NATO with the help of theories on strategic culture. This constructivist approach to security will help us to examine the topic by taking into account the structures underlying Turkey's changing ideas on security. Using strategic culture as a framework will allow us to observe how Turkey's possibilities for policy making are conditioned on the basis of longer term path dependency. It will enable us to describe the way Turkey perceives itself in terms of security, which, in turn, can explain its behaviour as a NATO member.

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11 Tarık Oğuzlu, 'Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO: From Identity to Interests', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2012), 153–64; Tarık Oğuzlu, 'NATO ve Türkiye: Dönüşen İttifakın Sorgulayan Üyesi', *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 9, No. 34 (2012), 99–124; Tarık Oğuzlu, 'Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey's Approach Within NATO Tell Us?', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 14, No 4 (2013), 774–96.

12 Oğuzlu, 'Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status', p. 791.

13 Jutta Weldes, 'Constructing National Interests', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1997), 193–237 (p. 279).

14 Weldes, 'Constructing National Interests', p. 276. Weldes called this "the national interest as social construction". What Oğuzlu described as an interest based approach to NATO can be seen as a formulation of the national interest which focuses on ways to directly strengthen Turkey's strategic position as a regional power. See: paragraph 3.2.



With the gained insights on Turkey's strategic culture we will look at several recent cases involving NATO and Turkey to study how Turkey's sometimes wayward behaviour and its formal commitment to the alliance create contradictions. The research question of this thesis will be: *how have changes in Turkey's general strategic culture manifested themselves in regards to Turkey's attitudes towards its NATO membership during 2009-2016?* The chosen timeframe reflects the years Davutoğlu was foreign minister (2009-2014) and prime minister (2014-2016), including the launch of his 'zero problems with neighbours' policy in 2010. Turkey's assertiveness in international politics, which Davutoğlu represents, grew markedly during this period, while the rate of change in Turkey's strategic culture accelerated. Apart from the academic literature on these topics, I will rely on news sources and documents and statements by Turkish officials to spot discrepancies between the line NATO is following and the Turkey's behaviour, driven by its strategic culture.

The thesis will be structured in the following way: paragraph 2 will be dedicated to the concept of strategic culture, its uses, its weaknesses and some ongoing debates. In paragraph 3 we will examine what strategic culture means in the case of Turkey by establishing and tracing Turkey's 'national unity narrative' and its 'regional power narrative'. Once we understand the development of Turkey's strategic culture, we will in paragraph 4 turn to its NATO membership. Turkey's accession to the alliance and its position during and after the Cold War will all be contextualised within its strategic culture. An important observation will be that while Turkey's changing strategic culture prompted instances of assertive behaviour on the international stage, as seen in paragraph 3, formally its commitment to NATO still relies considerably on its older conceptions of security. This will come apparent by studying Turkey's reaction to NATO's new Strategic Concept in 2010 and to the 60th anniversary of its NATO membership in 2012. Paragraph 5 will explore three cases in order to show how Turkey's alignment to NATO is under pressure from the tendencies of its increasingly independent foreign policy. We will look subsequently at the cases of the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, Turkey's reaction to the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 and NATO's and Turkey's attitudes towards the Syrian Kurdish rebels in the Syrian Civil War. Finally, we will discuss the consequences of our findings for Turkey's NATO membership in the concluding paragraph.

## 2. On Strategic Culture

### 2.1 What is strategic culture?

In the last decades of the Cold War the dominant (neo)realist views on international relations were increasingly challenged by theorists who were focusing on matters such as identity, culture, language etc. In the 1990s this direction in International Relations became well known as constructivism, a name invented by Nicholas Onuf in 1989.<sup>15</sup> However, the rise of strategic culture as a school of thought in security studies started slightly earlier, in the late 1970s, before constructivism had gathered broad following through scholars such as Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein.<sup>16</sup> Like constructivists, the strategic culture theorists challenged realism's characterisation of actors as 'black boxes', identical entities whose behaviour is determined by the constraints of the system they are manoeuvring in.

According to strategic culture theorists the behaviour of a security actor is led by its *view* of security. Notice here that strategic culture theorists, like constructivists, regard reality as a social construction, in which the behaviour of an actor is formed by its particular view of reality. This reality builds on the early or formative experiences of a state, and is to some degree influenced by the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites.<sup>17</sup> The particular construction of an actor's view on security then, its *strategic culture*, encompasses different questions such as "when is it appropriate to use force?" or "what is the preferred context to solve security issues: alone or multilateral?". The actor's point of view in these issues helps to explain its perception of threats, its policies etc. Of course, because different actors have different strategic cultures their interaction can by no means be calculated in a (neo-)realist way, with rationally acting, undifferentiated units.

The definition of strategic culture that I shall follow in this thesis is the one formulated by Kerry Longhurst. According to Longhurst strategic culture is "a distinctive body of beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding the use of force, which are held by a collective and arise gradually over time, through a unique protracted historical process.

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making* (Columbia, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, 'The Test of Strategic Culture: Germany, Pacifism and Pre-Emptive Strikes', *SAGE Publications*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2005), 339–59 (p. 341).

<sup>17</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Thinking about Strategic Culture', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1995), 32–64 (p. 34).

A strategic culture is persistent over time, tending to outlast the era of its original conception. It is not a permanent or static feature. Rather, a strategic culture is shaped by formative experiences and can alter, either fundamentally or piecemeal, at critical junctures in that collective's experiences."<sup>18</sup> I will discuss some of the aspects of her definition below, and will also elaborate on the history of strategic culture and its advantages and disadvantages.

The first to come up with the term strategic culture was Jack Snyder, in his 1977 study on the Soviet Union's nuclear weapon strategy. As American realists failed to explain the behaviour of the Soviets with generalised game theory, Snyder's alternative approach showed that there was a Soviet strategy which was influenced by "a number of factors unique to the Soviet historical experience"<sup>19</sup>. He stressed that the Soviet leaders should not be looked upon as "generic strategists who happen to be playing for the Red team, but as politicians and bureaucrats who have developed and been socialized into a strategic culture that is in many ways unique."<sup>20</sup> This exactly shows how a strategic culture approach can be valuable, and how over the last decades scientists such as Colin Gray and David Jones could make use of it.

Another example of the successful use of strategic culture is Sophia Becker's study on German security politics after its reunification in 1990. Whereas neorealists such as John Mearsheimer suggested that a unified Germany would bring back the old balance of power politics to Europe<sup>21</sup>, Germany's strategic culture, now firmly cemented in anti-militarism, multilateralism and an aversion to leadership, defied these expectations. Again, strategic culture was able to explain something which was a puzzling outcome for neorealist theory.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the concept of strategic culture has its weaknesses as well. Colin Gray pointed out that although strategic culture is strong at spotting and explaining tendencies after an event, it fails to predict behaviour (as opposite to game theory or

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18 Kerry Longhurst, *Germany and the Use of Force* (Manchester, 2004), p. 200.

19 Jack L. Snyder, 'The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations', 1977, 1-41 (pp. 8-9).

20 Snyder, p. 4.

21 John T. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1990), 5-56.

22 Sophia Becker, 'Germany and War: Understanding Strategic Culture under the Merkel Government', *Paris Papers*, No. 9 (2013), 1-80. See also: John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy after Unification* (Redwood City, 1998).

rational choice theory). Moreover, there is a risk to use an actor's strategic culture not as a framework for behaviour, but to see it as too deterministic, explaining anything and everything.<sup>23</sup>

Scholars have tried to counter this last point by stating that strategic culture is not mechanically deterministic, but that it rather creates tendencies to a particular strategic behaviour. Insights in an actor's strategic culture can thus rule out certain types of behaviour as very unlikely and others as possible and this way "map a corridor of 'normal' and 'probable' behaviour of states" which can be integrated into more comprehensive analyses of strategic choice.<sup>24</sup> Johnston observed that in that case the literature insufficiently explains through what logic the status or probability of these tendencies is decided.<sup>25</sup>

He is right about this: when assigning different levels of probability to behaviours for an actor, it is up to researchers to categorise these behaviours on the basis of criteria which are not standardised and which still fully depend on the creativity of the scholar. This is not to say that this stands in the way of good research; however, the lack of method makes it hard to compare studies and fully estimate the objective value of claims about strategic culture. For the time being the debates on many aspects of strategic culture continue.

## 2.2 The relation between strategic culture and behaviour

One of the prominent strategic culture debates is about the relation between culture and behaviour. For first generation scholars such as Colin Gray the two are inseparable, as the culture functions as context for the behaviour. This was later challenged by Alistair Johnston, who sought to formulate a falsifiable theory of strategic culture. Johnston noted that if behaviour is an expression of the culture, there is no longer anything valuable to say about strategic culture: everything can be explained by and brought back to culture, which in itself does not explain anything. One can, for example, explain away a defensive posture of a militarily weak European

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23 Longhurst, p. 9; Alan Bloomfield, 'Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2012), 437–61 (p. 441).

24 Christoph O. Meyer, 'Convergence Towards a European Strategic Culture? A Constructivist Framework for Explaining Changing Norms', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2005), 523–49 (p. 8).

25 Johnston, p. 38.

Union and a more offensive, strong United States, by producing a near-mystical connection under the label of strategic culture. According to Johnston, if strategic culture becomes an all-encompassing concept, it cannot be used as an independent variable on strategic behaviour and cannot lead to meaningful research.<sup>26</sup>

Although Johnston was correct when he pointed out that falsification is being hindered by the indivisibility of culture and behaviour, I see this as an inevitability. Gray convincingly argued that behaviour cannot be seen free from the influences under which it comes into existence.

“Everything a security community does, if not a manifestation of strategic culture, is at least an example of behaviour effected by culturally shaped, or encultured, people, organisations, procedures and weapons. [...] Although each dimension of strategy can be discussed in isolation, all dimensions function synergistically to constitute the whole. [...] Even when a security community is performing missions that traditionally it has not much favoured, if not actually alien, it *must* behave in a culturally shaped manner.”<sup>27</sup>

The debate between Gray and Johnston has never been solved and was more recently picked up again by Alan Bloomfield. Bloomfield attacked the work of Carnes Lord, who is regarded, like Gray, as a strategic culture scholar of the first generation. Bloomfield noted that Lord in his work, confusingly, first found the United States' strategic culture an outcome of “all things strategic”, while later describing it is as a *cause* of strategic policy and behaviour. Bloomfield thus concluded that Lord failed “to untangle the lines of causation” between his variables. This way strategic culture had become a tautology, being both cause and effect.<sup>28</sup>

I would argue, however, that the relation between strategic culture and many of the things strategic is one of mutual influence. It is true that strategic culture is formed by strategic factors, but this in turn causes behaviour by actors that shapes the strategic variables by which it was first formed. The feedback loop this creates is sometimes neglected by scholars, which overly or solely focus on strategic culture as an outcome.

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26 Toje Asle, ‘Strategic Culture as an Analytical Tool History, Capabilities, Geopolitics and Values: The EU Example’, No. 14 (2009), 3–23 (p. 7).

27 Collin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 132–35.

28 Bloomfield, pp. 439–41.

In this thesis I will try to consider both the elements that formed a strategic culture *and* their consequential behaviour, and especially the dialogue between the culture and the behaviour.

The issue Bloomfield raised, points basically at the same problem Gray and Johnston argued about. The inability to falsify strategic culture and to describe how it relates to strategic actors is an important unresolved issue, that will keep dividing strategic culture scholars. However, there are more questions to ask when dealing with strategic culture and trying to characterise it.

### 2.3 Measuring strategic culture

Once a strategic culture is defined, it is important to keep in mind that it is not static. Strategic cultures change, causing security actors to opt for different solutions in different points in time. The difficulty is how to determine the process that drives change in strategic culture. Scholars have not yet decided on a standard procedure to map this and have come up with different methods.

Longhurst, for example, identifies two ways in which strategic culture can change: fine-tuning and fundamental change. The first form manifests itself as behaviour of a security actor reacting to external or internal events which challenge the security culture as it is established at that moment. Challenges press the actor to fine-tune security policies in such a way that its 'core values' suit the new situation. Fundamental change, on the other hand, is a rarely occurring, radical change in security culture which can take place when a severe or traumatic event obsoletes the existing strategic culture. The subsequent quick acceptance of new core beliefs, can in a short period of time lead to the establishment of fundamentally new practices and policies.<sup>29</sup>

Alternatively, the workings of strategic culture can be approached in terms of long and short-term changes. This is not the same as Longhurst's method, for she was rather looking at the pervasiveness of changes in strategic culture (gradual change by slight fine-tuning or thorough change through milestone events). Thus, for example, the process of change in strategic culture can be described with a focus on slow

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<sup>29</sup> Longhurst, p. 18.

movements such as demographic changes or long term economic tendencies.<sup>30</sup> Such approaches remind of Fernand Braudel's view of history as a series of stacked time layers. "Event history" happens only within the structures of the long-term frame of the *longue durée*.<sup>31</sup> Although there are different factors to highlight in these time structure views on strategic culture, they all have in common that they stress the stern resistance of strategic culture against change. In doing so they play down the power of agency in strategic culture, as they suggest actors have a limited ability to try to establish changes in strategic culture as they will always to some extent have to rely on the (external) movements of the larger structures.

The issue of agency comes with its own problems. Apart from the question how much strategic culture is externally driven (by external processes or actions of other actors), it is not clear *who* is responsible for the formation of a strategic culture. Although it seems generally accepted that strategic culture is "an aggregate level of the most influential voices in terms of attitudes and behaviours"<sup>32</sup>, and thus consists of some interplay between elites, its precise realisation is an unclear process. Sometimes scholars also try to include other factors such as the role of the media and mass movements into the mixture.<sup>33</sup>

Bloomfield advocates the use of "strategic cognitive schemas", or subcultures, for the analysis for strategic culture. According to him an emphasis on the subcultures, which coexist and compete for influence, would clarify many current problems about the interpretation of strategic cultures. Changes in what strategic subculture is dominant could explain changes in strategic policies of state actors.<sup>34</sup> This is an important aspect to take into consideration - also in the Turkish case, which has a strong ideological divide between the ruling Islamist AKP and the strongly secular Kemalists.

However, I would contest the idea suggested by Bloomberg that a state's security policy is fully dictated by the subculture that is dominating the strategic culture. The

30 For example: Jeannie L. Johnson, 'Strategic Culture: Refining the Theoretical Construct', *Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum*, 2006, p. 25; Rodney W. Jones, 'India's Strategic Culture', *Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum*, 2006, p. 6; Thomas Gomart, 'Russia Alone Forever? The Kremlin's Strategic Solitude', *Politique Étrangère*, 2008, 23-33.

31 Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La Longue Durée', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Vol. 13, No 4 (1958), 725-53.

32 Asle, p. 4.

33 Meyer, pp. 22-23, 27.

34 Bloomfield, pp. 451-56.

way the dominant subculture manifests itself and which of its characteristics are highlighted should be related to the subcultures it is competing with. It is not as simple as saying a state is from that period to that period 'possessed' by one subculture, while the next is "waiting in the wings"<sup>35</sup>, ready to take over. Rather, a dominant subculture might be reacting against of being influenced by other subcultures. It might anticipate on its competitors by 'lending' certain characteristics, or it might be highlighting attributes especially contrasting with the preferences of its competitors. This in turn might move the state's strategic culture in one or another direction. Therefore the interplay between the subcultures and the way they ultimately reflect on the strategic culture should not be neglected.

The analysis of subcultures is a complicated matter. Although one subculture can be dominant, it is hard to nail down what groups or what actors are part of this subculture and are driving it, beyond the obvious leading party officials. In the case of the AKP single-party government, for example, we could confidently include the party's local officials and members and the government aligned press as part of the subculture. But as we draw the circle broader, including NGOs with ties to the government or the civil servant apparatus, it becomes increasingly precarious to understand the mechanics of the AKP government as dominant subculture. These actors, which stand further from the subcultures elite, influence the workings of the subculture through indirect processes. The composition of the AKP subculture forms a worthy topic for analysis in itself, from which I unfortunately will have to refrain. In this thesis I will therefore have to refer to the AKP elite without further investigation of subculture mechanics. Likewise, for the sake of attainability, I will in paragraph 3 on Turkey's strategic culture not get into a detailed account of all the Turkish governments and their specific subcultures and counter-cultures. Instead, a general outline of the developments in Turkey's strategic culture will have to do. The later paragraphs will focus on the AKP subculture, for I regard it as vastly influential in Turkey's contemporary strategic culture. Additionally there will be references to the Kemalist subculture, which forms an important opposition force.

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<sup>35</sup> Bloomfield, p. 452.



The way I will be handling the characteristics which a strategic culture consists of, is by referring to 'narratives'. Margaret Somers explained that narratives can present different versions of the past, the present or the future of a social group to depict a coherent version of what a group is. These narratives have a strong forming influence on social relations between individuals and in constructing social organisations. Eventually they can shape social life itself.<sup>36</sup>

In the next chapter I will present two narratives which give two very opposite interpretations of security. Different subcultures can adopt these narratives, or parts of them and to varying degrees. Although not usual in strategic culture analysis, I regard it necessary to add this extra layer on top of the previously described contest of subcultures: different subcultures can by times borrow from the same narratives, sharing certain beliefs with some subcultures, while differing on other points. Moreover, we can point out in this way that subcultures, like global strategic culture, are not static either: the importance of certain narratives within subcultures can grow and diminish over time.

Figure 1. depicts how the strategic culture mechanism works. Different subcultures hold different ideas on security. The beliefs of a subgroup is a particular composition of narratives, which have different degrees of influence. The country's strategic culture is shaped by the subgroups, one of which might be dominant. The strategic culture, then, provides a certain range of possible behaviours which we can expect from a country.

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<sup>36</sup> Margaret R. Somers, 'The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (1994), 605-49.

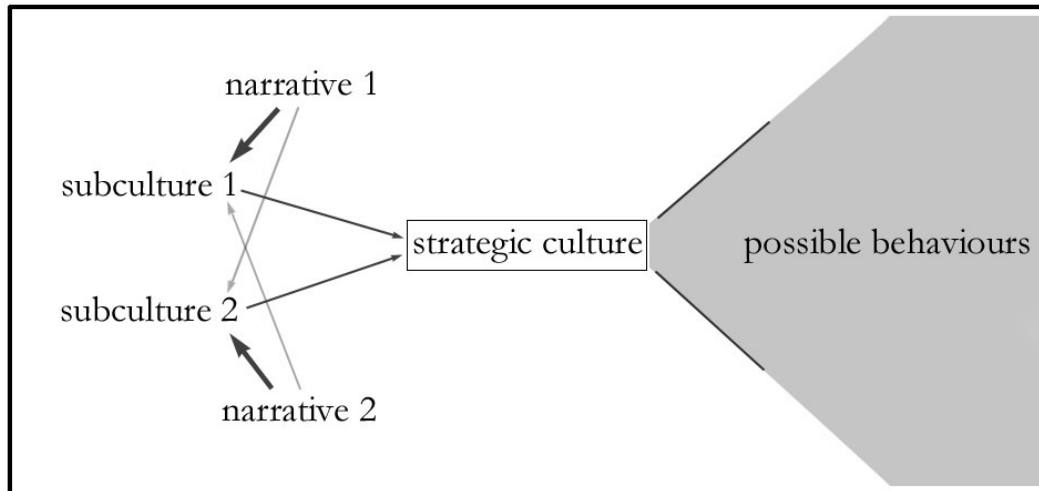


Figure 1. How strategic culture, subcultures and narratives relate (figure by author)

### 3. Turkey and Strategic Culture

Now we have studied the theory of strategic culture, let us look at the case of Turkey. As we examined in the previous paragraph, strategic culture is an amalgam of the preferences of different groups that possess power in Turkey, where any dominant group will be especially conclusive. While the groups can refer to different narratives, constructions of the world which contain a set of preferences, they might never fully align with the 'ideal type' version of the narrative. In our discussion of Turkey I will bring forward two different narratives.

We will first see how Atatürk's idea of "peace at home and peace in the world" connected the ideas of national state security at the domestic front with Turkey's foreign policy behaviour through the national unity narrative. We will then see how the strategic culture under this national unity narrative, which was held up by the Kemalists (those inspired by Kemal Atatürk), has increasingly been challenged by a narrative that presents Turkey as an assertive regional power. Especially under the rule of the AKP, which came into power in 2002, this narrative gained strength. Once we understand this shift in strategic culture we can see how this reflected on Turkey's role in NATO.

### 3.1 National unity narrative

The Ottoman defeat in the First World War, the collapse of the empire and the subsequent establishment of the Kemalist Turkish state led to a sudden change of course for Turkey's strategic culture. It was a rare instance of fundamental change, as we saw described by Longhurst, in which Turkey's core values were reshaped. The new republic opted for a strong state and a weak civil society<sup>37</sup>, and composed a strategic culture which was obsessed with the territorial integrity of the state and which followed what I will call the national unity narrative.

An important determinant for this was the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), in which Western powers partitioned the lands of the Ottoman Empire. The treaty caused a deep suspicion towards the intentions of foreign powers about Turkey up to the point that it has been described by scholars as the Sèvres Syndrome. Sèvres fuelled a narrative among the Turkish elites that foreign powers were trying to undermine Turkey and were tirelessly attempting to further interfere with its domestic politics through aggregating internal (ethnic) conflicts. In fact, causes of Turkey's internal problems were often sought and found in external factors, such as plotting foreign countries.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore Sèvres is of great importance to understand Turkey's strategic culture. The focus on national unity and territorial integrity kept a firm control on any possible domestic disturbances. In the early years of the republic several Kurdish rebellions were harshly suppressed. In addition, the Kemalists continuously tried to curb what they perceived as political extremism from both the communist and socialist Left and the religious Right. The sceptic attitude towards Western powers stemming from Sèvres is something that we will encounter later in the context of Turkey's NATO membership as well. Thus Sèvres links the Kemalist strong state with Turkey's foreign policy behaviour and general strategic culture.<sup>39</sup>

Another characteristic of the national unity narrative which was dominating Turkey's strategic culture in this phase was a reluctance to get involved in the conflicts of others. We can trace a long period in which Turkey tried to stay unaligned, as was the

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37 Metin Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey* (Beverly, 1985), p. 16.

38 Dorothee Schmid, 'Turkey: The Sèvres Syndrome, or the Endless War', *Franco-Turkish Paper*, No. 13 (2015), pp. 10–11.

39 Philip Robins, *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (Seattle, 2003), p. 109.

case in the Second World War, and during which it largely lacked foreign policy initiatives. There are some notable exceptions to this, such as the Baghdad Pact of 1955 and the invasion of Cyprus in 1974.<sup>40</sup> And of course Turkey was as a member of NATO involved in the Cold War in general. We will see, however, that it had several reasons to join the Western camp. Meanwhile, other regions, especially the Middle East, were almost neglected for decades. After being in a semi-constant state of war from the first years of the 20th century until the Liberation War in 1923, Turkey's strategic culture rarely produced appetite for grand foreign endeavours.

### 3.2 Regional power narrative

Against the national state security narrative we can formulate a strategic culture based on what I will call the regional power narrative. The narrative presents Turkey as a potential regional powerhouse, which ought to play a more assertive role in international politics, especially in its neighbourhood. The regional power narrative is closely connected to Turkey's neo-Ottoman overtures, but not necessarily the same. In order to make a strong case for Turkey's necessity to play a regional role, a period is sought and found in Turkish history and put in the narrative. Where the regional power narrative works for Turkey by using the Ottoman past, other countries could make their own variation of the same principle. It would be like Spain building ambitions based on its imperial past, or Hungary by reflecting on the old Kingdom of Hungary.

Thus in my view neo-Ottomanism is a tool for this particular regional power narrative. However, neo-Ottomanism comes with its own particularities, such as its multinational outlook and its appreciation of Islam as a binding feature. Because of this it was the Ottoman past that was attractive for the AKP and the political tide of parties based on the tradition of Islamism, and not a regional power narrative based on, for instance, pan-Turkism or the Byzantine past. Still, Turkey's activities, from deepening its ties with South America<sup>41</sup> to expanding strategic cooperation with China<sup>42</sup>, should rather be viewed as part of its quest to rise on the international stage, than having to do with Ottoman peculiarities. I therefore chose to name the narrative a 'regional power'

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40 The Cyprus conflict is somewhat different because it involved the Turkish community on the island state. It was therefore depicted as a national cause and defended by Turkey so fiercely that it did not waver in the face of economic sanctions by its own allies such as the United States.

41 'President Erdoğan Visits South America, Hails Stronger Trade Ties', The Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Investment Support and Promotion Agency, 11 February 2016.

42 'China, Turkey Upgrade Ties to Strategic Cooperative Relationship during Wen's Visit', Xinhua News, 9 October 2010.

narrative, in which neo-Ottomanism is used as a tool. Let us now look at neo-Ottomanism, and at exactly how the argument for regional power is fuelled.

A central figure in neo-Ottomanism (*yeni Osmanlılık*), whose words opened this thesis and whom we recurrently will encounter, is Ahmet Davutoğlu. Before becoming foreign minister (2009-2014) and prime minister (2014-2016) for the AKP, Davutoğlu had already published many academic works on international relations and had advised the party during the 2000s. He can be regarded as an important constructor of Turkey's security narrative.

Davutoğlu presented his ideas most clearly in his 2001 book *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position). He used the military term 'strategic depth' to refer to the hidden strategic potential Turkey has to improve its geopolitical situation. As a country which is according to Davutoğlu part of both the Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea regions, Turkey has a special and rare 'central power' position. This geographical advantage makes it possible through strategic depth to play a leading role in many regions at the same time through the use of soft power. In the book he also stresses the importance of path dependency, which means that Turkey cannot deny its historical, Ottoman experiences for the formation of its policies.<sup>43</sup>

Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanism (a term he always rejected himself) should not be confused with the ideas advocated by Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of several Islam-oriented political parties which in a way preceded the AKP. Erbakan, who had a strong influence on Turkey's former prime-minister and current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, represented a vision in which Turkey should actively break with the West in favour of an Islamic alliance with countries such as Libya, Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia. Rather than to shift away from the West, Davutoğlu looked for a way to let the East and West form complementary parts of Turkey's outlook. This reflects his appreciation of the Ottoman past, in which the Turks were at the centre of a large multinational empire.<sup>44</sup>

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43 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001); Iohannis N. Grigoriadis, 'The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy', Hellenic Foundation for European Foreign Policy Working Paper, No. 8 (2010), pp. 4–5.

44 Ömer Taşpınar, 'Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism', Carnegie Papers, No. 10 (2008), pp. 14–15.

According to Ömer Taşpınar, neo-Ottomanism means a “willingness to come to terms with Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage at home and abroad.” Because the Ottoman heritage and Islamic religion have in this framework become important shared characteristics of Turks with other peoples (contrasting with the Kemalist narrow view on national unity), neo-Ottomanism takes up a new mindset on many issues, including security and citizenship. On citizenship Taşpınar explains:

“neo-Ottomanism sees no major threat behind Kurdish cultural rights and the expression of Kurdish national identity, as long as Kurds maintain a sense of loyalty to the Republic of Turkey. Similarly, when faced with Kurdish demands for cultural and political rights, the neo-Ottoman mindset prefers to accommodate such demands in the framework of multiculturalism and Muslim identity. In other words, unlike Kemalist hardliners who insist on assimilating the Kurds, neo-Ottomanism allows Islam to play a greater role in terms of building a sense of shared identity.”<sup>45</sup>

The stress on these commonalities is very important for Turkey's regional power narrative. By using neo-Ottomanism, strategic culture under the regional power narrative looks back at the pre-republican period and the times the Ottoman Empire was exercising far-reaching control across the region. More than just a concern with the Ottoman Empire itself, the regional power narrative comes with a general attitude that suits an empire. Fundamentally, it acknowledges Turkey's own potential to play a leading role in the region. Moreover, its pursuit of regional dominance comes with a set of characteristics that contrasts with the national security narrative. It guarantees a more outward looking strategic culture, as Turkey's active pursuit to dominate the neighbourhood as its regional power presses it for decision making that has impact on other countries.

One can argue this quest for regional power, fits in with larger trends in which new geopolitical centres of gravity challenge the unipolar, US-driven world system that has been in place since at least the end of the Cold War. Important representatives of this efforts are the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), which as emerging economic powers seek a larger role in international affairs. The idea that Turkey should play an independent, regional role fits with the emergence of a multipolar system

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45 Taşpınar, ‘Turkey’s Middle East Policies’, p. 15.

which challenges the dominance of the West in general and the US in particular.<sup>46</sup> We will see later that Turkey can in a sense be related to the BRIC countries because of this.

Turkey's self-confidence in foreign policy can be traced further back to the 1980s, when president Turgut Özal engaged in initiatives that opened up economic ties with several (Middle-Eastern) countries, as part of a broader process of liberal economic reforms.<sup>47</sup> Under the AKP government, however, it is much more clearly present, as is shown by Turkey's many and diverse foreign policy initiatives. Since the 2000s we have seen many initiatives underlining Turkey's new belief it can and should expand its international influence. Apart from its zero problems policy in the Middle East and its engagement with Russia (both of which we will discuss below), the last decades have seen periods of effort to solve problems with neighbours Armenia, Cyprus and Greece.

Apart from the *confidence* to make Turkey a regional power, we can find reasons in this narrative as to why it should do so. This is where neo-Ottomanism is brought in. In his writings Davutoğlu criticised Turkey's past policies under the national unity narrative. He wrote that "during the Cold War Turkey pursued a foreign policy that was resting on a military strategy that only aimed to protect its borders rather than resting on a strategy that would realize the full potential of its international position. Turkey interpreted its international position within the narrow parameters of its defence strategy."<sup>48</sup>

Instead of focussing on its territorial integrity, Davutoğlu suggested that because of historical and geographical reasons Turkey was obliged to take a regional approach in foreign matters. According to him, "historical factors force Turkey to develop a defence strategy that goes beyond the contextual influence of its current borders. It is impossible for a country like Turkey, which was founded on the historical and geopolitical basis of the Ottoman state and inherited a legacy from the Empire, to design a defence strategy that is confined to its current borders. This historical legacy

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46 Emre Erşen, 'Rise of New Centres of Power in Eurasia: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 5 (2014), 184–91.

47 Sedat Laçiner, 'Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalizm', *USAK Yearbook*, Vol. 2 (2009), 153–205.

48 Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 73. Original quotation: "Türkiye Soğuk Savaş dönemi boyunca uluslararası konumdan çok, sınırlar boyu bir güvenlik anlayışına dayalı dış politika ve askeri stratejiler oluşturmuş ve uluslararası konumu bu güvenlik anlayışının dar kapsamı içinde yorumlamaya çalışmıştır."

can generate *de facto* situations which Turkey has to step in at any moment.”<sup>49</sup> Although Davutoğlu does not illuminate what “situations” he means exactly, it is clear from his argument that the Ottoman heritage demands Turkey to play an active role in the matters of its smaller neighbours. Indeed, an important asset of the regional power narrative is the idea that it is natural for Turkey to take up this role in the region. This idea can be an important determiner for its foreign policy behaviour.

To sum up, a strategic culture under the regional power narrative approaches Turkey's security in a very different way than the national unity narrative does. National security is not confined to Turkey's own borders, but because of historical, geographical and cultural reasons, reaches across the whole region. As consequence of these ideas this strategic culture thus gives a broad space for the pursuit of regional power status, a rebalancing of policies from a western orientation towards an independent, multifaceted outlook and international activism. The regional approach is domestically linked to a different image of the Turkish nation, in which national unitarity is abandoned in favour of a more inclusive, heterogeneous approach. After all, the Ottoman Empire too existed of many ethnicities and religious groups.

### 3.3 The change from national unity narrative to regional power narrative

As we concluded previously, Turkey's security behaviour at no point corresponds fully with one of the narratives. One reason is that, as discussed earlier, a strategic culture characterised by, for example, a focus on national integrity and a lack of international assertiveness can still produce seemingly contradictory behaviour<sup>50</sup>, although these instances are expected to be rare. Another reason is that different narratives on security might be competing at the same time. Even if, for instance, the national unity narrative is dominant, counter-narratives might still influence the security behaviour of an actor. This means that at no time a strategic culture will consist of some pure version of one of the previously described narratives.

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49 Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p. 41. Original quotation: “Türkiye’yi cari uluslararası sınırların konjonktürel etkisinin ötesinde bir savunma stratejisi geliştirme zorunluluğu ile karşı karşıya bırakmaktadır. Osmanlı Devleti’nin tarihi ve jeopolitik zemininde doğmuş bulunan ve o mirası devralan Türkiye’nin savunmasını sadece sahip olduğu sınırlar içinde düşünmesi ve planlaması imkansızdır.”

50 For instance, Turkey's alliance forming initiative of the Baghdad pact in 1955.



This is important to keep in mind when examining the change in strategic culture Turkey has witnessed. At no time Turkey's strategic culture was monolithically consisting of the national unity narrative, nor does or will the regional power narrative completely replace the previous narrative. However, we can say that in the last decades the regional power narrative has become more prominent and is being propagated by the AKP government, which forms a dominant subculture in the Turkish political system. We can find this push to adjust the strategic culture widely in the discourse of the party.

We saw how Davutoğlu provided a theoretical base for an active Turkish policy in the region. The duty of Turkey to live up to its role as heir of the Ottoman Empire is put into practise with a discourse that actively promotes a positive image of the Ottoman era and the role the empire played. By calling on shared histories under the former empire (in which the Turks were of course holding a centre position, not only geographically but also politically) he suggests that it is natural for Turkey to continue its friendly (but directing) ties with its neighbours.

In regards to the Balkans, for example, growing Turkish regional influence is accompanied by Davutoğlu's message that "We have a common history and cultural depth with the Balkan countries [...] The Balkans had its golden age of peace during the Ottoman reign. This is a historical fact. Those who blame the Ottoman period for the region's economic backwardness and internecine fights are under the influence of historical prejudices and stereotypes"<sup>51</sup> We can see here how Davutoğlu paves the way for re-engagement with the region by alluding that "economic backwardness and internecine fights" could be prevented if only the Balkan countries would stay close to Turkey's harmonising influence.

In the Middle-East too, the AKP government relies on Ottoman heritage to legitimate its increased engagement with the region. Its discourse on the Arab World contrasts with that from the Early Republican period, in which the region was depicted in a negative and backward way.<sup>52</sup> The view that rebelling Arabs had betrayed the Turks in the final years of the Ottoman Empire was corrected by Erdoğan. He stated about the

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51 Altin Raxhimi, 'Davutoglu: "I'm Not a Neo-Ottoman"', *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2011.

52 Ahmet Serdar Aktürk, 'Arabs in Kemalist Turkish Historiography', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2010, 633–53 (p. 636).

Early Republican period that “Turkey's relations with the Middle East were cut with the extremely incorrect and improper slogan, “the Arabs betrayed us””.<sup>53</sup> Instead he continuously gave (historical) reasons why Turkey should engage with Arab countries. Following the regional power narrative Erdoğan contended that it is for Turkey “very natural to be in touch with Middle Eastern countries” and that “Turkey has a lot to do in the Middle East. We are aware of this responsibility. We are here for this.”<sup>54</sup>

The historical perspective is applied by other officials as well. For example, when AKP deputy Fahri Keskin talked about the trade agreement between Turkey and Yemen and the relations between the countries he said that “Yemen has a special and important place in the hearts and memories of the Turkish people. Located in the south of the Arabic Peninsula, it stayed under Ottoman rule for centuries. This period was a time of peace, stability and welfare for Yemen. Historically, Yemen was a close witness to the magnificence and power of the Ottomans as well as how it was betrayed by others.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the Yemenis have good reason to long for the Ottoman era. Moreover, the Turks Yemen is dealing with now, have a direct connection with the Ottoman relations of the past. Just as the Ottomans made a positive impression on them, the Yemenis (naturally) translocated their sympathy to contemporary Turkey.

Similarly, at the African Day in 2011 president Abdullah Gül approached the establishment of relations between Turkey and African countries from an Ottoman angle. By saying that “the Ottoman Empire always supported the African people in their struggles against the colonial powers. [...] Historical relations with North and Northeast Africa have an exclusive place in the memories of our people”<sup>56</sup>, he establishes a connection with the Ottoman Empire and in that way hints to the political significance of contemporary Turkey. As if the current Turkish Republic is no different or less significant than the empire that once (arguably) stood by the African people.

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53 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, ‘Changing Balances and Rising Importance of Turkey, Speech at USAK’, 3 February 2010.

54 ‘Turkey Ready to Take Role in Mid-East Process’, Hürriyet Daily News, 2005.

55 ‘Minutes of the Proceedings of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Fahri Keskin, 2003 Vol. 27, Session 6, 56’, Turkish Grand National Assembly. Original quotation: “Bizim milletimizin kaderinde, halkımızın zihninde, halkımızın gönlünde Yemen’in ayrı yeri ve önemi vardır. Yemen, fiziken Arap Yarımadasının güneyinde olan ve Osmanlı hâkimiyetinde yüz yıllarca kalmış bir vatan parçasıydı. Bu dönem Yemen için bir istikrar, huzur ve refah dönemi olmuştur. Tarihte ise, Osmanlının gücünün, Osmanlının ihtişamının, Osmanlının ihanete uğrayışının yakın tanığı ve şahididir Yemen.”

56 ‘African Day - President Gül Underlines Turkey’s Interest in Africa. Speech at Bilkent University.’, SeaNews Turkey, 27 May 2011.

In another example, Yaşar Büyükanıt, chief of the general staff, as well propagated indirectly Turkey's involvement in the neighbourhood through the Ottoman heritage. He said that "In the Middle East, various ethnic and religious groups lived under the reign of the Ottoman Empire. We should ask why there had not been any conflict between them for centuries"<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the following example on the Syrian crisis by Erdoğan shows how the regional power narrative is fuelled by history and how it forms a rhetorical base for assertiveness in the region. Erdoğan said: "We do not see the Syrian issue as an external affair; the Syrian question is our internal affair. We share with them a border of 850 kilometres. We have ties of kinship, history and culture. Therefore we cannot passively watch what is happening. We need to do whatever is necessary."<sup>58</sup>

All these examples provide an idea of how the AKP government puts forward a new view on security. Sometimes the earlier republican conceptions of security and international policies are directly challenged. The many efforts by AKP officials to establish a positive link between the Ottoman times, the Ottoman region and the role contemporary Turkey can play there, nudge Turkey's strategic culture in a new direction.

However, as argued before, the change in strategic culture in Turkey is not complete. Oppositional groups may share different ideas about security. For example, the oppositional Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), which received over 25% of the votes during the November 2015 parliamentary elections, holds on to Kemalist principles and additionally is opposed to neo-Ottoman thinking.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the dominant governing party's own views might be ambiguous. One can for instance point to the fact that, notwithstanding the emancipative reforms the AKP brought, groups such as the Alevi religious minority and the Kurdish ethnic minority are in legal terms still held back. This means that the thought from the early-Republican national

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57 Yaşar Büyükanıt (2008), 'Speech delivered at the 5th Symposium titled "Middle East: Ist Future, Uncertainties and Security Issues" at War College', Istanbul, 06/05/2008.

58 'Erdoğan, Davutoğlu'nu Şam'a Gönderiyor', Habertürk, 6 August 2011. Original quotation: "Çünkü biz Suriye konusunu dış sorun olarak görmüyoruz. Suriye meselesi bizim bir iç meselemizdir. Çünkü Suriye ile 850 kilometre sınırimız var. Akrabalık, tarih, kültür bağlarımız var. Dolayısıyla burada olanlar, bitenler asla bizim seyirci kalmamıza fırsat vermez. Gereğini yapmak zorundayız."

59 Serkan Demirtaş, 'AKP's Adventurist Policies Turning Turkey into an Incompetent Country in Mideast: CHP', Hürriyet Daily News, 26 June 2014.

unity narrative, which stressed (among other things) the uniformity of the Turkish nation, still endures at some level.

## 4. Turkey and NATO

We will now look at Turkey's NATO membership, from its early years and the Cold War to the recent decades and the restructuration of the alliance. We will encounter different grounds for Turkey's behaviour, sometimes based on identity, sometimes on interest. Our gained insights in Turkey's strategic culture will help us to analyse aspects of its NATO membership and recognise that the grounds for its behaviour are connected to the earlier examined security narratives.

### 4.1 Establishment of NATO and Turkish membership

How we should see NATO and its founding has been a topic of extensive writing. According to Sireci and Coletta, the foundation of NATO was based on purely realist arguments and should be seen as a power balancing act by the United States.<sup>60</sup> However, Sean Kay insists that over time embedded community values in the alliance such as “reinforcing democracy and free market economies” became of growing importance. These characteristics put their mark on NATO even stronger because they contrasted with the ideology of the Soviet bloc.<sup>61</sup>

One can argue that throughout the Cold War the continuing existence of the East-West divide increased the importance of mentioned normative component. While realist reasons brought the allies together, the continuing projection of the NATO members as the 'self' versus the 'others' of the Warsaw Pact amplified the existing associations. Shared perceptions of threat, resulting from the similarity of identities among the members determined the success of the alliance. According to Risse-Kappen this common identity came into being through the members' shared norms and regulative practices, such as consultation and consensus-building. In this sense, “common values

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60 Jonathan Sireci and Damon Coletta, 'Enduring without an Enemy: NATO's Realist Foundation', *Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2009), 57–81 (pp. 58–59).

61 Sean Kay, 'What Went Wrong with NATO?', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2005), 69–83 (pp. 70–71).

and a collective identity of liberal democracies<sup>62</sup> did play an important role in fuelling the *raison d'être* of NATO as they led to common threat perceptions.<sup>63</sup>

However, in any discussion of NATO, we cannot underestimate the importance of the US within the alliance. Not only was the US the strategically determining factor to establish the alliance, up to this day it is highly dominant in military terms. It is responsible for over three-quarter of the combined military budget of all members.<sup>64</sup> Because the American predominance in NATO's actions and influence on its course, in many recent issues that we study actors alternate in their comments between calling on NATO's actions and the US' actions. This is especially the case in campaigns based on a 'coalition of the willing', such as is the case in, for instance, the effort against Daesh. While all NATO member states expressed support for the campaign, only a few actively participated (and especially the US). Although the dynamics between Turkey and the US play without a doubt a role in Turkey's ties with NATO, I will try to keep all observations centred on just the alliance as much as possible.

At the time of NATO's birth in 1949, Atatürk's rule and the establishment of the republic still lay fresh in Turkey's memory and its strategic culture was very much dominated by the national unity narrative. Therefore joining a military alliance to counter Soviet power was for Turkey not the most expected thing to do. There was, however, a mix of realist and identity motives that drove Turkey into the alliance.

While joining NATO fitted in with Turkey's Westernisation effort (see below), Soviet aggression gave even stronger, realist arguments. After the Second World War, while the map of Europe was being divided in American and Soviet spheres of influence, Stalin also made claims on Turkish territory. He demanded the Kars and Ardahan provinces in the east and wanted permanent Soviet bases in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. This would give the Soviets joint control over the Turkish Straits, and strategic access to the Mediterranean Sea. Stalin stepped up his claims with troop movements at the Turkish borders with Bulgaria and the Caucasus.<sup>65</sup> These particular

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62 Thomas Risse-Kappen, 'Collective Identity in a Democratic Community The Case of NATO', in *The Culture of National Security*, ed. by Peter Katzenstein (New York 1996), 357–99 (pp. 369, 395).

63 For the ideological power of NATO see also: Oğuzlu, 'Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO', p. 153; Aybet, 'The Evolution of NATO's Three Phases', p. 20.

64 NATO, 'Interview with Hüseyin Diriöz, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning', 2011.

65 Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change* (London, 2005), pp. 102–3.

Soviet threats took place directly after the Second World War and had started to fade by the time Turkey actually joined NATO in 1952. Nevertheless, the geographic proximity to the Soviet Union, at the time still under the capricious Stalin, and its offensive capabilities, made the realist arguments still relevant.<sup>66</sup>

The issue of Turkey's identity was more complicated. Identity-wise choosing for NATO membership was for Turkey a show of commitment to a Western identity. The years after the Second World War were an active time for Turkey's political westernisation. Before Turkey's NATO membership was achieved under the newly elected Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti), it had already taken part in the Marshall Plan of 1947 and had become a member of the Council of Europe in 1949 under the CHP. Moreover, Turkey's earliest attempts to become part of the European Union (then the European Economic Community) stem from the late 1950s. With these actions, Turkey acknowledged that it regarded its identity as part of the Western system. This is in line with the quest for Westernisation that had been started under Atatürk, but which roots can be traced further back to Ottoman times.<sup>67</sup>

But while being part of NATO was, apart from all its security concerns, a sign for Turkey that it was both politically and culturally part of the West, there was at the same time a certain ambivalence towards the alliance. While we saw earlier that NATO's coherence was strengthened by processes of shared identity building against the 'other' Soviet bloc, Turkey's case shows a counter-mechanism, working against Turkey's smooth integration into the alliance. As Karaosmanoğlu points out, Turkey's identity formation builds upon the centuries old role of the Ottoman Empire in the European system.<sup>68</sup> For centuries, the Turks had been projected by European states as 'the other' themselves. From the times in which the Ottoman armies were besieging Vienna and threatening the Christian world to the later years in which it got the reputation as the 'sick man of Europe', the Ottoman Empire had been an outsider. At best the Ottoman Empire could be "an irregular and peripheral member of the

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66 Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, 'Turkey's Alignment with NATO. Identity and Power Politics', in *NATO's Retirement? Essays in Honour of Peter Volten*, ed. by Margiet Drent, Arjan van den Assem, and Jaap de Wilde (Groningen 2011), pp. 37–48 (pp. 43–44).

67 Altunışık and Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change*, pp. 5–6.

68 Karaosmanoğlu, 'Turkey's Alignment with NATO', p. 39.

European framework<sup>69</sup> The suspicion of Turkey, with its complicated mix of Western and Islamic and Eastern identity, to be 'otherised' by the West, and the enduring Sèvres Syndrome (discussed previously) put a damper on its enthusiasm to try to be part West.<sup>70</sup>

There was therefore something odd about Turkey's NATO membership. On the one hand did the national unity narrative, which was important in this period, provide a reason to join the alliance, as it strengthened the Westernisation project which Atatürk used as part of his nation building process. On the other hand, however, the same narrative also opposed integration into NATO, because of its isolationist tendencies and the particular historical suspicion towards the West.

As for Turkey's behaviour within the organisation during the Cold War, Tarık Oğuzlu observes that the country behaved rather passively within the organisation. Whereas its elites were prone to think of Turkey as an influential strategic actor on its own, whenever NATO adopted decisions Turkey acted as if it did not take part in their formulation. "The prevailing discourse used to be that decisions within NATO were made in Brussels between the USA and other important European allies and that Turkey responded to them".<sup>71</sup> As Turkey was not only the alliance's south eastern stronghold against the Soviet Union but also was the member state with the second largest army, it clearly had the potential to take part more actively. Of course Turkey's attitude fits with the influence of the national unity narrative on its strategic culture as it kept the country uninterested in an assertive membership.

## 4.2 After the Cold War

After the Cold War it was not clear what was going to happen with NATO. From a realist perspective alliances should not outlive the threats they were created to address. With the disappearance of the common goal it was expected by many that the alliance would fall apart, as reasons for cooperating ceased to exist.<sup>72</sup> With the

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69 Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (New York, 1967), pp. 10–18; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909* (New York), pp. 5–7.

70 We will later on revisit this important issue in a more contemporary context.

71 Oğuzlu, 'Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status', p. 786.

72 Wallander, 'Institutional Assets'; Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure'.

collapse of the Soviet Union, therefore, NATO faced the daunting task of reinventing itself in order to have a *raison d'être* in the upcoming years.

While NATO was busy reorienting itself, Turkey stayed part of the Western military bloc. Though with a scent of resignation, it kept following the alliance's course as NATO transformed into a security community which directed itself to threats such as international terrorism. It supported the enlargement of NATO into Central-Europe and was particularly devoted in NATO's military missions to Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo.<sup>73</sup>

In the 2000s new dynamics emerged both in international context (after the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States) and because of domestic developments (2002 marks the beginning of AKP rule in Turkey). Following the assertiveness of the George W. Bush administration, Turkey joined NATO's missions to Afghanistan and other non-European places, although simultaneously a more critical or sceptical view emerged.<sup>74</sup> We can follow the Turkish (government) perspective on this development by looking at the writings of Davutoğlu.

We already noted that Davutoğlu constructed ideas which are leading for Turkey's regional power narrative. He also presented his vision on NATO and the future of the organisation. In a 2012 article he fully subscribed to its continuing importance. He also underlined the importance of identity to NATO by writing that the alliance was "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisations of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and rule of law. So long as our common values need protecting, NATO would continue to have a *raison d'être*."<sup>75</sup> Elsewhere he wrote about that Turkey's membership to NATO "is a solid symbol of Turkey's Western vocation and her choice of joining with democratic societies governed by universal values."<sup>76</sup>

However, as the last decade saw action by NATO in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and at the Somalian coast, Davutoğlu expressed his concern that the alliance's character was in

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<sup>73</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, 'NATO Enlargement and the South: A Turkish Perspective', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1999), 213–24 (pp. 213–15); Aybet, 'The Evolution of NATO's Three Phases', p. 29.

<sup>74</sup> Oğuzlu, 'Turkey's Eroding Commitment', p. 154.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, 'Transformation of NATO and Turkey's Position', *Perceptions*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2012), 7–17 (p. 8).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.



danger of shifting to a military tool, "imposing and implementing political decisions taken elsewhere"<sup>77</sup>, specifically hinting at the military dominance of the US. He argued that this was bad for the legitimacy of NATO. Here we can trace arguments that have been made by scholars that put limits to Turkey's commitment to NATO. Two major components of Turkey's foreign policy under AKP were not antagonising Russia (although this point was abandoned in 2015, later more on that) and keeping its "hard-gained positive image across the Islamic world".<sup>78</sup> These preferences, with their implications for Turkey's look on NATO, can be found in Turkey's official foreign policy of 'zero problems with neighbours'.

The zero problems doctrine was presented by Davutoğlu in early 2010 and was aimed at solving Turkey's strained relations with countries in the (Middle Eastern) neighbourhood, including Syria and Iraq. More in general, the idea behind the policy was for Turkey to diversify its focus. By directing itself more towards the Middle East it would gain more economic and political opportunities to establish itself as a regional power.

This raised some concerns among Western observers, as Turkey had traditionally avoided the complicated Middle Eastern intrigues in favour of engagement with Europe. It was therefore claimed that the zero problems doctrine, rather than an attempt to catch up with neglected neighbours was a turn away from the West. It was, moreover, perceived as a proof of the AKP's reorientation towards the Islamic world as part of a general Islamisation policy. Finally, it was said that Davutoğlu's vision was a neo-Ottoman one, aimed at reviving the glory days of the former empire. All these claims were denied by the Turkish government.<sup>79</sup>

Initially the zero problem doctrine surprised with its successes. Turkey saw its relations improve with countries such as Iraq, Iran and especially Syria, and it actively mediated in conflicts all over the region. The revolutionary wave in Arab countries that started in December 2010 for a moment seemed a golden opportunity for Turkey to promote

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<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> Şule Nişanlı, 'Turkey's Role in NATO in the Post-Cold War Security Environment', NATO Defence College Research Paper, No. 16 (2005), 2–8 (p. 7); Oğuzlu, 'Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status', pp. 782–84.

<sup>79</sup> 'I Am Not a Neo-Ottoman, Davutoğlu Says', Today's Zaman, 25 November 2009; Ihsan Bal, 'Expansion, Not Shift in the Turkish Foreign Policy Axis', Turkish Weekly, 10 November 2009.

itself.<sup>80</sup> However, as civil war broke out in Syria and the Arab Spring turned into a Winter, the gains of Turkey's foreign policy were quickly offset. By 2016, after a decade of zero problems with neighbours, Turkey found itself in a position in the Middle East where it arguably was "more isolated than ever".<sup>81</sup>

Although not in the Middle-East, Turkey's engagement with Russia is definitely related to Davutoğlu's attempt to expand the reach of its foreign policy well. Instead of staring itself blind at the West, as often happened in Turkey's old Kemalist policies, the AKP government considerably intensified relations with Putin's Russia. Although we will explore in chapter 5.2 how this diplomatic path clashed with NATO's preferences with the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, it for now suffices to say that engagement between the two countries had been intensifying. That year, Russia was Turkey's number one import country, and seventh largest export partner.<sup>82</sup> In the same year Turkey and Russia rolled out plans to increase their trade volume threefold by 2020.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, the personal chemistry between Putin and Erdoğan and their critique on the West brought Russia and Turkey together, up to the point that there were hints in 2013 that Turkey might want to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.<sup>84</sup> Although rhetoric about joining this Russian-Chinese security bloc possibly just served for Erdoğan to gain diplomatic leverage against the West (especially the EU), the very fact that he was prepared to bring it to table is a sign of how loose Turkey's alignment with its traditional Western allies had become at the time.

Until the breaking of Russian-Turkish relations in December 2015 Turkey and Russia were mentioned together and compared with each other. Significantly, when prime minister Erdoğan took up the function of president in 2015, many were reminded of Putin's institutional acrobatics in which he swapped the presidency for the prime ministership and back, each time taking with him the executive powers to rule the country.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> More on this in paragraph 5.1 on Libya.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Schanzer and Merve Tahiroğlu, 'Ankara's Failure: How Turkey Lost the Arab Spring', *Foreign Affairs*, 25 January 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Numbers on Turkey's 2014 foreign trade at: <http://globaleledge.msu.edu/countries/turkey/tradestats>.

<sup>83</sup> 'Turkey, Russia to Seek New Ways to Deepen Economic Ties despite Disagreements in Syria, Ukraine', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 1 December 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Kadri Gürsel, 'Erdogan Serious about Turkey's Bid for Shanghai 5 Membership', *Al-Monitor*, 31 January 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Merve Tahiroğlu and Boris Zilberman, 'Vladimir Erdoğan: How The Turkish Premier Is Consolidating Power, Russia-Style', *Forbes*, 2014.

Turkey's engagement with Russia, just like its independent endeavours in the Middle East, were clear signals of the new self-confidence on the international stage Turkey gained under AKP rule. Whatever the AKP's real intentions of the increased focus on the East and the zero problems doctrine were, the consequence was in any case a more diversely orientated foreign policy with the potential to clash with the interests of NATO.

Like Turkey befriending Russia became problematic when Russia and NATO clashed over Ukraine, the fact that the AKP was being very active to establish a good image in the Muslim world, could lead to disagreements with the NATO line. Ankara was careful to point out that "NATO should not be considered as an instrument forcing regime changes in predominantly Muslim countries"<sup>86</sup>, an echo of which we encountered in Davutoğlu's article. The dilemma of how to combine Turkey's NATO membership duties with the preservation of its reputation in the Islamic world is shown, for instance, by Turkey's preference to perform only civilian and crisis management tasks in Afghanistan, instead of combat action.<sup>87</sup> This would prevent the suggestion of Turkey being involved in some anti-Islamic effort by NATO. Another sign is Turkey's full support for the enlargement of the alliance into the Balkans. The inclusion of Montenegro and Macedonia, with large Muslim minorities, and Albania, a Muslim-majority country, would help to make NATO's image more multi-religious and to proof that it is not an army of Christian imperialists.

These are just a few examples of how Turkey's behaviour within the alliance is influenced by the fact that NATO's direction and Turkey's foreign policy preferences often did not align well. From Davutoğlu's argumentation we can understand how an assertive NATO with business in the Middle East or with Russia could spoil Turkey's own foreign policy. Oğuzlu explained how Turkey's behaviour in NATO is purely based on strategic determination. As his main principle is that Turkey, as a rising power, is trying to gain geopolitical importance, he sees for Turkey two basic ways to behave within NATO. In the first way Turkey would try "counterbalancing the most influential members of the alliance by making use of intra-alliance cleavages and by spoiling the alliance by contributing to its irrelevance". This way Turkey would be able to exploit

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<sup>86</sup> Oğuzlu, 'Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status', p. 783.

<sup>87</sup> Oğuzlu, 'Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO', p. 157.

the alliance for its own interest. Alternatively it could try to co-opt with the main players within NATO and shape its own national interests and foreign policy in line with the priorities of the alliance. In this second scenario Turkey would use NATO as a “force multiplier” of its preferences.<sup>88</sup>

Oğuzlu finds examples of both co-opting and counterbalancing behaviour in the 2000s, giving a mixed picture of Turkey's role in NATO. A closer look at Turkey's counterbalancing against the US or other influential NATO forces shows that it mainly involved attempts to mitigate relations with Russia and issues that harm Turkey's “hard-gained positive image across the Islamic world”.<sup>89</sup>

This behaviour is in line with what we would expect, as it is specifically directed against NATO behaviour that would be contradicting the preferences of Turkey's strategic culture. As the regional power narrative aims for an independent geopolitical position for Turkey in which it can actively reshape its neighbourhood, it is not surprising that Turkey plays a more interest based role within NATO. Especially at topics that directly concern Turkey's regional power status we can count on direct clashes with NATO there where the alliance has different interests.

Turkey's changed strategic culture explains therefore that Turkey does only moderately share the interests of the United States and the EU countries in their confrontation with Russia, and that it is careful when a NATO policy can damage its plans in the Middle East. We can also see why it makes sense for Turkey's regional power narrative incorporating Balkan countries into NATO. Having a group of friendly satellites with common cultural and historical (Ottoman) ties within the alliance would obviously improve Turkey's position. The very fact that Turkey is concerned about how it can bend NATO to its will is a consequence of its desire to be a regional power and is inspired by its strategic culture.

All these, however, are policy specific considerations. As we will see now, Turkey's formal rhetoric on NATO does not really reflect the change in strategic culture which we just marked.

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<sup>88</sup> Oğuzlu, ‘Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status’, pp. 779–80.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem, 782–784; This is also underlined by Şule Nişanlı, ‘Turkey's Role in NATO in the Post-Cold War Security Environment’, No. 16, 2005, 2–8 (p. 7).

### 4.3 NATO's new Strategic Concept and 60 years of NATO Membership: Contemplating on Turkey's NATO position in the 2010's

The new Strategic Concept is NATO's most recent ten-year plan and has been a milestone in its post-Cold War functional modernisation and transformation. The document contained not only a reconfirmation of the old core tasks of territorial defence, but also defined how to handle new focuses such as cyber defence and non-traditional forms of terrorism. Finally the document reiterated a commitment to cooperation with prospective members and with Russia.<sup>90</sup> When the alliance adopted the new Strategic Concept on 20 November 2010, Turkey's foreign policy had already been guided by Davutoğlu's ideas of strategic depth for several years. Turkey's "zero problems with neighbours" policy had been launched half a year earlier.

At the time journalists observed in this period an increasing frequency of disagreements between NATO and Turkey, indicating an axis shift of Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>91</sup> However, we do not recognise this image at all when we examine the article published by Turkish Defence Minister Vecdi Gönül (in function 2002-2011) in the Turkish Policy Quarterly, in which he explains his views on the new Strategic Concept. In positive wordings on the alliance, he encourages further evolution towards a more political organisation and a continuation of the expansion of the alliance. According to Gönül "NATO has played a central role in the security of Turkey for 58 years. The Alliance has made significant contributions for Turkey to be integrated in the Euro-Atlantic community. Turkey has made significant contributions to the Alliance as well. It adopted the common values the allies share, and defended them keenly."<sup>92</sup> In his article there seems to be a lack of any connection with Turkey's neo-Ottoman ambitions and possible reservations these could raise towards NATO. Gönül does not seem to share Davutoğlu's concerns about NATO as an interventionist tool, also when commenting on far away missions such as Afghanistan and the anti-piracy missions off the Horn of Africa. If anything, he seems to encourage a more active alliance.

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90 NATO, 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon', 2010.

91 Oya Dursun-Özkanca, 'Turkey-NATO Relations at a Crossroads ahead of NATO's New Strategic Concept', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 15 October 2010.

92 M. Vecdi Gönül, 'Turkey-NATO Relations and NATO's New Strategic Concept', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2010), 15-21 (p. 17).

In a interview by NATO Review with the (Turkish) Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning of NATO, Hüseyin Diriöz, we also find Turkey agreeing with the conclusions of the new Strategic Concept and the identified threats of terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, cyber attacks, the disruption of the flow of energy supplies and instability or conflict beyond NATO's borders. Diriöz confirms that "Turkey too has identified these and similar risks and challenges to its national security. Therefore, clearly, the threat perceptions of NATO as a whole and Turkey are essentially parallel."<sup>93</sup>

In a 2011 interview by NATO, İsmet Yılmaz, who had just become Turkey's new minister of Defence, expressed his ideas about Turkey and NATO and the new Strategic Concept in harmonious terms as well. According to him: "For Turkey, NATO means turning towards the West. A concrete expression of heading towards core human rights and the rule of law. You head towards the direction where you see your own security. Turkey's security is in the West. Turkey's preference is also the West.[...] With Turkey joining NATO in 1952, Turkey showed that its fundamental choice is the West and NATO." Later Yılmaz summarises Turkey's foreign policy with Atatürk's classic motto: "In Turkey we have a very basic principle: peace at home, peace in the world".<sup>94</sup>

Although we find unwavering enthusiasm for NATO and Turkey's NATO membership, we can also find a glimpse of the regional power narrative. That Yılmaz proudly lists the many areas and missions in which Turkey participates is hardly surprising. However, he also presents a strongly assertive attitude, underlining, for instance, how Turkey, with help of NATO, will be capable of steering the Middle East and solving conflicts in the regions. He also mentions Turkey's grown influence because of its recent economic growth. In addition to this show of self-confidence, we find a last reference to Turkey's regional power capabilities with a link to the Ottoman Empire. When explaining why Turkey has an important role to play for NATO in the Middle East, Yılmaz remarks: "Turkey knows the region better than outsiders. We have lived together for approximately 400 years. Even 500 years in some cases." In this quote he puts the beginning of Turkey not with the establishment of the republic under Atatürk

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93 NATO, 'Interview with Hüseyin Diriöz, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning', 20 December 2011.

94 'NATO Interview with Defence Minister İsmet Yılmaz (Online Video)', 2011.

but in the times of the Ottoman Empire. "We" are Ottomans, who had relations with the peoples of the Middle-East several centuries ago.

The next year, for the occasion of Turkey's 60 years of NATO membership, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly Cemil Çiçek's anniversary message stated that "We are proud of NATO's work to ensure peace and security."<sup>95</sup> He continued to explain that Turkey itself had made many important contributions to the alliance and that it will continue to fulfil its duties. Finally, Haydar Berk, Turkey's Permanent Representative to NATO, said something among the same lines: "NATO is a fundamental dimension of Turkey's foreign and defence policy. Turkey has been an important member for 60 years and is a reliable part of the alliance."<sup>96</sup>

One characteristic shared among all these remarks is a full support for Turkey's NATO membership. This is something we can expect from these representatives who have an interest in presenting a positive picture towards an international audience. At the same time, however, there is a striking neglect by the Turkish state to provide up to date information on NATO. The official English statement on NATO on the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which specifically mentions it deals "current issues", starts with the proud announcement that Turkey will celebrate its 60th anniversary of its membership in 2012.<sup>97</sup> From statements on Russia and Ukraine (and lacking ones on for instance Syria) we can also establish the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not updated its NATO page since 2010 or 2011, shortly after the implementation of the New Strategic Concept.

The Turkish version of "Views on Current Issues of the Alliance"<sup>98</sup> is considerably longer. Sections on new topics have been added, while old ones have not been updated. While some other English and Turkish pages on NATO are slightly more up to

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95 Akparti, 'TBMM Başkanı Cemil Çiçek, Türkiye'nin NATO'ya Üye Olusunun 60. Yıl Dönümü Dolayısıyla Bir Mesaj Yayınladı', 17 February 2012. Original quotation: "NATO'nun barış ve güvenliğin korunmasına yönelik etkin çalışmalarının gururunu yaşamaktayız."

96 Büyükelçi Haydar Berk, 'Türkiye-NATO Yıldönümü - 18 Şubat 1952', 2012. Original quotation: "NATO, Türk dış ve savunma politikasının temel boyutlarından biridir. Türkiye 60 yıldır İttifakın önemli bir üyesi ve güvenilir bir Müttefiklerdir."

97 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey's and NATO's Views on Current Issues of the Alliance', 2016.

98 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'NATO ve Türkiye'nin Güncel NATO Konularına İlişkin Görüşleri', 2016.

date than the main NATO page, the texts generally present outdated information which has not been revised in the last four years.<sup>99</sup>

All this does not necessarily have anything to do with NATO itself, and might rather be a sign of a malfunctioning bureaucracy than of a conscious neglect of the representation of the alliance by Turkey. Although other Turkish ministries suffer from the same problem<sup>100</sup>, from the much outdated official view on NATO we might at least assess that the Turkish administration does not regard the impression it makes on NATO allies as a priority.

While the extensive text on Turkey's view of NATO expresses many ways in which Turkey is important for NATO, it brings forward only one argument why NATO is important for Turkey: "Turkey's membership to NATO is an integral part of her global identity".<sup>101</sup> Positioning itself explicitly as part of the North-Atlantic community, neglects the idea that Turkey should equally balance its Western and Eastern affiliations. However, it does not come as a surprise that the statement underlines that Turkey places itself in the Western community, as doing otherwise would seriously undermine the credibility the statement would give Turkey in the alliance.

The statement concludes that "Turkey maintains its position within NATO by protecting its national interests as well as supporting the solidarity within the Alliance."<sup>102</sup> Mentioning the importance of national interests like this is not unique. For instance, Turkey's neighbour Greece declares in a similar statement on NATO that it is "guided by the promotion of its national interests."<sup>103</sup> But when we compare Turkey's statement on its view on NATO with older versions which were presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we do notice that older versions from 2001 and 2004 did

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99 For instance, on current Turkish NATO missions: Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey's International Security Initiatives and Contributions to NATO and EU Operations'; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Güvenlik Alanındaki Girişimleri ve Uluslararası (NATO, AB) Barışı Koruma Destekleme Harekatlarına Katkıları'.

100 This is demonstrated, for example, by info pages that have not been updated for many years (EU and Turkey history pages Ministry of EU Affairs), or former ministers still being displayed as in function (Ministry of Defence).

101 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey's and NATO's Views on Current Issues of the Alliance', 2016.

102 Ibidem.

103 Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Greece in NATO'.



not contain a single reference to Turkey's national interest.<sup>104</sup> In this official policy line we thus find this small reference to Turkey's independent course.

In a series of interviews conducted by NATO Review on Turkey's 60 years of membership to the alliance, we find some answers that paint a slightly different picture. Özgür Hüseyin Ekşi, a correspondent for the (not government-aligned) *Hürriyet Daily News*, answers to the question "How have Turkey's foreign policy priorities changed?" that the current government wants to play "a bigger role in the Middle East than ever", especially in regards to the ongoing Arab Spring. He continues that the current government follows a more pro-Islamic and pro-Arab line.<sup>105</sup> These answers are in itself not remarkable, but differ from the statements on NATO by representatives which we encountered earlier, as they rather underlined Turkey's commitment to the West.

Sinan Ulgen, who is connected to the think tank Carnegie Europe, gives an interesting answer to the question what NATO means for Turks today, by bluntly noting that: "the Turkish population views Turkey's role within NATO as being rather insignificant. And therefore there is a perception that NATO policy is essentially dictated and implemented by other powers than Turkey."<sup>106</sup> These observations are in line with statistical data, according to which Turkey is the member state with the lowest public support for NATO. Indeed, the share of Turks who believe that NATO is 'essential' declined from 53 percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2010. These numbers are associated to increasing disillusionment with the West, especially over EU membership.<sup>107</sup>

Yurter Özcan notes in 2011 in this regard a striking difference between the activities of the political elite, which generally acts by word and deed in line with Western and NATO concerns, and the low public support and interest for both NATO and the US. In between these two worlds he places the rhetoric in the domestic sphere by some Turkish actors, notably Erdoğan, which is recurrently anti-Western and in contradiction with the actual political decisions that are made by Turkey:

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104 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'European Security and Turkey - A. NATO and Turkey', 2001; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Turkey's Security Perspectives and Its Relations with NATO - II. Turkey's Views on Current NATO Issues', 2004.

105 NATO Review Magazine, 'Turkey: What 60 Years in NATO Means Video Interview by NATO', 2012.

106 Ibidem.

107 Key Findings 2010 (Transatlantic Trends, 2010), p. 25.

"Even though Erdoğan criticizes Western intervention in certain parts of the world as 'imperialist' or 'solely-driven for material benefit,' he actually continues to support those interventions in an active manner. His criticism with such an anti-Western tone contradicts the very positions that Erdoğan himself takes. [...] With the exception of the 2003 resolution [on intervention in Iraq], it is fair to say that AKP has assisted the U.S. virtually in every major occasion since it came to power in 2002."<sup>108</sup>

According to Özcan's theory the implication of the constant use of this tone is a gradual discreditation of the West and NATO among the Turkish population. This would naturally significantly influence Turkey's position in NATO in the long term.

In the official statements on the new Strategic Concept and the 60th anniversary of Turkey's NATO membership, we generally found a discourse that tells us that Turkey is a fully devoted member of the alliance. More importantly, in these cases the old narrative persists about how being part of NATO proves Turkey's choice to be part of the West. The sweeping changes in Turkey's foreign policy in the last decade, and the ideas about region balancing in order to build an independent foreign policy with regional ambitions are hardly reflected. Moreover, other observers commenting in NATO channels, such as Sinan Ulgen and Özgür Hüseyin Ekşi, gave us an idea of what these officials *could* have mentioned as well. The fact that there is gap between the official rhetoric and the real situation might also be shown by the interesting case of low public support for NATO, which is not represented at all in the official statements.

In this paragraph we observed that while many officials, including Davutoğlu, expressed their support for Turkey's alignment with the West and its position in the alliance, we also saw that there are several considerations that might cause a contradiction between this official Turkish line and its actual preferences. In the next paragraph we will look at three cases in which we can follow how the regional power narrative unfolds in practice in episodes in which Turkey and NATO have to come into action.

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108 Yurter Özcan, 'Turkey as a NATO Partner: Reality vs. Rhetoric', Turkish Policy Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2011), 105–12 (pp. 111–12).

## 5. Turkey's current position in NATO

### 5.1 NATO's intervention in Libya (2011)

When the new Strategic Concept was adopted in November 2010 no one expected the revolutionary wave in the Arab world that began one month later and all the implications it would have for NATO. In the next year the alliance intervened in the Libyan Civil War, where Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's government was about to crush the rebel movement. After the instalment of a no-fly zone in March and the bombing of loyalist military positions, Operation Unified Protector largely contributed to the fall of the Gaddafi regime in October 2011.

We will first shortly study general debate regarding the question if its intervention was justified or not, before turning to the specific events surrounding Turkey's aversion and then contribution to the NATO intervention. After that we can analyse the case to see what it tells us about Turkey's strategic culture.

The intervention, which received a UN mandate, followed earlier condemnations from the UN and regional organisations including the African Union, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. The many reports on human rights abuses by the Gaddafi regime against rebels led to widespread calls for action, especially after March 17, when Gaddafi famously threatened civilians who did not comply with his rule "We will come house by house, room by room [...] We will find you in your closets. We will have no mercy and no pity."<sup>109</sup> In legal terms, the NATO intervention was backed up by the concept of 'responsibility to protect' which had been endorsed and defined by the UN in 2005, and which sought to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Although the UN Security Council had initially backed Resolution 1973, which was used by the NATO countries as their mandate for action, several parties started to regret this shortly after. As soon as the attacks on Libya had started, Russia, China and the African Union reacted negatively on the military intervention and many political actors

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109 'Security Council Abstention: Germany Hesitates as UN Authorizes Action against Libya', Der Spiegel, 18 March 2011.

and scholars have questioned if NATO has militarily overreached its mandate with the way it interpreted Resolution 1973.<sup>110</sup>

Apart from the question of legality of the intervention, many observers initially lauded NATO's actions on humanitarian grounds. David Clark wrote in the liberal newspaper *The Guardian* that the historical experience of the aftermath of suppressed Arab rebellions such as in Syria (1982) and Iraq (1991), which were characterised by large scale atrocities, made it plausible something similar had been prevented in Libya.<sup>111</sup> At the time NATO itself too was confident in putting forward the intervention itself as a success. Writing shortly after the fall of the Gaddafi regime had been accomplished, Ivo Daalder (US Permanent Representative to NATO) and James Stavridis (Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander of the US European Command), stated that NATO's action in Libya "rightly has been hailed as a model intervention", and argued that NATO's involvement "demonstrated that the alliance remains an essential source of stability".<sup>112</sup>

By 2015, however, as Libya was descending into chaos, Daalder's tone had become cautiously more critical. He admitted that "There was an underestimation of the potential for violence and disagreement and the breakdown of the country into opposing militia forces." and that NATO had apparently not yet found the "goldilocks solution" for how to intervene in countries in turmoil.<sup>113</sup>

Since the fall of Gaddafi many have criticised Operation Unified Protector for 'killing' the UN's new legal concept 'responsibility to protect' by significantly overstepping its mandate. As result of the debacle "everywhere outside Western Europe and North America R2P [right to protect] is losing what little ethical credibility it ever commanded."<sup>114</sup> Alan Kuperman denounced the intervention for several other reasons. Firstly, he questioned the reality behind the humanitarian grounds. Not only was the rebel movement violent from the beginning, contradicting the idea of innocent

110 Geir Ulfstein and Hege Fossund Christiansen, 'The Legality of the NATO Bombing in Libya', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2013), 159–71 (pp. 169–70).

111 David Clark, 'Libyan Intervention Was a Success, despite the Aftermath's Atrocities', *The Guardian*, 28 October 2011.

112 Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, 'NATO's Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (2012), 1–7 (p. 2).

113 Nick Robins-Early, 'Was The 2011 Libya Intervention A Mistake? Interview with Ivo Daalder', *The Huffington Post*, 3 July 2015.

114 Sarah Brockmeier, Oliver Stuenkel and Marcos Tourinho, 'The Impact of the Libya Intervention Debates on Norms of Protection', *Global Society*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2016), 113–33; David Rieff, 'R2P, R.I.P.', *The New York Times*, 7 November 2011.

protesters being trampled by the regime's armed forces, Gaddafi's troops did not target civilians or resort to indiscriminate force. Secondly, he argues that the intervention, which came at the moment the rebels were almost defeated and the upsurge would be over, "magnified the conflict's duration about sixfold, and its death toll at least sevenfold, while also exacerbating human rights abuses, humanitarian suffering, Islamic radicalism, and weapons proliferation in Libya and its neighbours".<sup>115</sup>

It is clear from these different assessments that the NATO intervention in Libya is a contested topic, partly because of its execution and consequences, partly because of the reasons that triggered the intervention. The difficulties surrounding the intervention allows us to put Turkish reactions in perspective and make us realise better why several other NATO countries also were unsure what position to take. Germany, for example, although a NATO member, had abstained during the Resolution 1973 vote, together with BRIC countries Russia, China, India and Brazil. It declared in the UN not to support the military option because of "the danger of being drawn into a protracted military conflict that would affect the wider region."<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Germany decided not to take part in the military operations against Libya.

As we will see now, Turkey was initially very much against NATO operations in Libya, but then radically changed its position by actually joining the operations. The lack of enthusiasm from the Turkish decision makers for NATO action was in accordance with the public opinion. Although in June 2011 54 percent of the Turkish population liked to see Gaddafi removed from power (with 25 percent wanting him to stay), and the same percentage would have supported an intervention to protect civilians, 64 percent disapproved of the (current) intervention by international forces (23 percent approved).<sup>117</sup> This seems to indicate that specifically the NATO character of the intervention Libya was disliked by the Turks.

Although Resolution 1973 was passed on 19 March, there had already been many speculations over international action in Libya in February. There were several reasons specific for Turkey during these weeks to be discontent with this development. In

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<sup>115</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, *Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene*, Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, September 2013.

<sup>116</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'The Situation in Libya', 2011.

<sup>117</sup> 'Transatlantic Trend Survey 2011', German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2011, pp. 81–86.

regards to the French, who were leading the assertive voices in the West, the Turks had cool relations, as the French president Sarkozy had been actively opposing Turkey's EU-bid. With Gaddafi, on the other hand, relations had been up, as Turkey had in recent years been quickly expanding its economic investment in Libya. Because of this economic activity, there were 30.000 Turks in Libya, 5.000 of which were evacuated in a large operation finishing on the 23rd of February.

All this time there were no official Turkish statements on either Gaddafi or the uprising, while the Turkish opposition called on Erdoğan to give back the Al-Gaddafi International Prize for Human Rights, which he, awkwardly, had received personally from the Colonel three months earlier.<sup>118</sup>

On the 28 February Erdoğan explained his opinion about NATO countries moving towards an intervention. He believed that European countries had reacted weakly on Libya, and were now only looking for excuses to further their own interests. He continued:

"The Libyan people are being punished with all kinds of sanctions and an intervention which could lead to large and unacceptable suffering. Now the press comes to us and asks [Turkey], very interesting, should NATO intervene in Libya? What kind of nonsense is that? What business does NATO have in Libya? NATO can only discuss to come into action when somebody intrudes a NATO member state. Apart from that, how can NATO intervene in Libya? Look, Turkey is against it. It is something unspeakable and unthinkable for us."<sup>119</sup>

He subsequently said that for Libya, as with all the other countries affected by the Arab Spring, it is the people themselves who should decide on the fate of the country and nobody else. Next he accused other countries to use terms such as democracy and human rights as an excuse to intervene, while actually being interested in economic gain and natural resources. Finally he stressed that, while being in contact with

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118 'Başbakan Kaddafi Ödülünü Geri Vermiyor', Milliyet, 21 February 2011.

119 'NATO'nun Ne İş Var Libya'da?', Sabah, 28 February 2011. Original quotation: "Libya halkının cezalandırılması anlamına gelecek her türlü yaptırım ve müdahale büyük ve kabul edilemez sıkıntılara sebep olabilir. Şimdi bize basın mensupları soruyor, çok enteresan! NATO Libya'ya müdahale etmeli midir? Böyle bir saçmalık olur mu yahu? NATO'nun ne işi var Libya'da? NATO, mensubu olan ülkelerden birine herhangi bir müdahale yapılması halinde böyle bir şeyi gündeme getirebilir. Bunun dışında Libya'ya nasıl müdahale edilebilir? Bakın Türkiye olarak biz bunun karşısındayız, böyle bir şey konuşulamaz, böyle bir şey düşünülemez."

Gaddafi on the issue, the well-being of the Libyans and the many Turkish nationals in Libya should come first.

From that moment on we can find many instances in which Erdoğan repeated his opposition to NATO actions in Libya, quite consistently putting forward the same arguments. He generally put NATO's involvement in a context of Western imperialism, noting that "The Middle East and Africa have been viewed by the West as sources of oil and used as pawns in oil wars for decades." and referred to the bad results of Western campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The other part of his resistance was a concern for the humanitarian consequences of an intervention for the Libyan people, stressing that a foreign involvement would only deteriorate the situation.<sup>120</sup>

Likewise, Defence minister Vecdi Gönül stated that "I do not know what France is doing, but our politics are clear", implying that France's policies were built on hidden motives of material gain. Turkey's policies, Gönül explained, "are about non-interference in the internal affairs of others and to securing human rights and Turkey's interests in Libya."<sup>121</sup>

When on the 19th of March, two days after Resolution 1973 had been approved by the UN Security Council and France, the UK, the US and others had started bombing, Turkey kept speaking out against Western involvement in Libya. In another key statement, on the 22nd, Erdoğan declared that "when brothers are fighting brothers" in Libya, the solution cannot not be brought by ill willed external actors. "Currently our greatest wish is that the [Western] operations are concluded as soon as possible and that no more lives are lost. Our greatest desire is that the Libyan people can determine their own future themselves."<sup>122</sup> He also again raised his concern that NATO would wage war for the sake of wealth and natural resources.<sup>123</sup>

After it was decided on the 24th that NATO would take over command over the operations in Libya by the end of the month, Turkey still kept denouncing the

120 'Alarm over Plans for Libya No-Fly Zone', The Financial Times, 2 March 2011; Simon Cameron-Moore, 'Turkey Opposes Any NATO Operation in Libya', Reuters, 14 March 2011.

121 'Gönül: Libya Politikamız Açık', Haberler.com, 10 March 2011. Original quotation: "Fransa'nın ne yaptığını bilmiyorum ama bizim politikamız açık. Bizim politikamız içişlerine kaşmadan, oradaki insan haklarının ve Türkiye'nin menfaatlerinin en iyi şekilde korunmasıdır."

122 Original quotation: "Şu anda en büyük arzumuz, bu operasyonun mümkün olduğu en kısa sürede sonuçlandırılması ve şu mevcut can kaybının en kısa sürede neticelendirilmesidir. Libya halkının kendi geleceğini belirlemesi bizim en büyük arzumuzdur."

123 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 'NATO, Libya'nın Libyanlara Ait Olduğunu Tespit ve Tescil İçin Oraya Girmelidir' (AK Parti, 2011).

intervention. Davutoğlu complained that the legal procedures for establishing a coalition “were not sufficiently respected”. Moreover, by saying that the bombings were going beyond what had been sanctioned by Resolution 1974, he joined ranks with other opposing parties such as Russia and China.<sup>124</sup>

Meanwhile Erdoğan maintained that “we have been opposed to any unilateral action and we could never accept appeals such as that by the French minister for a new crusade. For Turkey, it's out of the question to shoot at Libyan people or drop bombs on the Libyan people. Turkey's role will be to withdraw from Libya as soon as possible.”<sup>125</sup> At the same time, however, it was decided that Turkey would join the NATO forces by contributing five ships and one submarine for the naval blockade and 6 F-16s for air superiority (not for ground attack operations).

We have observed now, throughout several examples, that Turkey actively tried during February and March 2011 to keep NATO from intervening in Libya. This is intriguing, because if Turkey did not want to be involved in NATO's operations in Libya, it could also just have refrained from sending any support, like for instance Germany, Poland and Portugal did. Instead, it is very clear that it felt the need to campaign against its allies, challenging their preferences. As decisions in NATO are taken unanimously, Turkey could, and seemed willing to, veto intervention plans.<sup>126</sup> All this means that Turkey estimated its interests in the Libyan case as high. We will see that evoking our previous findings on Turkey's strategic culture can provide some answers here, but also that Turkey's recalcitrant behaviour within the alliance and its subsequent military support in the operations hardly let itself be illuminated in a satisfying way.

We established earlier how Turkey's new focus on the Middle East, as part of the diversification of its foreign policy, led to strengthened ties with many Arab countries. It may therefore seem that with opposing Western interventionism, it could bolster its image in the Arab world. Indeed, the months after the Arab Spring started Turkey's image had been on the rise as the 'Turkish model' was presented as a democratic role

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124 Simon Tisdall, 'Libya: UK Battles to Hold Coalition Together', The Guardian, 21 March 2011.

125 Seumas Milne, 'Turkey Offers to Broker Libya Ceasefire as Rebels Advance on Sirte', The Guardian, 27 March 2011.

126 Sevil Küçükkoşum, 'Turkey Still the Outlier as World Mulls No-Fly Zone over Libya', Hürriyet Daily News, 3 March 2011.



model to which Arab protest movements could work towards.<sup>127</sup> As all eyes were now on Turkey, it had to weigh carefully how to position itself. Turkey actively joined support for the regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt. In the Libyan case (and initially with Syria as well), Turkey was not so outspoken in its reaction.

The NATO intervention was supporting the pro-democratic rebels in Libya, for whose Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts Turkey was supposed to be a role-model of Islamic democracy. This way, regardless the true intentions of Western actors in Libya, in supporting the Libyan opposition Turkey had, like in Egypt and Libya, another chance of using its soft power. At the same time, defending the autocratic Libyan regime would seriously undermine the credibility of Turkey's support for the Arab Spring. Although, of course, blocking a NATO intervention was not the same as supporting Gaddafi, it would have in fact jeopardised the chances of the Libyan rebels. In this view, upholding an international intervention, could tarnish Turkey's reputation as well.

It is quite possible that the Turkish policy makers were aware of this, but that they did not believe the rebel movement in Libya had much chance; at the moment the NATO intervention was being discussed the rebels were looking seriously outgunned by the army of Gaddafi's long-standing regime. Moreover, the recently improved ties with Libya, which Turkey hesitated to just undo overnight, and the pending evacuation of its citizens, were further reasons for Ankara to wait to formulate any stance during most of February, while other countries had already started imposing sanctions on Gaddafi's regime.

We saw how Turkey's long silence was followed by an active policy to try to prevent an internationalisation of the Libyan conflict in Libya. One can expect that Erdoğan's stress that the West should not engage with the internal issues of the Middle Eastern countries in order to gain wealth or resources, was not only appreciated by Arab rulers but also by the BRICs (all four countries abstained from voting on Resolution 1974). In this context Turkey's statements on imperialism and stress on non-interference in other's internal affairs seemed more reminiscent of the powers challenging the US' geopolitical position than of one of the Western allies.

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<sup>127</sup> Benjamin Harvey, Gregory Viscusi and Massoud A. Derhally, 'Arabs Battling Regimes See Erdogan's Muslim Democracy as Model', Bloomberg, 4 February 2011.

Another way in which Turkey exhibited its ability to be a responsible regional power, was its much self-emphasised role<sup>128</sup> as mediator between the regime and the rebels. This diplomatic route, had it been successful, would have fulfilled many of Turkey's preferences: it would have kept the West out of the internal business of the Libyans, it would have prevented further fighting while Turkey could have kept both its relations intact with the old regime and play a guiding role for the pro-democratic movements in Libya. And of course playing this key mediatory role would have gained Turkey much prestige on the global stage.

It seems that Turkey's standing up to the West in Libya, should be seen as part of its effort to play a regional power role in the Middle-East, which was especially pressing because the Arab Spring launched Turkey as a role model of Islamic democracy. As the results of Turkey's manoeuvring in the Libyan case are not so clear, the general philosophy behind it gets obscured. Whereas its actions might at first glance seemed a chance to bolster its prestige in the Arab world, we discussed that this is certainly not clear-cut for pro-democratic movements of the Arab Spring. Still its efforts to present itself as standing up for the independence of Arab countries from Western interference, its lining up with the NATO-critical BRIC countries and its emphasis on its own mediatory initiatives are signs of a strong influence regional power narrative in its strategic culture. The fact that in the end Turkey let go of its efforts and consented to the NATO operations, however, marks limits of how far Turkey could or wanted to go following its independent course in the face of its NATO alignment.

## 5.2 Ukrainian crisis (2014)

The 2014 Russian occupation of Crimea after the Euromaidan Revolution and the broader crisis involving Ukraine, its pro-Russian movements and Russia itself, was a key event for NATO as it evoked memories of the East-West division which it had once been established for.

Russia's actions against Ukraine have been explained in direct relation to the West and NATO and its eastward expansion. However, Kimberly Marten argues that Ukraine was nowhere near joining neither NATO nor the EU in the mid-long term, questioning the

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128 Most statements rejecting a NATO intervention also contained a confirmation that Turkey was carrying out "intense diplomatic traffic". Erdoğan, 'NATO, Libya'nın Libyalılara Ait Olduğunu Tespit ve Tescil İçin Oraya Girmelidir'. Original quotation: "Yoğun bir diplomasi trafiği yürüttük".

(in this context) precipitate character of Russia's operations.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, according to Eric Engle, Russia's actions were illegal in terms of international law: "Russia's annexation was a violation of its treaty obligation under its Treaty of Friendship to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and under the universally recognized general principle of the territorial integrity of each State under customary international law."<sup>130</sup> Indeed NATO regarded the Russian activities as such and harshly condemned them.

In the wake of the crisis, NATO shifted its strategy towards Russia in several ways. Not only took the alliance measures to expand its military presence in Eastern Europe with the establishment of 'rapid reaction forces' and the deployment of larger numbers of troops. Additionally, many levels of cooperation between Russia and the West, including dialogue through the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council were suspended. The crisis was also an important factor in the agreement at the Wales Summit of 2014 for NATO countries to "reverse the trend of declining defence budgets and to raise them over the coming decade".<sup>131</sup> NATO countries also imposed economic and other sanctions on Russia and people involved in the events in Ukraine.

We mentioned before that as part of its new diversified foreign policy orientation, Turkey had been steering for closer ties with Russia. Obviously, in the face of the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey, as part of the West, was expected to align with NATO's reactions to Russia. And indeed, when the Euromaidan Revolution began, Turkey did not support the old Ukrainian regime but instead condemned the use of force by president Janukovych against civilians and called for a peaceful, democratic solution. Next, Ankara recognised the new Ukrainian leadership while not accepting the results of the Russian-led referendum for Crimea's independence in March. Moreover, Turkey rejected both Russia's solution plan of federalising Ukraine and the pro-Russian rebellion that started in the Donbass.<sup>132</sup> Finally, there was special concern for the Crimean Tatars, a Turkic, Muslim minority, which makes up 14 percent of the Crimean

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129 Kimberly Marten, 'Putin's Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2015), 189–204 (pp. 189–90).

130 Eric Engle, 'A New Cold War? Cold Peace. Russia, Ukraine, and NATO', *St. Louis University Law Journal*, Vol. 59 (2015), 97–174 (pp. 170–71).

131 NATO, 'Allied Leaders Pledge to Reverse Defence Cuts, Reaffirm Transatlantic Bond', 2014.

132 Adam Balcer, 'Dances with the Bear: Turkey and Russia after Crimea', *Center for East European Studies, University of Warsaw, Working Paper* 8 (2014), p. 3.

population and which feared for their rights under Russian rule. As we will see below, the Tatar issue was a relatively important factor in Turkey's approach to the crisis.

But although Turkey's position was critical towards Russia, its stance was still moderate and different from its allies. One striking aspect is the fact that Turkey did not impose any sanctions on Russian individuals, businesses or officials. Not only did all the other NATO members do this, other Western oriented states such as Norway, Australia and Japan had followed suit.<sup>133</sup> Instead, Turkey's economic ties with Russia seemed only to improve.

In November 2014 Putin travelled with ten of his ministers to Turkey to discuss an action plan to triple bilateral trade over the next six years. Plans were made for joint industrial projects and energy cooperation (including not just Russian oil and gas but also Russian assistance to the construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant in Akkuyu).<sup>134</sup> Europe's cooling relations with Russia and the diminishing trade between the two blocks created opportunities for the Turkish economy. Russian sources confirmed this relation between Russia's trade with the EU and its trade with Turkey (not in the last place to show the West how useless its sanctions were). The Russian ambassador in Ankara remarked for instance: "What we can't buy from Europe, we buy from Turkey. We want this to continue for the long term. Sanctions on Russia have actually increased the trade between our countries."<sup>135</sup> Putin himself complimented Turkey on its stance within NATO as well, saying: "our Turkish partners refused to sacrifice their interests for somebody else's political ambitions. I consider that to be a really well-weighed and far-sighted policy." He was glad this opened up new opportunities for trade with Turkey.<sup>136</sup>

To what extent were these developments at variance with the breakdown of Russia's relations with the other NATO countries? According to Adam Balcer these signs of Turkish-Russian rapprochement did not mean much. Although Ankara described Russia as a strategic partner, this depiction of Turkish-Russian ties was exaggerated. In late 2014 Balcer wrote that "the economic pillar in the relationship tends to be

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133 'Presidency of Russia, 'Interview to Anadolu Agency', 28 November 2014.

134 'Turkey and Russia Initial Deals to Further Cultivate Trade Ties', Daily Sabah, 1 December 2014.

135 Muharrem Sarikaya, 'Turkey Benefits from Western Embargo on Russia', Al-Monitor, 21 November 2014.

136 Presidency of Russia, 'Interview to Anadolu Agency'.

overestimated and is likely to further weaken in the years ahead. Moreover, [...] the partnership lacks a solid social base, and more recently the two countries have witnessed serious divergences on a number of important geopolitical issues [including Syria, Egypt, the Armenian-Azeri conflict and the Russian annexation of Crimea].”<sup>137</sup> He continues that “In case of the new cold war between the US and the EU and Russia, Turkey - perhaps without strong conviction - will most probably align its policy with the West”<sup>138</sup>

However, although Balcer gives several strong arguments for Turkey not to align with Russia, one can question if this would automatically put Turkey in a consenting position with the West. Turkey's increasingly independent course, driven by its strategic culture, would make its conformity with the West increasingly unpredictable. During the Ukrainian crisis, Dimitar Bechev analysed that “ties between Russia and Turkey are driven by pragmatism - or even naked opportunism.”<sup>139</sup> But of course, one could also analyse Turkey's behaviour vis-à-vis NATO in this crisis from this perspective.

What we would expect from Turkey's strategic culture is a behaviour that tries to balance its relations with different actors in such a way that it would benefit the interest of Turkey as independent player the most. In other words, while the support for NATO should be maintained, its ties with Russia should not suffer from it. One factor that might have changed the equation to the disadvantage of the Russians, and thus strengthened Turkey's intent to follow the West and Ukraine, was the issue of the Crimean Tatars.

For the principles of neo-Ottomanism the fate of these representatives of Turkey's Ottoman heritage mattered. This is exactly how they were presented by the Turkish foreign ministry: “we are not looking at Ukraine solely from a Crimean perspective. But it is also true that Crimea has special importance for us. The Crimean Tatars speak Turkish and we have deep cultural ties with them. Historically, Crimea was a part of the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>140</sup> The “special importance” of Crimea here does not stem from

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137 Balcer, ‘Dances with the Bear’, p. 2.

138 Ibidem, p. 9.

139 Dimitar Bechev, ‘Russia and Turkey: What Does Their Partnership Mean for the EU?’, European Policy Centre, 2015, 1–4 (p. 1).

140 Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, ‘Turkey Mobilizes for Crimea after 160 Years’, *Al-Monitor*, 4 March 2014. It may be noted that the connection for Turks with the Tatars was on the basis of these ethnical and linguistic ties closer than those with just ‘any’ Ottoman vassals. In a sense, the urge to help the

Russia's strategic interest in the region with its military bases in the Black Sea and its consequences for Turkey's security. Nor is it related to the relation with Ukraine, the strategic interests of Turkey's NATO allies in Ukraine or to Russia's position there. Instead this special importance is based on the Ottoman Empire's century old possession of the peninsula and its people.<sup>141</sup> This self-centred way of reasoning emphasises the power that is being transmitted from Turkey as a regional player.

The real importance of the Crimean Tatars is not clear, however. Although the case was picked up extensively by both the Turkish media and Turkish politicians, Turkey was not being effrontery on the issue towards Russia. One statement by Davutoğlu read: "It is of great importance for us that Crimean Tatars live in peace together with other groups in Crimea as equal citizens within the unity of Ukraine."<sup>142</sup> The statement confirmed that Turkey sees Crimea as a part of Ukraine and also indirectly expressed the wish that with the Russian takeover no harm would be done to the Tatar minority. At the same time Davutoğlu made sure to fully avoid mentioning Russia directly, also when he continued that "Turkey is ready to provide every support for the bright future of both Ukraine and Crimea".

On another occasion he said: "Crimea should not be a territory of a military tension. On the contrary: it should be a peninsula of cultural peace and for this purpose we will do whatever it takes. Not only do we have a visionary and well-meant approach, we are also trying to take any measures that can help our Tatar brothers not to be affected by these conflicts." Here again, Davutoğlu expresses support for the Tatars, but does not blame anyone in particular for what is going on.<sup>143</sup>

From Erdoğan too we find moderate responses on the issue. At the NATO summit in Cardiff he declared that "Crimea's illegal annexation will not be recognised"<sup>144</sup>,

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Tatars would therefore also fit in nationalist feelings of the national unity narrative, or another, pan-Turkic, perspective. See also the Turkmen issue in paragraph 5.3.

141 The Ottoman Empire lost control over the region with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774.

142 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Minister Davutoğlu: "Turkey Is Ready to Contribute to Decrease the Tension and to Settle the Problems in Crimea."', 2014.

143 Ahmet Davutoğlu, Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun TRT 1 Televizyonunda Yayımlanan 'Enine Boyuna' Adlı Programda Verdikleri Özel Mülakat, 2014. Original quotation: "[...] Kırım'ın askeri gerilim alanı haline gelmemesi, aksine bir kültürel barış yarımadası haline dönüşmesi lazım, bunun için elimizden geleni yapacağız. Ama tabii bir taraftan böyle bir vizyoner iyi niyetli vizyoner bakışla bakarken diğer taraftan da orada Tatar kardeşlerimizin herhangi bir şekilde bütün bu çatışmalardan etkilenmemesi içinde her türlü tedbiri almaya gayret gösteriyoruz."

144 Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan NATO Zirvesi'nde', 2014. Original quotation: "Kırım'ın yasadışı ilhakının tanınmayacağını [...]".

choosing a form not depicting Russia as active player. This contrasts with the official summit declaration, which talked about “Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine” and “Russia's escalating and illegal military intervention”<sup>145</sup>, or with UK Prime Minister David Cameron's formulation that “what President Putin is doing is indefensible and wrong”<sup>146</sup>

Later too, with the Minsk peace process underway, Erdoğan used soothing words. Apart from mentioning the Crimean Tatars he said: “about Russia's interference in Crimea, we directly told them [the Russians] that we cannot accept their claim that they “have historical rights there”. We also said this to dear Mr. Putin himself. [...] We shared our concerns with him. As Turkey, we are a member of NATO. Our thoughts on this point are already represented in the closing statement of the Cardiff summit.”<sup>147</sup>

The fact that the language by these officials is cautious also stands out when we study the report the Turkish state itself commissioned on Russia's violations of rights against Crimean Tatars from June 2015. The findings from the academicians' work in Crimea include many cases of unlawful treatment and intimidation of individuals, pressure on Tatar political, social and religious organisations and Tatar educational institutions, deteriorating acceptance of the Tatar language and forced adoption of Russian citizenship. Moreover, the writers declare that they were constantly hindered and disturbed in their reporting, with the authorities even informing them that they could not vouch for the safety of researchers who did not follow the official program.<sup>148</sup> But even though, as shown by the report, the Turkish government actually looked into the status of the Tatars, it did not press Russia hard on it.

By avoiding the confrontation with Russia, Kemal Kaya argued that “Turkey *de facto* accepted Crimea's absorption by Russia.”<sup>149</sup> Turkey's fear that a possible escalation would put military options on the agenda and would pressure it to make the choice to break with Russia, triggered only a tame response on the Tatar issue, notwithstanding

145 NATO, ‘Wales Summit Declaration’, 5 September 2014.

146 UK Government, ‘NATO Summit 2014: PM End of Summit Press Conference’, 5 September 2014.

147 Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, “ABD, Türkiye’ye Rağmen Silah Yardımı Yaptı”, 23 October 2014. Original quotation: “Ukrayna’daki gelişmelerin bizi ilgilendiren bir başka boyutu da Kırım boyutudur. Kırım’da Rusya’nın oraya el koyma konusu, ‘orada bizim tarihi haklarımız’ gibi yaklaşımlarını kabullenmediğimizi kendilerine ifade ettik. Bunu Sayın Putin’e de söyledik. [...] Bunlarla ilgili düşüncelerimizi kendileriyle paylaştık. Bizim Türkiye olarak, bir NATO ülkesiyiz.”

148 Zafer Üskül, Kırım Raporu: Rusya Federasyonu’nun Kırım’ı İlhakı Sonrasında Kırım Tatarlarının Durumu, 5 June 2015.

149 Kemal Kaya, ‘The Crimean Crisis: Turkey’s Priorities Differ from the Western Powers’, Turkey Analyst, 26 March 2014.

how much it fitted the neo-Ottoman discourse and the regional power narrative to stand up for this Crimean minority.

We saw in this section that Turkey followed NATO's line on Russia only partially, as it tried to preserve its economic interests and its conveniently balanced diplomatic relations with both the US and EU and Russia. Whereas Turkey had been vocally impeding the allies on the Libya issue, its non-conformity went silent in this instance. Still the Ukrainian crisis shows Turkey as an actor which is not afraid to act independently and to carefully weigh the will of the alliance versus its own benefits.

And thus Turkey joined the West in condemning Russia's actions against Ukraine, while at the same time aiming for increased economic cooperation with Russia. Of course, this phase lasted only for a limited time as Turkey's relations with Russia were deeply disrupted a year and a half later. Since the incident in December 2015 in which Turkey shot down a trespassing Russian military airplane at the Syrian-Turkish border, bilateral relations have been abysmal.

The Syrian Civil War, in which context this incident happened, formed another case for both Turkey and NATO. The aspect we will focus on is the role of the Syrian Kurds in this conflict and its consequences for Turkey's relations with NATO.

### 5.3. NATO support for the Kurds in Syria

One instance in which the Turkish national interests clash with the interests of the alliance revolves around the Kurdish issue. The case gives us interesting information on Turkey's view on NATO.

The militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), is fighting for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan in the southeast of Turkey, and has since it started its campaign 1984 almost constantly been in violent conflict with the Turkish state. Over the years, over 40.000 people have been killed in the conflict.<sup>150</sup> The peace process between Turkey and the PKK which started in 2013, collapsed in July 2015.

Although the PKK is regarded by NATO, the EU and the US as a terrorist organisation, support to Turkey from its allies has never been particularly high.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, as Kurdish

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150 'Turkish Forces Kill 32 Kurdish Militants in Bloody Weekend as Conflict Escalates', The Guardian, 11 January 2016.

151 Bulent Aliriza and Bulent Aras, U.S.-Turkish Relations: A Review at the Beginning of the Third Decade of the Post-Cold War Era (CSIS, November 2012), p. 11.



opposition groups in Syria, *not* considered by the West as terrorist, were relatively successfully fighting Daesh in the Syrian Civil War, Western countries were not too happy with Turkey's renewed military campaign against the separatist Kurds within its own borders. In late 2015 Şaban Kardaş from the Turkish strategic NGO ORSAM wrote: "Once again, Turkey has opted to rely largely on its own capacity in its traditional fight against PKK terrorism. Even though Turkey was displeased with some of its NATO allies' attitudes towards its fight against PKK, it conventionally refrained from carrying the issue into NATO's agenda, for it considered the problem as essentially domestic one."<sup>152</sup>

However, treating the Turkish-Kurdish conflict as a domestic insurgency proved impossible in the political context. The complicating factor is that the Kurdish issue in itself forms a transnational problem as the stateless Kurds live in parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Consequently, there are many linkages between the PKK in Turkey and Kurdish independence movements in the neighbouring countries. Moreover, the PKK has in the past often retreated beyond the Turkish borders. It was therefore that the Turkish army, in times of weakness of the Saddam Hussein regime, entered the north of Iraq in 'hot pursuit' in order to combat PKK forces.<sup>153</sup> In other instances, it had to deal with PKK training camps in Syria, supported by the Assad regime.<sup>154</sup>

But this all happened years before the Syrian Civil War. On the complicated Syrian battleground the largely Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have been successful in occupying large swaths of land in the north of the country. The YPG is considered the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which itself is an important force of the Kurdish Supreme Committee, the government of Syrian Kurdistan. With the retreat of the Assad regime from the Kurdish areas and with a *de facto* Kurdish administration in place instead, a Syrian Kurdish independent, or at least autonomous state has come close.

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<sup>152</sup> Şaban Kardaş, 'Fight Against Double Terrorism, NATO and Turkish Foreign Policy', ORSAM, 6 August 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Funda Keskin, 'Turkey's Trans-Border Operations in Northern Iraq: Before and after the Invasion of Iraq', *Research Journal of International Studies*, Issue 8 (2008), 59–75.

<sup>154</sup> Joost Jongerden, 'Dams and Politics in Turkey: Utilising Water, Developing Conflict', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010), 137–43 (p. 140); Altunışık and Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change*, p. 126.

Although NATO has been targeting Daesh with air strikes since September 2014, it has, not forgetting the long aftermath of the Afghanistan campaign, avoided putting forces on the ground. Of the local factions combating Daesh the YPG has been more successful than the other opposition groups or the Syrian and Iraqi regimes and is therefore an important strategic partner for NATO countries.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, some, generally leftist, Western media outlets frame the YPG as more secular and democratic than Turkey, making it a preferred partner for the West in the Middle East.<sup>156</sup> Although NATO members such as France and especially the US were aware of the fact that the strengthening of the Kurdish factions could lead to the splintering of Iraq and Syria (in a post-war situation), they have generally been positive about the YPG's progress.<sup>157</sup>

At the same time, Turkey has taken a very different perspective on the matter. It regards the YPG as the Syrian branch of the PKK and therefore as a terrorist organisation. After the Kurdish-Turkish peace process collapsed and the fighting in the southeast recommenced, the Turkish army started targeting the YPG as well. A particular intense series of bombardments of YPG positions in Syria began on 13 February 2016, including areas of Aleppo which recently had been taken from Islamist rebels.<sup>158</sup> While Western media cried foul, saying Turkey was undermining the fight against Daesh, Turkey maintained that its bombing was justified.

In a pro-nationalist article by ORSAM, published in the following weeks, we can trace several arguments that led Turkey to behaviour which directly contradicted the policies of other NATO countries. At the base is the assumption that the YPG is not just committed to the fight in Syria, but has larger ambitions which directly threaten Turkey: "the YPG does not respect borders. It sees the war that it fights in Syria as supportive for the fight in the four countries where Kurds live. The fact that the YPG's goals are not limited to Syria increases the security concerns of Turkey. These concerns are materialised in the examples of passing of arms, ammunition and fighters from Kamisli to Nusaybin, from Kobani to Suruc, and from Afrin to Hatay. According to

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<sup>155</sup> Aaron Stein and Michael Stephens, 'The YPG: America's New Best Friend?', Al Jazeera, 28 June 2015.

<sup>156</sup> Bernard-Henri Levy, 'Stop Calling Our Closest Allies Against ISIS "Terrorists"', The New Republic, 22 October 2014; Stanley Weiss, 'It's Time to Kick Erdogan's Turkey Out of NATO', The Huffington Post, 23 February 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Stein and Stephens, 'The YPG'.

<sup>158</sup> 'Turkey Shells YPG Targets in Northern Syria in Retaliation', Hürriyet Daily News, 13 February 2016.

the YPG's perspective, the fight in the north[, the southeast of Turkey,] can be supported more easily when the fight in Syria is over and the YPG gains political status."<sup>159</sup>

The West always maintained that the YPG is important for the fight against Daesh. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu confirmed at the NATO summit in Antalya in 2015 his concern with Daesh: "Turkey is the only member of the alliance to have borders with Daesh [...] It poses a significant threat to us."<sup>160</sup> At other occasions Turkey has made clear, however, that this is no reason to work together with the Syrian Kurds because to Turkey both Daesh and the YPG are as terrorist organisations equally unacceptable. Moreover, it argued that the YPG's fight against Daesh should not be taken seriously as it is merely a way to bolster its image in the West and a way to legitimise its occupations of the Syrian regions where Kurds do not live. Another concern is that the YPG will pass on not just weapons to the PKK, but also experienced soldiers with high campaign planning capacities. Finally, Turkey feels a special concern for lands captured by the YPG which are inhabited not by Kurds but by other groups such as Arabs and Turkmens.<sup>161</sup>

The Turkmens form an ethnical group which is close to the Turks. The special attention the AKP government is paying towards this group, not just in Syria, but in places as Iraq and Lebanon as well<sup>162</sup>, betray a particular concern with the Turkish nation, as opposed to the multinational Turkey that is being propagated in the regional power narrative. At first sight it may seem that we encounter here the Kemalist thinking in national unity, in which Turkey consisted of only Turks, and no other groups. This could explain why Turkmen, as Turkic kinsfolk around the Turkish border, are held in high esteem. However, this discourse on Turkmens, living outside of Turkey, actually also fits in a neo-Ottoman discourse. The fate of Turkmens can be invoked to refer to Turkey's historical and cultural ties with the region, underlining the regional power narrative. It enabled, for instance, Davutoğlu to declare to Turkmens during his visit in Lebanon: "You [Turkmens] are the bridge of friendship between Lebanon and Turkey.

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<sup>159</sup> Oytun Orhan, 'Why Does Turkey Hit PYD/YPG?', ORSAM, 3 March 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Jorge Benitez, 'Turkish Leaders Make Bold Statements at NATO Meeting', Atlantic Council, 2015.

<sup>161</sup> Orhan, 'Why Does Turkey Hit PYD/YPG?'

<sup>162</sup> Oytun Orhan, Turkey-Lebanon Friendship Bridge: The Turkish Presence and the Ottoman Heritage in Lebanon (ORSAM, 2015).

[...] When you are in peace and in prosperity, we are also at peace. Your problem is our problem.”<sup>163</sup>

The argument Turkey is making against the YPG in regard to the Syrian Turkmen does not fit into this line of thought though. The claims that the YPG is purposely harming Turkmen<sup>164</sup>, evoke the spirit of Turkish nationalism, and specifically one based on ethnicity. The threat for the Turkmen from the YPG is linked to the threat for the Turks from the PKK, highlighting the enduring national unity side of Turkey's strategic culture.

The validity of all these arguments is unclear at this point, because precise links between the PKK and YPG are hard to nail down. We can identify, however, that by actively opposing the YPG and legitimising it with these arguments, by early 2016 Turkey had gotten into a situation in which its own preferences came out against the NATO line.

To recognise that Turkey was truly opposing NATO here we should note that especially the US was vocal on trying to stop Turkey's actions against the Kurds in Syria and to move it in accordance with the rest of NATO.<sup>165</sup> Tellingly, the US State Department stated that the fighters of the YPG “are part of a number of groups that have been very effective in taking the fight against, or taking the fight, rather, to Daesh. [...] We still view YPG and PKK as two separate entities.”<sup>166</sup>

Nor the rhetoric of the NATO member states, nor the fact that these allies were actually providing arms and strategic support to the Syrian Kurds impressed the AKP government to change direction. Instead it kept challenging and trying to convince its allies. In one line of argument, AKP spokesman Ömer Çelik tried to establish that the YPG thanked its position in Syria to the support it got from the Assad regime. Instead of furthering the case of oppositional forces in Syria, he was implying, NATO support to

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163 Ibidem, p. 26.

164 ‘ABD-YPG İşbirliği Arap ve Türkmenleri Göçe Zorluyor’, Yeni Şafak, 3 June 2015; ‘Türkmen Köyüne Baskın’, Yeni Şafak, 17 June 2015.

165 Andrew Rettman, ‘Turkey Clashes with Allies over Attack on Syria Kurds’, EUobserver, 15 February 2016. Note that although NATO officially decided to strike against Daesh during the September 2014 NATO summit in Wales, the responsibility of the attack came to rely on some ‘core members’ led by the US. The campaign against Daesh is therefore, as said before, more a campaign executed by a ‘coalition of the willing’ than a full alliance effort.

166 ‘US State Department Emphasizes: “YPG and PKK Are Separate Entities”’, Aranews, 26 March 2016.

the Kurds would be welcomed by the loathed Syrian regime.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, proponents of the Turkish government also brought this together with the support for the YPG by the Russians (whose relations with both Turkey and NATO had hit a low point).<sup>168</sup>

Erdoğan harshly criticised the alliance on 17 February 2016: "Are we not together with the US and NATO? Are we your friend, or the YPG and PYD? [...] Let us know, so that we don't need to talk about these issues with you. A friend should do what friendships require. We would do anything for our friends, but the people who do not see us as their friend should make themselves known."<sup>169</sup> Cengiz Çandar, a prominent Turkish left-wing journalist, targeted the government over this attitude and analysed the situation in the following way:

"As a result of the erroneous policies of the current government, Turkey has failed to realise its plans in regards to the PYD and its 'symbolic' military force YPG in Syria. The struggle against the PYD and YPG has been pursued despite defying Washington. In a way, Turkey played game of "Either me, or him" in the 'political-diplomatic arena'. And, in this 'arena' it lost against Washington. The [Turkish] president, prime minister and the minister of the foreign affairs were all saying directly to Washington that "PYD, YPG, PKK are all same. They are terrorists. Choose us or them". And the Washington Foreign Affairs spokesmen were resisting Ankara by saying "We don't see it that way. In Syria they [the PYD] are our ally. We will keep supporting them."<sup>170</sup>

Note that the diplomatic dispute here is reduced to one between Turkey and the US, rather than the whole NATO alliance. According to Çandar, Turkey had positioned itself in a very non-cooperative way, pushing forward what it regarded as its national interests and pressuring the US to make a simplified "them or us" choice. After this quotation he went on arguing that the Turkish government would even instrumentalise the Daesh and separatist terrorist attacks in Turkey, to justify and propagate its

167 "PYD-YPG Suriye'de Esad Rejiminin Desteği İle Mevziler Elde Etti", AK Parti.org, 18 February 2016.

168 Mehmet Solmaz, 'Regime Troops, Russians, YPG Trying to Control Northern Syria in Coordinated Moves', Daily Sabah, 24 January 2016.

169 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Milletim Başkanlık İstemezse Öper Başımıza Koyarız', Habertürk, 17 February 2016. Original quotation: "Biz ABD ile NATO'da beraber değil miyiz? Sizin dostunuz biz miyiz, YPG, PYD mi? [...] Bilelim ki bu konuları sizle konuşmak zorunda kalmayalım. Dost, dostluğunun gereğini yapmalı. Biz dost bildiğimize gereğini yaparız, ama bizi dost olarak görmeyenler bunu açıkça ifade etsin."

170 Cengiz Çandar, 'Yurtta Iflas, Cihanda Iflas..', Radikal, 21 February 2016. Original quotation: "Türkiye, mevcut iktidarın akıl almaz yanlış politikaları sonucunda, Suriye'de siyasi planda PYD ve "simgesel" olarak ise onun askeri kolu sayılan YPG karşısında yenik düşmüştür. PYD ve YPG ile mücadele, aslında, Washington'a karşı verilmiştir. "Ya ben, ya o" biçiminde "siyasi-diplomatik arena"da yürütülmüştür. Ve, o "arena"da Washington'a karşı kaybedilmiştir. Cumhurbaşkanı, Başbakan, Dışişleri Bakanı, bir süredir Washington'u muhatap alarak "PYD, YPG, PKK'dır. Teröristtir. Ya ben, ya o" diyor; Washington ise Dışişleri sözcüleri aracılığıyla "Biz öyle görmüyoruz. Suriye'de müttefikimizdir. Desteklemeye devam edeceğiz" açıklamalarıyla Ankara'ya karşı koyuyordu."

foreign policy decisions by trying to prove its right on the YPG to the US. In Çandar's opinion, Turkey's harsh approach alienates it from its allies and weakens its international position. All this would attest to how far Turkey was willing to go to contest the alliance consensus.

In terms of strategic culture, we observe behaviour in Turkey's foreign policy that fits the tendencies that we described before. Following the self-confidence that we encountered in the regional power narrative, we saw Turkey act independently from its allies. Although Turkey shared NATO's rejection of the Assad regime and has been collaborating with the general effort to destroy Daesh (both in line with its own interests), it opted for an independent course in the case of the Syrian Kurds, as it found its concerns for its national security too important to sacrifice for the sake of consensus within the alliance. It can of course be expected that any member state would lobby for its own strategic preferences, but the stubbornness of the Turkish position and especially the fact that in February 2016 it actively started to target the YPG in Syria is something which stands out.

## 6. Conclusions

In this thesis we have examined recent developments in Turkey's strategic culture and their manifestations and consequences in the context of Turkey's NATO membership. Early in the Davutoğlu years, we encountered his 'zero problems with neighbours' policy and the launch of NATO's new Strategic Concept in 2010. We next studied the cases of Libya, Ukraine and Syria for manifestations of the increasing importance of the regional power narrative in Turkey's strategic culture.

On 5 May 2016 Davutoğlu announced his resignation, allegedly after losing a power struggle with president Erdoğan. With the sudden end of his political career, we can regard this event as the end of an era. We analysed Davutoğlu's ideas on international politics and Turkey's 'natural' geopolitical position, and it is clear that these ideas are very much in line with the behaviour we have seen in our case studies. While it was not him alone who shaped Turkey's thinking on foreign policy, we can be sure that with his departure others will come who will put their own mark on his ideas or who might take Turkey's foreign policy in a different direction.

However, it is also evident that Davutoğlu's influence fits with the more general developments of Turkey's strategic culture. Although the years that he was advisor to

the AKP government, and subsequently foreign minister and prime minister, marked a decisive shift for Turkey abroad, we have also seen that the move away from the early-Republican thinking on international politics and its narrative of national unity had already been in motion since at least the times of the Özal governments of the 1980s.

Still the Davutoğlu years might proof the most decisive period, which marked particularly strong changes in Turkey's strategic culture and which saw the country make headway to take up its role as a regional power.

In paragraph 2 we first examined theories on the concept of strategic culture. As noted there, our study does not yield us any solid forecasting on the future of Turkey's foreign politics. However, we did find that by analysing Turkey's strategic culture we can gain a certain range of probable behaviour. The national unity narrative and the regional power narrative, which we traced in paragraph 3 on the history of Turkey's strategic culture, and the ratio between these two, formed important points of reference which we used later in our case studies. By concluding at the end of the paragraph that the regional power narrative had come to play a more important role in recent years, we could better place Turkey's actions in NATO in the broader context of its foreign policy. Turkey's NATO membership, as we saw in chapter 4, was an anchor of its affiliation with the West, and in a way a monument of Turkey's 'old' foreign policy. The assumption is that if the regional power narrative has penetrated Turkey's thinking on security even here, the shift in strategic culture must have come a far way. While looking at Turkey's evaluation of the new Strategic Concept and the 60th anniversary of its membership to the alliance, we noticed that in Turkey's official discourse its steadfast dedication to NATO is still very much alive. Signs of regional balancing or an assertive, independent policy were limited. In the subsequent case studies, however, we saw that in practical situations Turkey uses different rhetoric and behaves differently.

While I have tried to be careful not to just deterministically interpret any difference of opinion between Turkey and its NATO allies as a sign of the regional power narrative at work, I believe that I have shown that in many of the cases underlying relations with Turkey's changing strategic culture new foreign policy course do exist. Turkey has become more self-confident and has launched many foreign policy initiatives, revealing a daring to play an independent, regional role. In our case studies we saw that this

also includes that Turkey is confident to stand up against its NATO allies when it regards its own interests as different.

Libya formed an interesting case because it showed Turkey, pressured by the international setting at the time, ambitiously set out to stand up against Western imperialism. Even though we saw that its exact strategies, related to its sudden importance during the Arab Spring, were hard to follow, the Libyan Civil War formed an instance of a Turkish foreign policy which was heavily based on the belief that it could play an important role as a regional power. Consequently its initiatives did not align at all with the plans of (some of) its NATO allies. Even though Turkey withdrew its opposition and even joined operation Unified Protector, the rhetoric with which it initially disregarded its allies, indicates how Turkey views itself within alliance. In the face of the independent, self-interest driven regional power narrative, Turkey might have used the alliance in some instances, when it aligns with its interests. When it does not align, it does not just abstain or oppose a policy, but will not hesitate to actively, publicly campaign the opposite.

In the case of Ukraine Turkey did follow the other NATO countries in speaking out its support for Ukraine, but only to such an extent that it could still preserve the ties with Russia which it cared about. Moreover, it did not refrain from actually profiting from the economic sanctions the other NATO countries imposed on Russia in order to strengthen its own economic position.

Turkey has confronted its allies most headstrong in the case of the Syrian Kurds. We saw that whereas NATO, headed by the US, regarded the YPG as essential allies against Daesh, Turkey has been very vocal in denouncing the group for its ties with the PKK. As this issue is the one we examined which is closest to home, the stakes are, understandably, higher for Turkey. Still, the persistence with which it has not just differed with NATO but has also tried to convince NATO of its rightness, demonstrates Turkey's conviction that it can and should decide on international issues by its own strength. The case was therefore a good indicator of how Turkey's new principles on security can strain its relation with NATO.

Along the way we also saw that the heritage of the Ottoman Empire appeared as a factor in Turkey's actions, at the same time driving policy makers and being employed as a tool by these politicians. In the rhetoric on Ukraine, it was rather the fate of Crimean Tatars than the concerns of NATO strategists that appeared to worry Turkey.



Likewise, Turkey presented itself as a pre-eminent mediator in Libya and as protector of the Turkmens in Syria, partly on the premise that it had historical connections with these peoples. These are signs of the different view Turkey gained on foreign matters, as strongly identifying itself with the former empire.

NATO counts among its members several countries with strong independent foreign policies, including the US, the UK and France. Turkey's reliance on the Ottoman Empire -a former great power- includes different aspects though. By approaching the Western alliance from the angle of the Ottoman outsider, which had always been regarded awkward at the Concert of Europe, Turkey may also place itself outside of the alliance. We saw that while Turkey's foreign policy 'expansion' to other regions such as the Middle East or Russia might fit the foreign policy of a matured regional power, the way it has been pursuing this goal has made for continuing clashes with NATO.

By analysing this problem through the scope of strategic culture theories, this thesis shows that it is very likely that Turkey and NATO will continue to encounter conflicts such as the ones examined in paragraph 5. Turkey's strategic culture has evolved into such a form, that it has a strong tendency to tackle foreign policy issues unilaterally or together with casual partners. As the regional power narrative gains dominance, belonging to an alliance such as NATO is increasingly a tool which might be employed to further Turkey's interests, but can also easily be put aside when the circumstances are not fitting. This is obviously an attitude that will not be appreciated by some of the NATO members.

That being said, we cannot be sure in what direction Turkey's internal developments and the turbulent geopolitical times are going to push the country. Changes in strategic culture are a slow process, but at the moment we can see how the strengthening regional power narrative is transforming Turkey's position. Developments to watch are the way how Turkey's leaders will be treating Davutoğlu's foreign policy legacy, and how developments in Turkey's political system, such as the new constitution which is in the works and a strong presidential system, for which Erdoğan has been lobbying, will influence the direction Turkey is moving.

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