

China–Turkey Relations from the Perspective of Neoclassical Realism

Mustafa Cüneyt Özşahin¹ , Federico Donelli² 
and Riccardo Gasco³ 

Abstract

There is plenty of studies focusing on China's global outreach through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In tandem with this, the extensive literature on China depicts it as the next hegemon to succeed in the USA. Along this line, flourishing ties with various Asian nations, including the Middle Eastern countries, as a result of China's recent foreign policy activism has been addressed extensively. While most research has been stressing the rising assertiveness of China in world politics, only a limited number of studies have touched upon the responses from middle or small powers against China's ascent. Drawing from neoclassical realism, this article contends two levels of analysis for delineating the interaction between Turkey, a middle power, and China, a rising great power. First, the exchange between Turkey and the USA is vital in determining the cordial relations between Turkey and China. Alteration in the American policy vis-à-vis Turkey in the wake of the Arab Spring is relevant to Turkey's growing relations with China. Second, is the rising anti-Westernism of foreign policy elites as part of the alteration in the strategic culture of Turkish politics, which makes Turkey's rapprochement with China possible. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these two levels are intertwined and feed each other. Consequently, employing a neoclassical realist approach, the article argues that the middle powers' stance against a rising hegemon is conditional upon the bilateral relations with the current hegemon and peculiarities of domestic politics.

Keywords

Turkey, China, Belt and Road Initiative, neoclassical realism, strategic culture, AKP

¹ Department of Political Science and International Relations, Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya, Turkey

² Department of Political Science, University of Genoa, Genoa, Italy

³ School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, United Kingdom

Corresponding author:

Mustafa Cüneyt Özşahin, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya 42090, Turkey.
E-mail: mustafacuneytozsahin@gmail.com

Introduction

There is a widespread consensus that the international system is going through a period of structural change distinguished by the rise of China, a new great power able to challenge the American leadership. The Sino-American competition would reflect a pattern of recurring international system dynamics: hegemonic or power transition. Recently, the peaceful rise argument¹ rebuffed with the development in Chinese foreign policy with the tenure of Xi Jinping (Chang-Liao, 2018; Chang-Liao, 2019; Layne, 2020). The reconfiguration of the economic and political environment resulting from the rising of China has uncertain implications for other small and middle powers, especially for their relations with the United States.

According to some studies, during the transition of great powers, others, especially middle powers, are led to group themselves into two large coalitions between those who back the power in decline and those who support the challenger. Over the past few years, Turkey, a middle power² with historical, political, and economic ties to the USA and the West, would seem to be taking stances increasingly akin to China. Indeed, despite China's rising influence in the Middle East, Turkey has not opted to counteract the Chinese initiatives in the region. On the contrary, Turkey has unexpectedly sought to cement ties with Beijing since the late 2010s. Turkey–China relations seem to have gained momentum in recent years following Turkey's straining ties with the Western bloc (Kumar, 2013). The reasons behind Turkey's recent overture to China still needs to be addressed. What has driven the decisions of Turkish policymakers? Are the gains of such a policy real or only perceived?

Despite a good amount of scholarly work describing current Turkey–China relations, very few studies prove a theoretical framework that extends beyond anecdotal explanations. By analyzing the way Sino-Turkish relations have developed over the last two decades, the article seeks to problematize the choices of the middle power's policymakers. This study contends that middle powers have no predetermined behavior toward the rising great power or challenger. Instead, it argues that the structure of the international environment and the domestic politics of a particular middle power together shape the strategy of that state in the course of power transition. In other words, the main hypothesis is that the determinants should be traced in the constant interaction between international and domestic politics. Accordingly, Turkey's rapprochement with China can be better explored through the prism of neoclassical realism, which allows grasping the intertwining of domestic and systemic dimensions.

Therefore, to unfold the dynamics behind Turkey's foreign policy behavior within the new global context, one ought to look at the two levels of analysis.³ First, relations between the hegemon (the USA) and the middle power (Turkey) are of significance in shaping the relations of the latter with the challenger (China). Accordingly, in the present case, it is maintained that Turkey's policy toward China largely hinges on the shape of Turkey–US relations. Second, in addition to the American posture toward Turkey, the growing anti-Westernism in

Turkey's domestic environment has given rise to seeking alternative venues for foreign policy.

Given all these considerations, this research is sub-divided into three sections. Where the first section outlines the main historical steps of Turkey–China relations, the second assesses the relevance of neoclassical realist's theoretical framework in addressing Turkey–China relations to explain Turkish foreign policy behavior during the global power transition. Following this, last section make some inferences concerning middle power-rising global power relations in light of overlapping structural and domestic factors. Thus, the research aim is twofold: to contribute to the emerging literature on the Sino-Turkish relations and to provides insight on how a middle or secondary power behaves during a great power transition.

The Initial Periods in Turkey–China Relations: Engaging with the Dragon

Until now, a strong strand of literature has overly stressed China's global expansion with a specific emphasis on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), meaning that the bulk of these studies contextualize the issue from the perspective of hegemonic transition. The rising Chinese influence in the Middle East and growing rapport between China and Middle Eastern states are well articulated from the Chinese perspective. Nevertheless, only a few studies draw attention to the responses from the middle and small powers vis a vis the changing global landscape. There is vast research on the global resurgence of China and its regional effects. For many studies, China is far from being a threat to global order yet a "responsible shareholder" in the liberal world order (Johnston, 2003; Xiang, 2001). Liberal pundits such as Ikenberry argue that China is a part of the liberal world order rather than the opposite (Ikenberry, 2008). However, on the other hand, a more realist tradition highlights that it is indispensable for China to assert its hegemony sooner or later (Mearsheimer, 2010, 2014). Also, it is well addressed that China is preponderant power in East Asia that made itself evident in regional affairs. In this regard, China has been adopting a "strategic, development-oriented approach" toward the neighboring small states (Tiang Boon & Ardy, 2017, p. 129).

However, it should be noted that China attempts to expand its influence beyond East Asia by fostering ties with Middle Eastern nations, including Turkey. On this account, more Middle East-focused inquiries address China's role in the Middle East with a particular focus on China's economic and energy-motivated foreign policy.⁴ However, research on this topic has been exclusively focusing on China's perspective, only limited emphasis on regional middle and small powers have been put so far. No doubt that such a caveat can also be detected in China–Turkey relations as did other middle and small powers.

China and Turkey have a long history traced back to ancient times. The literature regarding the blinkers between Turks and Chinese in East Asia portrays

Hun Turks and Chinese as arch enemies. However, historical records reveal that two entities were first encountered during the Tang dynasty (Fidan, 2016). In a more recent period, the Ottoman–Chinese interaction returned to the Abdülaziz era in terms of connection with Turkestan and subsequently Abdülhamit II-era centering on the orchestrating of the Chinese Muslims in the region (Ersoy, 2008, pp. 57–58). Scholarship on Sino-Turkish diplomatic relations, on the other hand, addresses relatively late history by particularly focusing on the aftermath of the Turkish Republic. Formal diplomatic ties date back to 1971, when the relations were established (Çolakoğlu 2015, p. 7; Kumar, 2013, p. 134).⁵ Bilateral relations henceforth continued in a low profile for a long period.

During the earlier period of the Cold War, Turkey–China relations were shaped in the shade of ideological rivalry. Drawing from structural realism, Çolakoğlu stresses the role of systemic pressures that shape the trajectory of China–Turkey relations during the Cold War to a large extent. For example, between 1950 and 1970, “anti-communist solidarity” has a crucial bearing on Turkey–China relations. As such, Turkey sought to form diplomatic relations with Japan, Taiwan/Republic of China, and South Korea against pro-communist states (Çolakoğlu, 2012, pp. 129–133). On the other hand, China attempted to reach most of the developing countries through its radio broadcast as part of propaganda operations. Radio Peking’s Turkish section was one of those endeavors targeting Turkey, which took effect in 1957 (Üngör, 2012). After the 1970s, on the other hand, relations gained momentum between the two sides with the easing tension between the USA and China (Çolakoğlu, 2012, p. 134).

Another factor enabling Turkey’s rapprochement with China stems from conjectural crises with the West. It is a widely stressed fact that one of the structural determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy (hereafter, TFP) is its western orientation. Nevertheless, there were occasions when Turkey strayed away from such a unidirectional foreign policy. For example, the Cyprus issue, one of the momentous occasions in TFP, paved the way for the emergence of versatile foreign policy with a more independent character in the 1970s. Accordingly, this enabled Turkey to engage with a myriad of Third World countries, many of which had earlier on, never been in its foreign policy agenda (Çolakoğlu, 2012, p. 134). Added to this, during the 1980s, not only economic ties flourished, but also diplomatic exchanges accelerated between parties.

Therefore, President Kenan Evren’s visit to China in 1982 is not a coincidence as bilateral relations kicked off with this visit. Even though the US–China rapprochement remained a significant determinant in TFP, other international factors became decisive in Turkey’s novel diplomacy toward China. Turkey, for instance, has paid special attention to boost diplomatic relations due to China’s permanent membership in the UN (Çolakoğlu, 2012, p. 138; Çolakoğlu, 2015, p. 8). However, there have also been certain drawbacks stemming from the Uyghur minority in China. China–Turkey relations strained because of so-called Turkish support to and of being a safe-haven for Uyghur separatists. Because of the multiple crises arose from the Uyghur issue, bilateral relations were far from being cordial during the 1990s (Çolakoğlu, 2012, p. 139; Çolakoğlu, 2015, pp. 12–14; Ergenc, 2015, pp. 295–296). As such, both sides applied diplomatic

measures to have their interlocutor retreat. Nevertheless, Western denial to sell weapons to Turkey due to its human rights violation in its conflict with Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê; PKK) initiated a new round of cooperation within the realm of the defense industry in the 1990s (Guo, 2017, p. 78; Kumar, 2013, p. 134). To sum up, despite certain political disagreements between China and Turkey, relations based on economic and military exchanges between the two parties were sustained.

With the demise of the threat of communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey–China relations diversified, encompassing economic, military, and cultural dimensions, although the economy was the building block of bilateral ties. With the emergence of China as an economic power and export hub in international trade, economic relations started to occupy an exclusive place (see, Atlı, 2011; Temiz, 2020). In this regard, while China was initially perceived as a massive market for Turkish exports while from the Chinese perspective, Turkey was considered to be a big market located in a strategic position between Asia and Europe (Çolakoğlu, 2010; Çolakoğlu, 2015, p. 8). Nevertheless, Atlı (2011, p. 111) points out that even though there was rising “trade volume” between the parties, the “trade deficit” also rose for Turkey. Similarly, Temiz expressed that there has been an “asymmetrical interdependence” mostly because of the “competitive advantage” of China (Temiz, 2020).

Turkish–Chinese Rapprochement During the 2000s: Reassessing the AKP Period

As opposed to differences between China and Turkey, mostly due to the Uyghur issue during the 1990s, relations gained momentum, which coincided with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). Apart from Chinese infrastructure mega-projects in Turkey, another step that is planned to move economic relations to another level is, for sure, the renowned Chinese project One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative (also known as Belt and Road Initiative or BRI) as part of a New Silk Road (Chaziza, 2016, p. 276; Ergenc, 2015, p. 191; Guo, 2017, p. 70; Lavi & Lindenstrauss, 2016, pp. 123–124). Furthermore, as stressed by Işık and Zou, Turkey–China rapprochement further intensified with Xi Jinping's prominent BRI and the “Middle Corridor” approach put forward in 2010 (Isik & Zou, 2019, pp. 286–287). Moreover, on 5 August 2019, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that Turkey initiated a new opening called the “Asia Anew” initiative. Before this move, Turkey had stepped up its effort by launching new embassies and joining multilateral organizations, including Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner and ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner (Alperen & Ersoy, 2019; Çolakoğlu, 2019a).

Despite the fact that there are multiple reasons to account for Turkey–China rapprochement, two primary motivations enable relations between two states. First, putting aside the transformation of China's grand strategy from being a regional to global one,⁶ there are other determinants stemming from alterations in Turkey's friend–enemy definitions. Although Turkey de-securitized its relations

with its neighbors under the dictum of “zero problems,” it generally deemed a historical moment as a deviation from the established foreign policy tradition (Walker, 2007). However, subsequent domestic (rising anti-westernism) and international developments (deteriorating relations with the West and the rise of China) changed the course of TFP in the following years.

Given the advancements mentioned above, it should not be wrong to claim that the Ankara–Beijing dimension gained a new face, especially after Turkey’s worsening economic condition. That is to say that Turkey was tormented with economic deprivation with low growth and high inflation rates, which necessitated seeking new financial sources to ensure its economic growth. Because of the bedeviled relations with the West, China emerged as an alternative route for financial needs as well. According to the Anatolian Agency, Turkey plans to receive a US\$10 billion loan from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) for infrastructure and energy projects (Aliyev, 2018). However, Turkish–China relations are, by no means, restricted to economy, and both sides give signals of the establishment of security cooperation in recent years. As such, since the Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Turkey, which took place in 2010, bilateral relations intensified with “high-level dialogue on military cooperation,” joint military training, and negotiation over arms exports (Isik & Zou, 2019, pp. 285–286). Particularly, Turkey’s search for an air defense system and the transfer of military technology became pivotal for the Turkish–Chinese relations instead of economic relations dominating bilateral dialogue between two states.

As Kumar stresses deterioration of relations with the USA and EU, especially on the issues of sanctions and arms transfers, compels Turkey to seek new partners (Kumar, 2013, p. 134). It should also be noted that Chinese and Russian companies emerged as potential arms dealers against the USA and European alternatives, most of whose government suspended military arms sales to Turkey, which further alienated Turkey from the West. Turkey’s venture into purchasing missile defense system FD-2000, also known as HQ-9 from the Chinese military firm CPMEIC (Guo, 2017, pp. 69–70), was mostly regarded as another sign of Ankara’s detachment from the West. However, Xiaoli argues that Turkey’s purchasing of the Chinese missile system was not just based on mere military consideration but was also a “leverage” vis-à-vis NATO and its western allies (Guo, 2017, pp. 86–87).

Similarly, Chaziza stresses that “Beijing has the potential to provide Ankara with great economic, political and strategic opportunities as well as military technology, and to afford it a certain degree of leverage vis-a-vis Washington in its policy choices” (Chaziza, 2016, p. 278). Although Turkey’s venture into buying the Chinese air defense system failed (Onuş, 2015), Russia–Turkish military dialogue, on the other hand, ended with an agreement to purchase S-400 missile system, which was being delivered in 2019 (*Reuters*, 2019). Corollary to this, such a prospect for military cooperation stirred tension between NATO members and Turkey. As a long-time NATO member, Turkey’s military endeavors were seen as adventurism leading to a potential threat to the US-led Western conventional security order. In response to the purchase of S-400 systems from Russia, Ankara was expelled from the F-35 program, where it had been one of the long-standing partners (*Deutsche Welle*, 2019a).

In addition to this, one of the tools employed by the AKP government to resolve the financial crisis has been swap arrangements with China and the first swap deal was signed in 2012. Following this, it was prolonged for three years until 2015 and fully realized in 2016. The swap deal was renewed in 2019 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).⁷ The two sides developed ties in health diplomacy during the COVID 19 pandemic. Turkey opted for the Chinese Sinovac vaccine by sidelining the USA and EU-based alternatives despite concerns over its efficiency. However, it has come to light that delays in vaccine deliveries were a step by China to force Ankara's cooperation over the extradition of Uighurs (Tavşan, 2021). Arguably, the accelerated economic and military exchange between the two sides had repercussions over time, including Turkey's retreat from its traditional guardianship role for the Uighur minority. Beijing and Ankara signed an extradition treaty in 2017 that was ratified Chinese National People's Congress in 2020 (*Euro News*, 2020). Moreover, Chinese authorities had occasionally warned Turkey over the Uighur issue by emphasizing its increasing economic dependence on Beijing (*Euro News*, 2019).

Neoclassical Realism: A Framework for Analysis

Over the last two decades, neoclassical realism, whose purpose is to investigate the states' foreign policy, has become one of the most widespread approaches to studying international relations. Drawing from the founding names of classical realists, neoclassical realist critiques neorealism thoroughly (Quinn, 2013). Notwithstanding this critique, neoclassical realism upholds power distribution in international system/structure as its base for its analysis (Rathbun, 2008, p. 297; Rynning, 2001, p. 90; Taliaferro et al., 2009, pp. 20–21). While neoclassical realists acknowledge the dominant role of the international system over units, they highlight domestic politics as intervening variables that ought to be taken into consideration (Donelli 2020, p. 226; Kitchen, 2010; Rose, 1998, pp. 146, 152–154). Consequently, it can be argued that the principal claim of neoclassical realism is that foreign policy output is the consequence of the complex exchange between state level and structural factors.

Second, neoclassical realism interrogates the primacy of the balance of power assumption of the neorealist theory of IR. In contrast to neorealism, neoclassical realism does not take the balance of power behavior as a rule of thumb by emphasizing under-balancing as a foreign policy behavior as common as the balancing (Schweller, 2004, p. 164; Taliaferro, 2000, p. 135). Unlike neorealism, neoclassical realism offers a theoretical framework for states' foreign policy other than giving a structural insight based on power distribution (Wohlforth, 2008, p. 35). Thus, it clarifies the above-mentioned anomalies in the balancing behavior of middle and small powers contrary to the pre-given patterns of neorealist schools. For these reasons, a body of literature utilized neoclassical realism to account for middle and small powers' foreign policy behaviors.⁸

Neoclassical realists specifically highlight that states follow foreign policies based on their perception of power distribution and the nature of threats. In this

context, domestic variables stand out as crucial explanatory shedding light on variants of foreign policy outputs in neoclassical realism. Hence, neoclassical realism aims to revise neorealism with the inclusion of the state level, which is construed as a black box by neorealists. To put it differently, neoclassical realists revise the systemic holism of neo-realists by incorporating actor-centered specificities (Finel, 2001). Neoclassical realists' another recurring topic is the relationship between state leaders or the foreign policy executive (FPE) and the people. From a neoclassical realist perspective, state leaders or FPE exist at the interface of the international/structural and the domestic layers. Accordingly, foreign policy decisions were not made in a vacuum and the FPE are crucial actors in decision-making processes (Lobell, 2009; Saltzman, 2015, p. 502). Hence, in this line, it can be maintained that decision-makers' worldviews have a strong bearing on foreign policy decisions (Mowle, 2003). Significantly, "complex threat assessment" of decision-makers factors systemic, sub-state and domestic level threat perceptions into the analysis (Lobell, 2009, pp. 46–54).

Moreover, in parallel to the general tendency to combine constructivist and realist approaches in IR (Barkin, 2003; Jackson & Nexon, 2004; See also Nau, 2002 neoclassical realists also underline the perspectives over constraints and opportunities of the international system by incorporating culture, identity and norms in their analysis (Kitchen, 2010; Sterling-Folker, 2009). The ideational factors such as nationalism are particularly useful because they render decision-makers to "extract, mobilize, and direct societal resources and cultivate support among its power base" (Taliaferro et al., 2009, p. 38). To summarize, the neoclassical theory considers the foreign policy behavior of the states as a correlation of external factors as influenced by, or in the function of, some internal intervening factors.

Turkey–China Relations Through the Prism of Neoclassical Realists

Emphasizing the role of state-level factors, strategic assessment and policymakers' perception, neoclassical realism advances a two-level theory of foreign policy. As a result, foreign policy behavior is determined by a constant strain between domestic and international spheres. Domestic policy factors and assessments may lead FPEs or leaders to take peculiar actions in the international context. In some cases, what represents a challenge from an international perspective is perceived as an opportunity at a domestic level and vice versa. To understand the prospects for Sino-Turkish relations, it is necessary to analyze the rationales that lead Turkish FPEs to view China as either an opportunity or a challenge. The neoclassical analytical framework enables the examination of two variables which are considered crucial to understanding the Turkish choice of approaching Beijing: the relationship between the dominant power in decline (US) and the middle power (Turkey) during the phases of structural change; and the transformation of the strategic culture of Turkish FPEs. The international

environment, as well as the relative power, determine the room for maneuver of a middle power. Strategic culture, on the other hand, clarifies how the middle power intends to exploit that space.

The article argues that domestic political considerations have driven Turkey's move to boost relations with China alongside the systemic incentives. The Sino-Turkish relations should be understood within the broader framework of TFP, which has gone through multiple changes since the beginning of the new millennium. With the rise of AKP, Turkey emerged as an "emerging regional power," claiming a new role in the international system (Parlar Dal, 2016). Arguably, this is closely related to the reduced US engagement in the Middle East that began during the Obama administration and perpetuated during the Trump administration (Yom, 2020). Accordingly, consistent throughout the last two decades has been the purpose of the Turkish FPEs: the increase of Turkey's international status with the changing global balance in the late 2000s. In this context, the means used to achieve this goal have been the diversification of economic and political relations and increased autonomy in foreign policy (Oğuzlu, 2018, pp. 128–129).

Meanwhile, one of the distinctive traits of the modern Middle East has remained unchanged: the high permeability to external influences. In this regard, Washington's de-prioritization of the region has generated a space partially filled by Russia and China (Oğuzlu, 2018, p. 129). China's increased presence alongside Russia in the region can be regarded as the harbinger of a changing security environment in the Middle East. However, it is difficult to predict whether this change will be permanent or ephemeral. Consequently, Middle Eastern states, most of which have strong political and security ties with the USA, have crafted strategies to reposition themselves within this emerging environment.

The Status of Secondary States During Great Power Transition

During the great power transition, the attitude of middle powers is an important issue to be examined but still understudied. Especially, the nexus among secondary state-hegemon power and rising power is crucial in determining the foreign policy behavior of the secondary states. By emphasizing the economic power hub, Ikenberry argues that middle states have been vacillating between China as an economic power and the USA as a security provider in the East Asian context (Ikenberry, 2016). Investigating the relationship between great power (China) and middle power (Iran), Conduit and Akbarzade emphasize that middle powers can be an asset as potential allies against the hegemonic force, but at the same such a coalition can also carry a danger of pushing great power into a conflict with the hegemon (Conduit & Akbarzadeh, 2019). On the other hand, Lebow, Jesse, and Williams highlight the influence of hegemonic power on systemic and sub-systemic levels as well as the role of rising powers in a particular region in determining the secondary and tertiary states' foreign policy behavior (Lobell et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, none of the studies hitherto mentioned exclusively emphasize the role of domestic factors. In contrast with the previous literature, Gilley and

O’Neil state that “generating hypotheses about the specific content of the middle power behavior depends not only on the nature of the international system but also on distinctive domestic, political, economic and cultural conditions that are present in the ranks of middle powers” (Gilley & O’Neil 2014, p. 9). Departing from this viewpoint, Gilley investigates the dynamics at China (rising power)—Canada (middle power)—the United States (hegemonic power) triangle and concludes that the US–Canada relations were resistant to any change not only because of ‘structural interests’ of these two states but also the normative commonalities based on liberal values in the face of rising power, China (Gilley, 2011). In parallel to the point raised above, Umut Aydın (2021) argues that emerging middle powers may renounce the traditional roles they were expected to play in defense of the international liberal order. By contrast, they might become disruptive forces in respect of the global liberal order due to deteriorating democratic freedoms in their own backyard. He sheds light on this point by referring to Turkey and Mexico as two antagonists of the values and institutions underpinning the international liberal order (Aydın, 2021).

It is imperative to look into Turkey–US relations in the post-Arab Spring to grasp Turkey–China relations. Turkey and the USA have historically gone through up-and-down phases. Nevertheless, Ankara and Washington could cope with them until recently because none of the incidents had affected the tie at its core. The international environment was also instrumental in overcoming tensions. Especially from the Turkish perspective, both during the Cold War and in the following two decades, the systemic structure offered no realistic alternative to the relationship with the USA. Yet during the first decade of the AKP government, the two countries found common ground for cooperation within the framework of the so-called American Greater Middle East Initiative (Yurdusev, 2006). Therefore, the renewed Turkish ambitions and the quest for greater autonomy in regional politics did not generate tensions with the US ally.

However, these ties were deteriorated in the following years due to deep divergences on two issues: the Syrian crisis and the 15 July coup attempt. Turkey’s assertive approach to the region based on soft power took a new form after the eruption of the Arab Spring, which was seen as a window of opportunity for AKP elites (Özpek & Demirağ, 2014). As the Syrian crisis worsened, Turkey blamed the USA for not supporting its policy of counterbalancing the influence of Iran and Russia, both of which strove to keep disintegrating Assad’s rule intact (Altunışık, 2020; Đidić & Kösebalaban, 2019; Ovalı & Özdikmenli 2020, pp. 115–116). The strain between Washington and Ankara deflagrated with the advance of the Islamic State into Syrian soil. The USA opted to engage in a war of proxy by supporting Kurdish fighters, including the People’s Protection Units (YPG). Turkey considers these militias as the Syrian branch of the banned terrorist organization PKK.⁹ The American support for the YPG was a breaking point in the Turkey–US relationship (Ovalı & Özdikmenli, 2020, p. 115). To counter the influence of the YPG, which Turkey considers a main national security threat, Turkish FPEs opted to form issue-oriented alignment on the ground with Russia and Iran through the Astana process (Cengiz, 2019).

The second incident that further strained the relations was the attitude of US decision-makers following the failed coup attempt of 2016. The late and meager American response led to disappointment among the AKP political elite and significant parts of the Turkish public. Furthermore, the US decision to refuse the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, considered by Turkish authorities to be responsible for the coup, has increased mistrust toward the long-standing ally (Kanat, 2020). Moreover, the official narrative of the failed coup has progressively encapsulated anti-Western rhetoric that, as we will see in the next section, has driven Turkey closer to China. Similarly, Turkey–EU dialogue came to a halt in 2016 after the opposition from Cyprus and France due to Turkey’s refusal to abandon its legal commitments concerning Cyprus and French regulations over the accession process, respectively (Directorate of EU Affairs, 2019). Furthermore, Turkey was harshly criticized by the EU due to its human rights violations committed against journalists, political activists, and academics. As of 2019, the tension between the two sides escalated to a new level that the European Parliament brought up the suspension of Turkey’s membership into the debate (*Deutsche Welle*, 2019b). Moreover, both the USA and the EU resorted to the sanction threat over Turkey’s purchase of S-400 and Turkish activism in the Mediterranean energy scramble (Norman et al., 2020).

In the face of the rising tensions with both the USA and the EU, Turkey drifted into isolation, impelling it to seek new partners. Unsurprisingly, China as the challenger to the American leadership emerged as one of the most favorable options Turkey would consider. As mentioned, there is a body of literature on global power transition giving a specific emphasis on the rise of China. Also, this line of research also dovetailed with the end of the American hegemony debate. It is well-addressed that China is shaking the US hegemony in East Asia (Ikenberry, 2004).

Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to argue that China’s global ambitions expanded well beyond its near abroad. According to Chaziza, China has been soft balancing the USA rather than hard balancing in the Middle East for some time now (Chaziza, 2014). On the other hand, Chang highlights that China became more visible than ever in the Middle East, especially after the Arab Spring with the Syrian crisis (Chang, 2014). China’s regional agenda, known as the “1+2+3 Strategy,” was introduced in 2014 to build new cooperative relationships with all regional actors based on three dimensions or pillars: energy, investment and trade (Fulton, 2020). Like other regional players, Turkish FPEs saw the growing Chinese footprint as an opportunity to diversify their trade relations. Although China has come to the forefront as a rising great power with huge economic potential, it became more complicated to establish trade synergies for Turkey due to several reasons: First, the trade deficit between the two sides reached a record level in favor of China (Atlı, 2011, pp. 109–111; Çetingüleç, 2019; Dellios & Yilmaz, 2008, pp. 17–18). Second, the growing presence of Chinese companies in third-party contexts such as Africa threatens to reduce further space for Turkish companies (Sano, 2018).

The rise of China and the simultaneous American decline have created a more permissive international environment. The structural change has given a chance to

status-seeking middle powers such as Turkey to implement more enterprising behavior. The prospect of increasing relations with China, like what Turkey has done with Russia, has become a lever or bargaining chip in relations with the West. FPEs are aware of Turkey's relevance for the West and, in particular, the USA. A strategic prominence is bound to increase further precisely because of the growing Chinese presence in the region. As a result, Turkish FPEs have sought to maximize the gains of their relationship with Washington by raising the specter of a shift toward China. In other words, China stood out as a rising global power with a huge economic and military potential as Turkish FPEs were bound by constraints imposed by other global power centers.

FPEs Shift and the Anti-Western Sentiments

Some scholars consider that one of the main reasons for Turkey's rapport with China is its attitude toward the West (see Kumar, 2013). Particularly after the Gezi protests, which were claimed to have been orchestrated by foreign powers, alluding to Western governments, Erdoğan heralded that "Turkey is ready to ink free trade agreements with countries in Eurasia" (Taş, 2014). According to Lavi and Lindenstrauss, "the frustration with the West and even the basic hostility to what is sometimes perceived as neo-imperialism are to a large degree shared by China and Turkey" (Lavi & Lindenstrauss, 2016, p. 125). According to Dellios and Yılmaz (2008, pp. 21–22), despite the asymmetries between the two nations in terms of size and resources, there are also similarities, such as both of these states are, historically, "outside the Western system" and "strong states" in terms of their hard power capabilities. Such attributes enable further cooperation under the umbrella of the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," in which Turkey became a "dialogue partner" (Dellios & Yılmaz, 2008, p.29; Parlar Dal, 2016, p. 16).

One can maintain that the current transformation in Turkish foreign policy could be assigned to an alteration in the perspectives of political elites. In retrospect, Turkey was generally depicted as a "torn country" with the westernized elites and conservative society (Huntington, 1997, pp. 74, 144–149). From the late Ottoman period to the modern Republic, Turkish modernization was a project carried out through the bureaucratic elites (Heper, 2001; Trimberger, 1978). These bureaucratic elites fostered a strategic culture that paved the way for a western-oriented and non-interventionist foreign policy, which underpins the strategic culture in foreign policymaking. In line with this, Karaosmanoğlu, for example, stresses that "since the 18th century, the process of Westernization has left its imprint on the national security culture. It has greatly motivated Turkey's Western-oriented policies and introduced liberal and internationalist elements into foreign policy" (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000, p. 200). Mufti, on the other hand, emphasizes the "strong bias in favor of the geopolitical status quo; and a powerful aversion to foreign entanglement," as another plank of strategic culture (Mufti, 2009, p. 3).

The pivotal change in Turkish foreign policy was the strategic culture of the FPEs during the AKP period. A variety of studies has highlighted this paradigm shift. As such, there is a body of literature revolving around Turkey's new foreign

policy quest, emphasizing multidimensionality in terms of diplomacy toward the non-western world. For example, Erdağ & Kardaş (2013) scrutinize the change in the strategic culture during AKP's tenure with a specific emphasis on Davutoglu's diplomacy based on "multidimensional and active foreign policy" covering the neglected countries of the non-western world for so long (Erdağ & Kardaş, 2013, p. 87). Moreover, another stream of research focuses on the rising autonomy of TFP. In this line, Öniş and Kutlay stress Turkey became "critical of the existing Western-led world order" and "inclined to pursue delegitimization strategies" (Öniş & Kutlay, 2017, p. 181). In parallel to these statements, Yeşiltas highlights that Turkey has been after a new civilizational identity in "a search for anti-hegemony" (Yeşiltas, 2014, p. 44). Similarly, Özkan opines that Turkey and Brazil, as two middle powers, attempted to broker a new deal with Iran which can be viewed "as milestones in the rise of non-Western powers" (Özkan 2010, p. 30).

In the light of the foregoing studies, it can be argued that Turkey diversified its foreign policy to cultivate new ties with the non-western world. Nevertheless, the strategic culture has evolved from non-westernism in terms of multidimensionality and autonomy to anti-westernism in the later AKP period. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that this strategic culture-shifting process has gained momentum following the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Arguably, the main determinant was the reshuffle within Turkish FPEs, that paved the way for the inception of a new strategic culture: Eurasianism.¹⁰ The rise of the Eurasianist perspective, not new in TFP, is related to the power struggle within FPEs to fill the vacuum left by the wave of arrests of Gülenist affiliates and by the sidelining of cadres close to the former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Among the factions that have acquired more influence is the so-called Perinçek group. The group, which revolves around the leader of the arch-secularist and ultranationalist Vatan Party, Doğu Perinçek, is known for its staunchly secular, isolationist, socialist, anti-West and Eurasianist characteristics (Çolakoğlu, 2019b; Donelli 2020, p. 242; Üngör, 2019, pp. 69–70). Endorsing its anti-western rhetoric, decision-makers have recently highlighted Turkey's distinctiveness and authenticity more frequently than ever. As one of the leading figures amongst the AKP political elite, İbrahim Kalın attests this by stating that "we have told the stories of others in the name of modernization. Now it is time to write our own story" (Kalın, 2018).

At the international level, the Turkish anti-Western rhetoric¹¹ has a twofold facet. It is being used by Turkish FPEs to bolster Turkey's image among the countries of the Global South and within specific regional agendas (Levaggi & Donelli, 2021). In the first case, Turkey promotes a comprehensive reform of global governance epitomized by the motto "the world is bigger than five" (Aral, 2019; Yeşiltas, 2014, pp. 44–45). In the second case, anti-western rhetoric finds its place in policies toward particular regions, such as Africa, where Turkey exploits this narrative to differentiate its involvement from former colonial powers. In the African context, anti-western rhetoric bears the hallmarks of anti-imperialism (Abdirahman, 2013, pp. 72–73; Langan, 2017). This point was invoked on a variety of platforms. For instance, Erdoğan's speech at the University of Khartoum stressed that "there is no moral value imperialists won't contravene

for a drip of oil, Africa is the continent that best knows that fact,” illustrates this very explicitly (*Daily Sabah*, 2015).

This anti-Western stance has been prompted by shifts within the FPE and new domestic political concerns as the government alliance shifts toward the right. In addition, numerous divergencies with Western allies on regional policy issues have fueled anti-western sentiments among the Turkish public. Moreover, rising nationalism and anti-Western rhetoric have provided a window of opportunity for a new partnership (the so-called *Cumhur Alliance*) between the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) (Altunışık, 2020, p. 15; Yavuz & Ozcan, 2019, pp. 86–88; see also Levaggi & Donelli, 2021, p. 1108). That is to say that the current political equilibrium in Turkey has also pushed JDP to drift toward anti-western rhetoric. In this regard, anti-western rhetoric has been closely associated with rising political populism in Turkey, which has also had repercussions on Turkish diplomacy vis-à-vis Western capitals (Göksel, 2019; Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019).

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that anti-western sentiments have much deeper roots in the Islamic world, which far exceed the tactical employment of anti-western rhetoric in the current politics of Turkey (see Aydın, 2007). As part of the rising anti-western populism following the 15 July coup attempt, Turkey justified its domestic and foreign policy based on “native and national (*yerli ve milli*)” discourse (Üngör, 2019, p. 68). Accordingly, rising nationalism, intertwined with anti-westernism, has also propped up the development of intimate relations with China. While fostering an increase in Chinese investment in the country, this development has also reduced Turkish autonomy on political issues such as Beijing’s treatment of Uighurs.

Conclusion

This study analyses the behavior of a middle power during the great power transition period. Assuming Turkey is a middle power, the research uses Turkey’s rapprochement with China as a case study and examines it through the lens of neoclassical realism. What has been shown is that it is impossible to assess the actions of the middle power (Turkey) to the rising great power (China) without considering its relationship with the declining great power (US). Furthermore, domestic policy assessments also play an important role in these decision-making processes. These shreds of evidence witness how foreign policy behavior is determined by the permanent two-level game. Accordingly, Turkey–China rapprochement has been evaluated within the framework of neoclassical realism, considered suitable for multi-layered analysis. The case study confers middle powers’ cooperative or conflictual behavior, in the face of an emerging power, contingents upon the nexus between the current hegemon and the middle power and the domestic sensitivities of a middle power. Considering TFP, one can argue that systemic factors and domestic politics overlap with each other under the rule

of AKP, enabling to cement new ties with China as the rising power. Deteriorations of relations with the Western bloc (the USA and the EU) and the spreading of anti-Western sentiments among the Turkish public fed each other. In other words, both these factors facilitate recent Turkey–China relations. Following the mixture of status-seeking aspirations and rising anti-Westernism, Turkey has diverged from its (traditional) western-oriented foreign policy paradigm. Such a shift bank upon China that, as a hegemon-candidate, has turned into assertive power challenging western-centric international order.

Consequently, both of these countries’ abiding anti-western as well revisionist stances have converged. Nowadays, economic ties between China and Turkey are the most relevant dimension of bilateral relations. However, the relationship is asymmetric, and Chinese gains are higher than the Turkish ones. Further, the relationship has deepened beyond material exchanges and an additional factor that has facilitated the strengthening of ties is ideological. The emergence of a new strategic culture among Turkish FPEs and the spread of anti-Western sentiments among the AKP constituency have pushed Turkey toward looking at China as an alternative to the West.

It should be noted that these two ideational factors feed each other in a cycle indelibly intertwined with Turkish relations with the West. Theoretically, this study contends that if an analysis is based solely on power hierarchy and the middle powers’ position in the international system, the analysis would be erroneous. Hence, the article claims that no predetermined foreign policy behavior emanates from the distribution of power that is binding for all middle powers. It can be surmised that the intensity and durability of anti-westernism and nationalist aura, both of which are significant components of the new strategic culture in Turkey, will have a strong bearing on the trajectory of Turkey–China relations by shaping the perception of the foreign policy elites.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. For peaceful rise notion, see Glaser and Medeiros (2007).
2. There is a good body of literature emphasizing Turkey’s middle powerhood see for example Müftüler and Yüksel (1997), Oran (2010), Yalçın (2012), Hale (2013), Özkan (2006), Elik (2012), Parlar Dal (2018), Baba and Önsoy (2016), and Parlar Dal and Kurşun (2016).
3. For two level of analysis, see Putnam (1988).
4. See, for example, Rynhold (1996), Rubin (1998), Shichor (2006), Bianchi (2013), Chang (2014), and Keskin and Braun (2016).

5. In terms of cultural exchange between two nations, relations have much deeper historical roots in that Turkey's Sinology department in Ankara University dates back to the 1930s (see Ergenc, 2015, p. 292).
6. For the rivalry between China and the USA in East Asia and the posture of middle states, see Ikenberry (2016).
7. For possible repercussions of Turkish–China economic rapprochement including swap agreements, see Lerner (2020).
8. See, for example, Gvalia et al. (2013), Gvalia et al. (2019), and Rosa et al. (2020).
9. PKK has been a secessionist establishment operational in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq since the late 1970s and has been designated a terrorist organization by Turkey. For a review of PKK, see Criss (1995)
10. There is extensive literature with regards to the root and development of Eurasianism in Turkish Foreign Policy from a geopolitical perspective, see Akçali and Perinçek (2009), Aktürk (2015), Erşen (2013), Tüfekci (2017), and Çolakoğlu (2019b).
11. For the rise of anti-westernism in Turkish Foreign Policy from a neoclassical realist perspective, see Ovalı and Özdikmenli (2020). For other studies on anti-Westernism and TFP, see Göksel (2019), Kaliber and Kaliber (2019), and Taş (2014).

ORCID iDs

Mustafa Cüneyt Özşahin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3445-5412>

Federico Donelli  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6093-3510>

Riccardo Gasco  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2549-8453>

References

- Abdirahman, Ali. (2013). Turkey's foray into Africa: A new humanitarian power? *Insight Turkey*, 13(4), 65–73.
- Akçali, Emel, & Perinçek, Mehmet (2009). Kemalist Eurasianism: An emerging geopolitical discourse in Turkey. *Geopolitics*, 14(3), 550–569.
- Aktürk, Şener. (2015). The fourth style of politics: Eurasianism as a pro-Russian rethinking of Turkey's geopolitical identity. *Turkish Studies*, 16(1), 54–79.
- Aliyev, Jeyhun. (2018, July 27). Chinese bank to loan \$3.6 billion to Turkey. *Anadolu Agency*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/investments/chinese-bank-to-loan-36-billion-to-turkey/21019>
- Alperen, Ümit, & Ersoy, Eyüp. (2019, October 18). Turkey and Asia anew: A foreign policy initiative in passing. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/turkey-and-asia-anew-a-foreign-policy-initiative-in-passing/>
- Altunışık, Meliha Benli. (2020). *The new turn in Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East: Regional and domestic insecurities*. Istituto Affari Internazionali. <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/new-turn-turkeys-foreign-policy-middle-east-regional-and-domestic-insecurities>
- Aral, Berdal. (2019). “The world is bigger than five”: A salutary manifesto of Turkey's new international outlook. *Insight Turkey*, 21(4), 71–96.
- Atlı, Altay. (2011). Questioning Turkey's China trade. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 10(2), 107–116.
- Aydın, Cemil. (2007). *The politics of anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of world order in pan-Islamic and pan-Asian thought*. Columbia University Press
- Aydın, Umut. (2021). Emerging middle powers and the liberal international order. *International Affairs*, 97(5), 1377–1394.

- Baba, Gürol, & Önsoy, Murat. (2016). Between capability and foreign policy: Comparing Turkey's small power and middle power status. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 13(51), 3–20.
- Barkin, J. Samuel. (2003). Realist constructivism. *International Studies Review*, 5(3), 325–342.
- Bianchi, Robert R. (2013). China–Middle East relations in light of Obama's pivot to the Pacific. *China Report*, 49(1), 103–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445513479456>.
- Cengiz, Sinem. (2019, September 20). Turkey, Russia, Iran: Unlikely 'allies' united by a common threat. *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1557336>
- Chang-Liao, Nien-chung. (2018). Winds of change: Assessing China's assertive turn in foreign policy. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(6), 880–895. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909618762477>.
- Chang-Liao, Nien-chung. (2019). From engagement to competition? The logic of the US China policy debate. *Global Policy*, 10(2), 250–257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12667>
- Chang, I-Wei Jennifer. (2014). Chinese policies on the Arab Spring. In Robert Mason (Ed.), *The international politics of the Arab Spring: Popular unrest and foreign policy* (pp.177–191). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Chaziza, Mordechai. (2014). Soft balancing strategy in the Middle East: Chinese and Russian vetoes in the United Nations Security Council in the Syria crisis. *China Report*, 50(3), 243–258.
- Chaziza, Mordechai. (2016). Sino-Turkish 'solid strategic partnership' China's dream or a reality? *China Report*, 52(4), 265–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445516661812>
- Çetingüleç, Mehmet. (2019, May 21). Turkey grapples with big trade deficit with China. *Al-Monitor*. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/05/turkey-grapples-with-big-trade-deficit-with-china.html>
- Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. (2010). *Turkey and China: Seeking a sustainable partnership* [Policy Brief no. 41]. SETA Foundation for Political Economic and Social Research.
- Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. (2012). Turkey's East Asian policy: From security concerns to trade partnerships. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 17(4), 129–158.
- Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. (2015). Dynamics of Sino-Turkish relations: A Turkish perspective. *East Asia*, 32(1), 7–23.
- Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. (2019a, October 15). Turkey's Asia anew initiative: Assessment and shortcomings. *MEI@75*. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-asia-anew-initiative-assessment-and-shortcomings>
- Çolakoğlu, Selçuk. (2019b, April 16). The rise of Eurasianism in Turkish foreign policy: Can Turkey change its pro-Western orientation? *MEI@75*. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rise-eurasianism-turkish-foreign-policy-can-turkey-change-its-pro-western-orientation>
- Conduit, Dara, & Akbarzadeh, Shahram. (2019). Great power-middle power dynamics: The case of China and Iran. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28(117), 468–481.
- Criss, Nur Bilge. (1995). The nature of PKK terrorism in Turkey. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 18(1), 17–37.
- Daily Sabah* (2015, December 25). Imperialists sniffing out oil more dangerous than sharks sniffing out blood, Erdoğan says. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2017/12/25/imperialists-sniffing-out-oil-more-dangerous-than-sharks-sniffing-out-blood-erdogan-says>
- Dellios, Rosita, & Yilmaz, Nadir Kemal. (2008). Turkey and China: A study in symmetry. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2(1), 13–30.

- Deutsche Welle*. (2019a, July 15). US removes Turkey from F-35 program after S-400 fiasco. <https://www.dw.com/en/us-removes-turkey-from-f-35-program-after-s-400-fiasco/a-49625337>
- Deutsche Welle*. (2019b, March 13). European parliament votes to suspend Turkey's EU membership bid. <https://www.dw.com/en/european-parliament-votes-to-suspend-turkeys-eu-membership-bid/a-47902275>
- Didiç, Ajdin, & Kösebalaban, Hasan. (2019). Turkey's rapprochement with Russia: Assertive bandwagoning. *The International Spectator*, 54(3), 123–138.
- Directorate of EU Affairs. (2019, July 7). Katılım Müzakerelerinde Mevcut Durum [The current situation at accession negotiations]. *T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı*. https://www.ab.gov.tr/katilim-muzakerelerinde-mevcut-durum_65.html
- Donelli, Federico. (2020). Explaining the role of intervening variables in Turkey's foreign policy behaviour. *Interdisciplinary Political Studies*, 6(2), 223–257. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i20398573v6n2p223>.
- Elik, Süleyman. (2012). *Iran–Turkey relations, 1979–2011: Conceptualising the dynamics of politics, religion, and security in the middle-power states*. Routledge.
- Erdag, Ramazan, & Kardaş, Tuncay. (2013). Türk Dış Politikası ve Stratejik Kültür. In Duran, Burhanettin, İnat, Kemal, & Ulutaş, Ufuk (Ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2012* (pp. 66–90). SETA Yayınları.
- Ergenc, Ceren. (2015). Can two ends of Asia meet? An overview of contemporary Turkey–China relations. *East Asia*, 32(3), 289–308.
- Ersoy, Eyüp. (2008). *Turkish–Chinese relations: Spinning more moving less*. USAK Publication.
- Ersen, Emre. (2013). The evolution of 'Eurasia' as a geopolitical concept in post-cold war Turkey. *Geopolitics*, 18(1), 24–44.
- Euro News*. (2019, March 1). Çin'den Türkiye'ye Uygur Türkleri tehdidi: Ekonomik ilişkileri tehlikeye atarsınız [Chinese threat to Turkey about Uighur Turks: You buy economic relations in danger]. <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/03/01/cin-den-turkiye-uygur-turkleri-tehdidi-ekonomik-iliskileri-tehlikeye-atarsiniz>
- Euro News*. (2020, December 27). Çin, Türkiye ile imzalanan 'Suçluların İadesi Anlaşması'nı onayladı; Uygur Türkleri endişeli [China ratified the extradition of criminals agreement signed with Turkey; Uighur Turks are worried]. <https://tr.euronews.com/2020/12/27/cin-turkiye-ile-imzalanan-suclular-n-iadesi-anlasmas-n-onaylad-uygur-turkleri-endiseli>
- Fidan, Giray. (2016, October 4). Sino-Turkish relations: An overview. *MEI@75*. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/sino-turkish-relations-overview>
- Finel, Bernard I. (2001). Black box or Pandora's box: State level variables and progressivity in realist research programs. *Security Studies*, 11(2), 187–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714005331>.
- Fulton, Jonathan. (2020). China–Saudi Arabia relations through the “1+ 2+ 3” cooperation Pattern. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 14(4), 516–527.
- Gilley, Bruce. (2011). Middle powers during great power transitions: China's rise and the future of Canada–US relations. *International Journal*, 66(2), 245–264.
- Gilley, Bruce, & O'Neil, Andrew. (Eds.) (2014). China's rise through the prism of middle powers In *Middle powers and the rise of China* (pp. 1–22). Georgetown University Press.
- Glaser, Bonnie S., & Medeiros, Evan S. (2007). The changing ecology of foreign policy-making in China: The ascension and demise of the theory of “peaceful rise.” *The China Quarterly*, 190, 291–310.

- Göksel, Oğuzhan. (2019). Foreign policy making in the age of populism: The uses of anti-Westernism in Turkish politics. *New Middle Eastern Studies*, 9(1), 13–35.
- Guo, Xiaoli. (2017). Is Turkey acting fairly?—Turkey’s choice in T-Loramids. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 11(2), 69–89.
- Gvalia, Giorgi, Lebanidze, Bidzina, & Siroky, David S. (2019). Neoclassical realism and small states: Systemic constraints and domestic filters in Georgia’s foreign policy. *East European Politics*, 35(1), 21–51.
- Gvalia, Giorgi, Lebanidze, Bidzina, Siroky, David S., & Zurab, Iashvili (2013). Thinking outside the bloc: Explaining the foreign policies of small states. *Security Studies*, 22(1), 98–131.
- Hale, William M. (2013). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774* (3rd ed). Routledge.
- Heper, Metin. (2001). The state and bureaucracy: The Turkish case in historical perspective. In Ali Farazmand (Ed.), *Handbook of comparative and development public administration* (pp. 1019–1028). Marcel & Dekker Inc.
- Huntington, Samuel P. (1997). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Penguin Books India.
- John Ikenberry, G. (2004). American hegemony and East Asian order. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58(3), 353–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1035771042000260129>.
- Ikenberry, John G. (2008). The rise of China and the future of the west-can the liberal system survive. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(1), 23–37.
- Ikenberry, John G. (2016). Between the eagle and the dragon: America, China, and middle state strategies in East Asia. *Political Science Quarterly*, 131(1), 9–43.
- Isik, Ahmet Faruk, & Zou, Zhiqiang. (2019). China–Turkey security cooperation under the background of the “belt and road” and the “middle corridor” initiatives. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 13(2), 278–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2019.1605572>.
- Jackson, Patrick T. & Nexon, Daniel H. (2004) Constructivist Realism or Realist Constructivism? *International Studies Review*, 6(2), 337–341.
- Johnston, Alastair Iain. (2003). Is China a status quo power? *International Security*, 27(4), 5–56.
- Kalin, İbrahim. (2018). We have told the stories of others in the name of modernization. Now it is time to write our own story. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/ikalin1/status/1002188443080953856?lang=en>
- Kaliber, Alper, & Kaliber, Esra. (2019). From de-Europeanisation to anti-Western populism: Turkish foreign policy in flux. *The International Spectator*, 54(4), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.16686>
- Kanat Kılıç, Buğra. (2020, July 13). 15 July and Turkey–US relations. *Daily Sabah*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/july-15-and-turkey-us-relations>
- Karaosmanoğlu, Ali L. (2000). The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey. *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 199–216.
- Keskin, Tuğrul, & Braun, Christian N. (2016). When a sleeping giant wakes—A neoclassical realist analysis of China’s expanding ties in the Middle East. *Sociology of Islam*, 4(1–2), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00402009>.
- Kitchen, Nicholas. (2010). Systemic pressures and domestic ideas: A neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation. *Review of International Studies*, 36(1), 117–143.
- Kumar, Atul. (2013). Sino-Turkish strategic partnership: Prudent hedging or irreversible shift? *China Report*, 49(1), 119–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0009445513479457>.
- Langan, Mark. (2017). Virtuous power Turkey in Sub-Saharan Africa: The “neo-Ottoman” challenge to the European Union. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(6), 1399–1414.

- Lavi, Galia, & Lindenstrauss, Gallia. (2016). China and Turkey: Closer relations mixed with suspicion. *Strategic Assessment*, 19(2), 119–127.
- Layne, Christopher. (2020, November 2) Coming storms: The return of great-power war. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-10-13/coming-storms>
- Lerner, George Marshall. (2020, July 3). China to the rescue in Turkey? *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/china-to-the-rescue-in-turkey/>
- Levaggi, Ariel Gonzalez, & Donelli, Federico. (2021). Turkey's changing engagement with the global South. *International Affairs*, 97(4), 1105–1124.
- Lobell, Steven E. (2009). Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: A neoclassical realist model. In Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell & Norrin M. Ripsman (Eds.), *Neoclassical realism, the state and foreign policy* (pp. 42–74). Cambridge University Press.
- Lobell, Steven E., Jesse, Neal G., & Williams K., P. (2015). Why do secondary states choose to support, follow or challenge? *International Politics*, 52(2), 146–162.
- Mearsheimer, John J. (2010). The gathering storm: China's challenge to US power in Asia. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3(4), 381–396.
- Mearsheimer, John J. (2014). China's unpeaceful rise. *Current History*, 105(690), 160–162.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). Turkey–People's Republic of China economic and trade relations. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-china.en.mfa
- Mowle, Thomas S. (2003). Worldviews in foreign policy: Realism, liberalism, and external conflict. *Political Psychology*, 24(3), 561–592.
- Mufti, Malik. (2009). *Daring and caution in Turkish strategic culture: Republic at sea*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Müftüler, Meltem, & Yüksel, Müberra. (1997). Turkey: A middle power in the new order. In Andrew F. Cooper (Ed.), *Niche diplomacy: Middle powers after the cold war* (pp. 184–196). MacMillan.
- Nau, Henry R. (2002). *At home abroad: Identity and power in American foreign policy*. Cornell University Press.
- Norman, Laurence, Gauthier-Villars, David, & Mauldin, William. (2020, December 10). US, EU to impose sanctions on Turkey over missile system, energy. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-to-impose-new-sanctions-on-turkey-officials-over-energy-activities-in-eastern-mediterranean-11607648191>
- Oğuzlu, H. Tark. (2018). Turkish foreign policy in a changing world order. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy & Peace*, 9(2), 127–136. <https://doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.464076>.
- Onuş, Sinan. (2015, November 16). Çin'den Füze Alımından Vazgeçilmesi Ne Anlama Geliyor? [What does it mean to be renounced to purchase of missiles from China]. *BBC*. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/11/151116_cin_fuze_turkiye
- Oran, Baskin. (2010). *Turkish foreign policy, 1919–2006: Facts and analyses with documents*. University Utah Press.
- Öniş, Ziya, & Kutlay, Mustafa (2017). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: The paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(2), 164–183.
- Ovalı, Şevket, & Özdikmenli, İlkin. (2020). Ideologies and the Western question in Turkish foreign policy: A neo-classical realist perspective. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy & Peace*, 9(1), 105–126.
- Özkan, Mehmet. (2006). A new approach to global security: Pivotal middle powers and global politics. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 11(1), 77–95.

- Özkan, Mehmet. (2010). Turkey–Brazil involvement in Iranian nuclear issue: What is the big deal? *Strategic Analysis*, 35(1), 26–30.
- Özpek, B. Bilgehan, & Demirağ, Yelda. (2014). Turkish foreign policy after the ‘Arab Spring’: From agenda setter state to agenda-entrepreneur state. *Israel Affairs*, 20(3), 328–346.
- Dal, Parlar Emel. (2016). Conceptualising and testing the ‘emerging regional power’ of Turkey in the shifting international order. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(8), 1425–1453.
- Dal, Parlar Emel. (2018). *Profiling middle powers in global governance and the Turkish case: An introduction. In middle powers in global governance: The rise of Turkey.* (pp. 1–31). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dal, Parlar Emel & Kurşun, Ali Murat (2016). Assessing Turkey’s middle power foreign policy in MIKTA: Goals, means and impact. *International Journal*, 71(4), 608–629.
- Putnam, Robert. (1988). Diplomacy and domestic politics: The logic of two-level games. *International Organizations*, 42(3), 427–460.
- Quinn, Adam. (2013). Kenneth Waltz, Adam Smith and the limits of science: Hard choices for neoclassical realism. *International Politics*, 50(2), 159–182.
- Rathbun, Brian. (2008). A rose by any other name: Neoclassical realism as the logical and necessary extension of structural realism. *Security Studies*, 17(2), 294–321.
- Rosa, Paola, Benati, Stefano, Foradori, Paola, & Longoni, Gian Marco. (2020). Neoclassical realism and Italy’s military behaviour, 1946–2010: A combined dyad/nation analysis. *Political Research Exchange*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2020.1770103>.
- Rose, Gideon. (1998). Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy. *World Politics*, 51(1), 144–172.
- Reuters. (2019, September 15). Turkey says delivery of second S-400 battery complete. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-usa-defense-russia-idUSKBN1W00AQ>
- Rubin, Barry. (1998). China’s middle east strategy. *China Report*, 34(3–4), 345–353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000944559803400306>.
- Rynning, Sten. (2001). Shaping military doctrine in France: Decision-makers between international power and domestic interests. *Security Studies*, 11(2), 86–115.
- Rynhold, Jonathan. (1996). China’s cautious new pragmatism in the Middle East. *Survival*, 38(3), 102–116.
- Saltzman, Ilai Z. (2015). Growing pains: Neoclassical realism and Japan’s security policy emancipation. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36(3), 498–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2015.1091574>
- Sano, Akhiro. (2018, May 12). Turkey jockeys with China for influence in Africa. *Nikkei Asia*. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Turkey-jockeys-with-China-for-influence-in-Africa>
- Schweller, Randall L. (2004). Unanswered threats: A neoclassical realist theory of underbalancing. *International Security*, 29(2), 159–201.
- Shichor, Yitzhak. (2006). Competence and incompetence: The political economy of China’s relations with the middle east. *Asian Perspective*, 30(4), 39–67.
- Sterling-Folker, Jennifer. (2009). Neoclassical realism and identity: Peril despite profit across the Taiwan Strait. In Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman & Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Eds.), *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy* (pp. 99–138). Cambridge University Press.
- Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. (2000). Security seeking under anarchy: Defensive realism revisited. *International Security*, 25(3), 128–161.
- Taliaferro, Jeffrey W., Lobell, Steven E., & Ripsman, Norrin M. (Eds.) (2009). Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy. In *Neoclassical realism, the state and foreign policy* (pp. 1–41). Cambridge University Press.

- Taş, Hakkı. (2014, March 11). Anti-westernism in Turkey. *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/antiwesternism-in-turkey/>
- Tavşan, Sinan. (2021, January 14). Turkey accused of trading Uighurs for Chinese vaccine. *Asia Nikkei*. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Turkey-accused-of-trading-Uighurs-for-Chinese-vaccine>
- Temiz, Kadir. (2020, March 19). Türkiye-Çin İlişkilerinin Fay Hatları. *PERSPEKTİF*. <https://www.perspektif.online/turkiye-cin-iliskilerinin-fay-hatlari-2/>
- Boon, Tiang Hoo Ardy, Charles. (2017). China and Lilliputians: Small states in a big power's evolving foreign policy. *Asian Security*, 13(2), 116–131.
- Trimberger, Ellen Key. (1978). *Revolution from above: Military bureaucrats and development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt, and Peru*. Transaction Books.
- Tüfekci, Özgür. (2017). *The foreign policy of modern Turkey: Power and the ideology of Eurasianism*. IB Tauris.
- Üngör, Çağdaş. (2012). China reaches Turkey? Radio Peking's Turkish language broadcasts during the Cold War. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 1(2), 19–33.
- Üngör, Çağdaş. (2019). Heading toward the east? Sino Turkish relations after the 15 July coup attempt. In Emre Erşen Emre & Köstem, Seçkin (Eds.), *Turkey's pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and foreign policy in a changing world order* (pp. 64–78). Routledge.
- Walker, Joshua W. (2007). Learning strategic depth: Implications of Turkey's new foreign policy doctrine. *Insight Turkey*, 9(3), 32–47.
- Wohlforth, William C. (2008). Realism and foreign policy. In Steven Smith, Amelia Hadfield & Tim Dunne (Eds.), *Foreign policy: Theories, actors, cases* (pp. 31–48). Oxford University Press.
- Xiang, Lanxin. (2001). Washington's misguided China policy. *Survival*, 43(3), 7–24.
- Yalçın, Hasan Basri. (2012). The concept of “middle power” and the recent Turkish foreign policy activism. *Afro Eurasian Studies*, 1(1), 195–213.
- Yavuz, Hakan, & Nihat Özcan, Ali. (2019). 2019 elections in Turkey: End of the Erdoğan era? *Middle East Policy*, 26(2), 85–94.
- Yeşiltaş, Murat. (2014). Turkey's quest for a “new international order”: The discourse of civilization and the politics of restoration. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 19(4), 43–76.
- Yom, Sean. (2020). US foreign policy in the Middle East: The logic of hegemonic retreat. *Global Policy*, 11(1), 75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12777>.
- Yurdusev, Ahmet Nuri. (2006). The greater Middle East initiative and democracy in Muslim states: A Turkish perspective. *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 18(2), 73–94.