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**From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland  
and Beyond: Understanding Turkey's  
Drift towards Greater Strategic  
Autonomy**

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*From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond: Understanding  
Turkey's Drift towards Greater Strategic Autonomy*

*Abstract:*

*Turkey's position in NATO and broadly within the Western framework has on-and-off become of concern. As concerns around Turkey's Western orientation flared up again very recently, this paper aims to provide a better understanding of Turkey's strategic reorientation. To this end, implications of the change from Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland doctrine in Turkey's geostrategic vision in the light of changing parameters in the recent decades are analysed. Based on this analysis, this paper argues that Turkey's drift away from the West is far from translating into a full-fledged shift of axis towards the East. Instead, through asserting certain degree of 'strategic autonomy' Turkey tries to stand up to the challenges of an increasingly multipolar world and ensure a higher appreciation of its status within the West albeit in a collision with its Western allies.*

*Keywords:*

*Turkey, the West, Strategic Depth, Blue Homeland, strategic autonomy.*

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**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense.

## Introduction

Turkey as having the second largest army in NATO has always been at the forefront in many strategic debates particularly about its immediate neighbourhood which extends from Balkans to Caucasus, from Greater Mediterranean to Middle East. Its geography is considered as having strategic importance which might be an asset for the country but a source of perils as well. In that sense, it provides a fertile ground to examine the role of geography over the fate of a given country which is a very much contested issue in Strategic Studies. Nevertheless, such an endeavour to look at the interplay between Turkey's geography and its fate is far beyond the limits of this paper. As debates around Turkey's Western orientation flared up again very recently just like it did occasionally after the end of Cold War, this paper aims to provide a better understanding of Turkey's strategic reorientation by emphasizing that Turkey's drift away from the West is far from translating into a full-fledged shift of axis towards the East. Instead, this paper argues that it is more about the quest for having more room for manoeuvre with asserting certain degree of 'strategic autonomy' so that the country can better stand up to the challenges of an increasingly multipolar world where the Western hegemony is in free fall and there emerges powers that assertively challenge the liberal international order. To that end, this paper will analyse two strategic doctrines that are of crucial importance to understand Turkey's strategic orientation in the last two decades as follows: Strategic Depth and Blue Homeland.

To outline, this paper will first provide a broad perspective about Turkey's geopolitical imagination from the foundation of the new Republic (1923) onwards briefly. This paper will then turn to Turkey's strategic outlook under the reign of Strategic Depth and Blue Homeland doctrines, respectively. After then, there will be a broad discussion covering how changing parameters interacted with the changes in Turkey's strategic orientation. In the end, there will be a brief conclusion.

## A Historical Perspective for Geopolitical Imagination of Turkey

After a national Independence War (1919-1922) which ended with Lausanne Peace Treaty, the Republic of Turkey is founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who led the National Independence movement. With the Ottoman Empire dissolved, for the first time in history Turks have embarked upon a process of having Western-style nation state which will be

a challenging one as it inherited many legacies of the Ottoman past. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk have led the new Republic from 1923 until his death in 1938 with a single party system thanks to which he had been able to undertake a wide range of revolutionary reforms aimed at modernizing the country in line with Western-led universal standards. This period has been marked mostly by isolationism in Turkish foreign policy despite a few peaceful irredentist moves made possible by the favourable international environment like changing status of the Straits. A real revolutionary Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, despite public scepticism and caution towards the Western powers with whom National Independence War was fought, has established for his country an aspiration to join the universal civilization of the West in the long run. After his death, his close associate, and a very important figure of National Independence War İsmet İnönü took the lead of the country through the Second World War until 1950 when first time ever multi-party elections are held, and a right-wing government came to the power. Next paragraph will look at Turkey's strategic orientation during the Cold War as a whole.

The start of Cold War meant that the world entered a phase where countries are divided with ideological lines: capitalist camp led by the USA versus communist camp led by USSR. Turkey made its choice in favor of the US-led capitalist camp. By integrating into various Western institutional arrangements like primarily NATO, Turkey has both contributed to its alliance with the West and very much benefitted from it in terms of security, military-technical, economic etc. NATO umbrella provided Turkey with a reliable sense of security vis-à-vis its immediate security threat by the USSR. Turkey has provided the alliance with a reliable military contribution whenever necessary, and its strategic location performed a role of strong bulwark against the USSR. Although there have been exceptional cases of ruptures in relations between Turkey and its Western allies like its Cyprus intervention in 1974 and military coup d'états both in 1960 and 1980, Turkey has been considered as vital part of Western security architecture. Another important aspect in the relations which will be of significance in 2000s was Turkey's application to European Economic Community in 1958 which will later be transformed into European Union. The fact that Turkey has been waiting to join today's European Union over decades is one of the most important factors that complicates Turkey's relations with the West today. Nevertheless, this will be touched upon thereafter in this paper. Overall, Cold War period has been marked by that Turkey is profoundly anchored itself in the West with a strong institutional aspect and feel its strategic importance being cherished by its

Western allies. However, with the end of Cold War there emerged a new world under US hegemony where Turkey just like any actor had to reposition itself in accordance with new world order.

As USSR went out of existence with the end of Cold War and a new security paradigm came into existence where, for instance, Europe's focus shifted towards issues like migration and trafficking, Turkey found it challenging to adjust itself as it is used to capitalize on ideological geopolitics paradigm during the Cold War where it finds for itself a valuable place within the Western camp<sup>1</sup>. Bilgin maintains that Turkey found itself increasingly excluded from the new security architecture in Europe to which it once contributed a lot and showed a strong commitment. This caused a sense of betrayal from and resentment to its Western allies. This feelings of resentment and betrayal are represented in many expressions of Turkey's elites, both military and political ones. Whereas the EU perceived Turkey in earlier phases of post-Cold War era of new risks and challenges such as migration source, Turkey's discourse focused on representing itself as not a flank but a front state. The climax of the discrepancy between Turkey's imagination of itself as European and EU's representation of Turkey as non-European is triggered with the representation of Eastern enlargement by EU perspective as 'returning to Europe'<sup>2</sup>. Throughout 1990s, Turkey has struggled hard to readjust its strategic orientation. Overall, Turkey has acted cautiously vis-à-vis crisis near its surrounding within its power limits in these years. With a drastic change in global security paradigm because of 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 which heated debates around Clash of Civilizations primarily between Islam vs. the West and the fact that an Islamist pro-Western government came to power in Turkey, a new period of thick strategic attachment between Turkey and the West has just been about to start. From 2002 onwards, Turkey's strategic orientation can be said to be defined by Strategic Depth doctrine which will be examined in the following section.

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<sup>1</sup> BILGIN, P. "A Return to 'Civilisational Geopolitics' in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era", *Geopolitics*, pp. 269-291, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> BILGIN, P. "A Return to 'Civilisational Geopolitics' in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era", *Geopolitics*, pp. 269-291, 2010.

## Turkey's Strategic Outlook in Strategic Depth

Since 2002 Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has governed Turkey. Erdoğan has been prime minister between 2002-2014, president under a parliamentary system between 2014-2017 and finally president under a full executive presidential system since 2017. On the other hand, Ahmet Davutoglu who is the doctrinaire of *Strategic Depth* has been advisor to Erdoğan until 2009 when he became the Foreign Minister of Turkey. From 2014 when Erdoğan became president until May 2016, Ahmet Davutoglu has been the prime minister of Turkey. He has been the most influential person who shaped Turkey's strategic orientation thanks to full support of Erdoğan from 2002 until his forced resignation from the party in May 2016. His seminal book *Strategic Depth* is published in 2000 before AKP came to power.



Figure 1. Image shows Land basin in green (Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus), Maritime basin in disconnected dots (Black Sea, East Mediterranean, Persian Gulf), Continental basin in yellow (Europe, North Africa, South Asia, Central and East Asia). Turkey should actively engage in all of them according to Strategic Depth doctrine. Source: Available at: <https://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/ahmet-davutoglugunun-stratejik-derinlik-haritasi-2014-08-23>

Strategic Depth doctrine became the guiding principle of AKP's foreign policy<sup>3</sup>. Murinson argues that origin of the doctrine dates to former President Özal's neo-Ottomanism and

<sup>3</sup> MURINSON, A. "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy". *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), pp. 945-964, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284512>

former prime minister Erbakan's pursuit of multidimensionality. With Strategic Depth doctrine, Davutoglu cherished Turkey's innate might derived of its geographic position at the intersection of Europe, Africa, and Asia<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, strategic depth of Turkey offers valuable possibilities to Turkey in establishing an order within its region and across wider Muslim world. To promote this geostrategic vision, Davutoglu as foreign minister has targeted strategic cooperation, increased trade, and solidarity among the country's neighbours which is termed as 'zero problem with neighbours' policy<sup>5</sup>. This policy was just one manifestation of a broader aim of interregional connectivity to create 'a zone of peace and stability, starting from her neighbours'<sup>6</sup>. Tanchum further argues that this policy is based on the use of soft power tools and 'Security for all, political dialogue, economic interdependence and cultural harmony are the building blocks of this vision'.

Though it has earlier been appreciated by many, it later became proven to be failure due to the changing realpolitik, which will be addressed in the discussion part of this paper, as Turkey ended up with so-called 'precious loneliness' in the international scene. However, one of the important lessons from *Strategic Depth* experience was that soft-power approach alone deprives Turkey of shaping the changing realpolitik, for instance Arab Spring events and Eastern Mediterranean disputes<sup>7</sup>. As a result, Turkey shifted towards more hard power approach particularly following the July 15<sup>th</sup> coup attempt in 2016<sup>8</sup> in line with its greater strategic autonomy from the West.

With Davutoglu forced to resign over his disagreements with Erdoğan in May 2016 and a coup attempt happened in July 2016, Turkey entered a new period where its strategic posturing mostly reflected the spirit of Blue Homeland doctrine despite some continuities with certain elements of Strategic Depth doctrine.

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<sup>4</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>5</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>6</sup> TANCHUM, M. "The Logic Beyond Lausanne: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Congruence between Turkey's New Hard Power and its Strategic Reorientation", *Insight Turkey*, 22(3), pp. 41-54, 2020. doi:10.25253/99.2020223.03

<sup>7</sup> TANCHUM, M. "The Logic Beyond Lausanne: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Congruence between Turkey's New Hard Power and its Strategic Reorientation", *Insight Turkey*, 22(3), pp. 41-54, 2020. doi:10.25253/99.2020223.03

<sup>8</sup> TANCHUM, M. "The Logic Beyond Lausanne: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Congruence between Turkey's New Hard Power and its Strategic Reorientation", *Insight Turkey*, 22(3), pp. 41-54, 2020. doi:10.25253/99.2020223.03

## Blue Homeland: Full Steam Reorientation?

After Davutoglu's resignation and July 2016 coup attempt, what will replace Strategic Depth was in question. Although there did not emerge a single comprehensive replacement, so-called Blue Homeland doctrine appeared to define Turkey's geostrategic vision to a certain extent. The origin of Blue Homeland doctrine can be dated back to 2006 when it is first used by Rear Admiral Cem Gürdeniz. However, almost until after 2016 it has been marginal for Turkey's ruling party and elites because of fractious civil-military relations. It is important to note that some elements and legacies of Strategic Depth doctrine also continued to be influential but in a lower profile and with hard power capabilities replacing soft ones.

The use of Blue Homeland term has exponentially proliferated in Turkish politics to refer to Turkey's maritime stakes in Eastern Mediterranean<sup>9</sup>. As such, Erdoğan said in 2019 that 'I submit that we are ready to protect every swath of our 462 thousand square meter blue homeland with great determination and undertake every possible duty that may come'. GINGERAS maintains that it was not simply a matter of political discourse but indeed very much a drastic change in Turkey's geostrategic vision since the idea is widely shared by many in Turkish politics and military. There are two prominent figures who are associated with the crafting of Blue Homeland: the navy's former chief of staff Cihat Yaycı and former Turkish Rear Adm. Cem Gürdeniz. Both are ultranationalist and explicitly critiques of Turkey's attachment to what they call 'Atlantic framework/front' which they consider punishing Turkey because of its close ties with Russia<sup>10</sup>. Besides, Cem Gürdeniz, in his many writings, blames the US and European allies of conspiring the July 2016 coup attempt and spoiling Turkish interest in every possible occasion to curtail Turkey's rise to global power status<sup>11</sup>. He sees Turkey's interests would be better served with deeper alignments with Russia and China<sup>12</sup>. His prolific media appearance is

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<sup>9</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>10</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>11</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>12</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

somewhat unusual since Turkish navy traditionally remains invisible from public. According to Cem Gürdeniz, that is what drives him to publicly make the case that championing territorial waters is no different than maintaining Turkish soil in terms of importance<sup>13</sup>. In addition, he reflects that the decline of Ottoman Empire was largely determined due to its failure to be a maritime power<sup>14</sup>. For him and his associates, today Turkey is on the brink of another Sevre<sup>15</sup> moment. As a result, Blue Homeland is also a 'blueprint for national liberation'<sup>16</sup>.



Figure 2. Image shows imagined maritime claims of Turkey under Blue Homeland. Source. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>13</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>14</sup> ÇANDAR, C. "Turkey's Blue Homeland Doctrine: Signaling Perpetual Conflict in the Mediterranean and Rough Waters Ahead", *Turkey Analyst*, August 26 2020. Available at: <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/648-turkey%E2%80%99s-blue-homeland-doctrine-signaling-perpetual-conflict-in-the-mediterranean-and-rough-waters-ahead.html>

<sup>15</sup> Sevre treaty, though never enacted by Ottoman Parliament, has been the predecessor of Lausanne Peace Treaty and caused serious backlash from National Independence Movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at the time. However, it has become a lively memory for Turks as a horrible syndrome and a source of skepticism towards Western powers.

<sup>16</sup> ÇANDAR, C. "Turkey's Blue Homeland Doctrine: Signaling Perpetual Conflict in the Mediterranean and Rough Waters Ahead", *Turkey Analyst*, August 26 2020. Available at: <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/648-turkey%E2%80%99s-blue-homeland-doctrine-signaling-perpetual-conflict-in-the-mediterranean-and-rough-waters-ahead.html>



No doubt that Blue Homeland now highly resonates within Turkish army. Turkish naval exercises in March 2019 are called 'Blue Homeland 2019' and Turkey's Naval War College has a journal called 'Mavi Vatan (Blue Homeland)'<sup>17</sup>. In parallel, it is no doubt that Turkey's foreign policy has become more and more militarized and assertive. However, it is important to note that although Erdoğan embraced Blue Homeland, his recent moves suggest he does not want Turkey's geopolitical posturing to be completely subjugated to the reign of these left-wing ultranationalist circles. As such, he made some moves to downgrade their profile as seen by the replacement of Cihat Yaycı with Adm. Yankı Bağcıoğlu<sup>18</sup>. Adm. Yankı Bağcıoğlu is said to tell a French naval delegation that Turkey relentlessly sticks to Blue Homeland along with its NATO commitments<sup>19</sup>. This can be interpreted as Erdoğan's Turkey does not want any decisive rupture with the West while asserting itself in the region at the same time. On the other hand, in a long-term perspective Blue Homeland might mean a Mahanian turn in Turkey's geostrategic vision considering Turkey's heavy investment in its naval capabilities in the last decade. It, however, remains to be seen depending on various domestic and global changes in the years to come.

## Discussion

### *Tracing Changing Parameters in Recent Decades and Their Implications*

#### 1. From US hegemony to multipolarity

One of the most determining factors behind Turkey's push for greater strategic autonomy is the fact that US-led Western hegemony in the world is in free fall in the recent decades. As such, some argues that the American era came to an end where US power no longer matches 'the textbook definition of a hegemon'<sup>20</sup>. Instead, Kutlay describes new era as

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<sup>17</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>18</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>19</sup> GINGERAS, R. "BLUE HOMELAND: THE HEATED POLITICS BEHIND TURKEY'S NEW MARITIME STRATEGY", War on the Rocks, June 2 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

<sup>20</sup> KUTLAY, M. "GLOBAL POWER SHIFTS AND TURKEY-EU RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF HYBRIDITY", Institut Bosphore, 2019. Available at: [http://www.institut-bosphore.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/IB\\_PolicyPaper\\_MustafaKutlay.pdf](http://www.institut-bosphore.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/IB_PolicyPaper_MustafaKutlay.pdf)

'age of hybridity'. Accordingly, it is ontologically fragmented, normatively inconsistent, and institutionally incoherent. Kutlay refers to the 2008 global financial crisis as the turning point which fuelled the trend that the centre of gravity in terms of power capabilities is tilted from the West to non-Western powers. That reconfiguration in material capabilities coincided with the unravelling of global governance based on liberal internationalism. In short, newly emerging order is being defined by post-Western and multipolar terms<sup>21</sup>.

In response to this fundamental change in global power configuration, Turkey increasingly felt able to have room for manoeuvre to pursue its own interests regardless of their alignment with the West. More multidimensionality in Turkish foreign policy has become possible after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Turkey started to boost its ties with China and Russia but also made an unprecedented opening towards Africa, Balkans, Caucasus, and Turkic republics in the Central Asia. However, it is important to note that all those cases are still far from being able to match Turkey's multi-layered institutional ties with the West. On the other hand, Turkey is also said to have seized the opportunities extended by the enlargement of global governance structures like the replacement of G8 with G20 so that it became more confident as an active player contrary to its former role as passive complier<sup>22</sup>.

## 2. Turkey's Deteriorating Europeanization agenda

Another dimension of Turkey's greater strategic autonomy ambition is that Turkey's bid to join the EU have stalled by 2007 because of the French President Sarkozy's and German Chancellor Merkel's reluctance vis-à-vis Turkey's full membership. The years between 2002 and 2005 is commonly referred as 'the Golden Age'<sup>23</sup> in Turkey-EU relations and marked by Turkey's unprecedented efforts to make membership reforms. However, Turkey's membership process has been stalled by several factors: Turkey was not seen as European on cultural grounds, Turkey was seen too big to handle, EU had

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<sup>21</sup> KUTLAY, M. "GLOBAL POWER SHIFTS AND TURKEY-EU RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF HYBRIDITY", *Institut Bosphore*, 2019. Available at: [http://www.institut-bosphore.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/IB\\_-\\_PolicyPaper\\_MustafaKutlay.pdf](http://www.institut-bosphore.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/IB_-_PolicyPaper_MustafaKutlay.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> ÖNIŞ, Z. "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), pp. 47-65, 2011. Available at: <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/multiple-faces-of-the-new-turkish-foreign-policy-underlying-dynamics-and-a-critique>

<sup>23</sup> ÖNIŞ, Z. "Turkey-EU Relations: Beyond the Current Stalemate", *Insight Turkey*, pp. 35-50, 2008. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26330810>

its own internal crisis about the so-called EU constitution debates and finally EU accepted Cyprus as a member without the resolution of territorial disputes in the island which further complicated Turkey's bid to join the EU. As a result, both public and elite support drastically declined for joining the EU<sup>24</sup>. The years afterwards 2007 have witnessed loose Europeanization and de-Europeanization very recently.

Turkey's bid to join the EU was a crucial component of Turkey's Western orientation. In parallel to its vivid Europeanization agenda, Turkey's relations with Greece have also been unprecedentedly good at the time. Turkey tried hard for the resolution of Cyprus dispute in line with UN-backed Annan plan which is accepted by large majority of Turkish Cypriots but rejected by Greek Cypriots. EU's acceptance of Cyprus as a member without a decisive resolution of the dispute has caused a sense of resentment in Turkey. It was one of the biggest strategic mistakes of the EU that would hamper the relations with Turkey in the years ahead and push Turkey to look for unilateral fait accompli solutions on its own.

### 3. Turkey's increased material capabilities (rise of defence industry, economic improvement, etc.)

One of the most important yet often neglected aspect of Turkey's drift towards greater strategic autonomy is that Turkey has developed a robust national defence industry which recently meets more than 60% of its needs. More self-sufficiency came up with more confidence in projecting power and ability to develop more independent strategic posture. Turkey's domestic production of armed drones, which have proven to be very successful in its involvements in many fronts such as Libya and Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, is just a case in point. In addition, Turkey's economy performed exceptionally high sustained growth since 2002. Although Turkey's current militarized and assertive pursuit costs a lot to the country, it seems Turkey has so far proven to afford it. However, further entrenchment bears the risk of overwhelming its economy so there are limits.

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<sup>24</sup> ÖNIŞ, Z. "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), pp. 47-65, 2011. Available at: <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/multiple-faces-of-the-new-turkish-foreign-policy-underlying-dynamics-and-a-critique>



**Figure 3. Made-in-Turkey Bayraktar TB2 armed drone owned by Azerbaijan is exhibited in a military ceremony to celebrate the triumph in the latest Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.** Source. DAILY SABAH WITH AA. (2020, December 30). *UK to start new drone program following example of Turkey's Bayraktar*. Guardian. Retrieved from Daily Sabah: <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/uk-to-start-new-drone-program-following-example-of-turkeys-bayraktar-guardian>

On the other hand, an important dispute has arisen between Turkey and its Western allies due to Turkey's purchase of S-400 Russian air defence systems. It is certain that this is not in spirit of NATO alliance and would bear serious consequences for Turkey's Western orientation. However, it is important to note that what pushed Turkey to search for alternative air defence systems was that its Western allies did not provide Turkey with an air defence system compatible with NATO systems<sup>25</sup>. In 2015, as Syrian War became heated, US and Germany retrieved US-made patriot missile system back from Turkey in a time where Turkey needed it most.<sup>26</sup> This made Turkey feel vulnerable vis-à-vis Russia and frustrated with the Western allies.<sup>27</sup> Besides this, there have been other occasions that Turkey's Western allies conditioned their military technologic supports to Turkey and

<sup>25</sup> DEMIRDAS, A. "Biden and Turkish-American Relations: The Coming Crisis?", *National Interest*, November 27 2020. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/biden-and-turkish-american-relations-coming-crisis-173365>

<sup>26</sup> DEMIRDAS, A. "Biden and Turkish-American Relations: The Coming Crisis?", *National Interest*, November 27 2020. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/biden-and-turkish-american-relations-coming-crisis-173365>

<sup>27</sup> DEMIRDAS, A. "Biden and Turkish-American Relations: The Coming Crisis?", *National Interest*, November 27 2020. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/biden-and-turkish-american-relations-coming-crisis-173365>

Turkey did not want its Western allies to dictate the terms. Instead, Turkey either procured its needs from non-Western powers or opted to produce them domestically.

#### 4. Turkey use relations with Russia and China to emphasize its importance as an autonomous agent

One of the criticisms towards Turkey is that its growing ties with Russia and China refer to a decisive reorientation of Turkey towards non-Western powers. Although examining this will require a comprehensive accounting of relations between Turkey and these powers, such an endeavour is far beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this paper is content with highlighting that Turkey's relations with them are mostly grounded upon transactional arrangements mostly managed at leader-to-leader level, particularly as Aydın-Düzgıt, Balta, & O'Donohue shows the case for Turkey's relations with Russia<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, there are numerous instances that pit increasingly assertive posture of Turkey against Russia and it is expected that Turkey would have to balance against Russia<sup>29</sup>. In short, Turkey is expected to keep instrumentalizing its relations both with Russia and the West to establish itself more autonomous actor in an increasingly multipolar world<sup>30</sup>.

#### 5. Debates around EU strategic autonomy

Finally, when analysing Turkey's quest for greater strategic autonomy, it is highly relevant to mention the recent discussions about the concept of European strategic autonomy which have started with Macron's speech in 2017. Even the relations between the US and the EU have not been immune to the changing parameters that transformed Turkey. In this age of hybridity, there are starkly growing divergences between the US interests

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<sup>28</sup> AYDIN-DÜZGİT, S., BALTA, E., & O'DONOHUE, A. (2020). "TURKEY, RUSSIA, AND THE WEST: REASSESSING PERSISTENT VOLATILITY, ASYMMETRIC INTERDEPENDENCE, AND THE SYRIA CONFLICT", *Istanbul Policy Center*, 2020. Available at: <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/Content/Images/Document/reassessing-persistent-volatility-asymmetric-interdependence-and-the-syria-conflict-93d479/reassessing-persistent-volatility-asymmetric-interdependence-and-the-syria-conflict-93d479.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> GOT, A. "TURKEY'S CRISIS WITH THE WEST: HOW A NEW LOW IN RELATIONS RISKS PARALYZING NATO", *War on the Rocks*, November 19 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/turkeys-crisis-with-the-west-how-a-new-low-in-relations-risks-paralyzing-nato/>

<sup>30</sup> BECHEV, D. "What does Biden's victory mean for Turkey's relations with Russia?", *Istanbul*, December 5 2020. Available at: <https://en.istanpol.org/post/what-does-biden-s-victory-mean-for-turkey-s-relations-with-russia>

and European interests. One can go further by saying that the same applies to the member states of the EU. The latest EU-China investment deal<sup>31</sup> which is interpreted as an initial step of European strategic autonomy is the latest case in point. Contrary to the expectations, Europeans did not wait until the inauguration of president-elect Biden to forge a common comprehensive approach towards China. Therefore, it is fair to say that Turkey's quest for strategic autonomy is not something peculiar but a striking symptom of a broader pattern in the international scene.

## Conclusion

All in all, Turkey's drift away from the West towards greater strategic autonomy has been incrementally in the making in the recent decades. During the years under the influence of Strategic Depth, Turkey's foreign policy has become multidimensional with thriving openings towards non-Western geographies. In line with this, Turkey has prioritized using soft power tools like proactive diplomacy, burgeoning trade relations, and development aids in its foreign policy. However, this multidimensionality did not come at the expense of Turkey's Western orientation. Turkey has pursued an ambitious Europeanization agenda in the years between 2002-2005 marked by 'Golden Age'. This ambitious Europeanization agenda were hampered by the stagnating membership negotiations due to multiple factors such as EU's reluctance to welcome Turkey in contrast to the admission of Cyprus to the EU without the resolution of disputes in the island. Therefore, Turkey's Europeanization agenda after the 'Golden Age' continued but in a gradually loose manner almost until the end of Davutoglu era (hence the end of Strategic Depth era) in 2016.

As Blue Homeland started to dominate Turkey's geostrategic vision in the aftermath of Davutoglu era and coup attempt of 2016, Turkey's foreign policy manner became strikingly assertive and militarized based on a logic of *fait accompli*. Retreating US presence in parallel to prolific Russian influence over Turkey's neighbouring geographies combined with thriving material capabilities of Turkey forced and/or enabled Turkey to

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<sup>31</sup> For a fair account of strategic implications of the deal on Transatlantic alliance. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/the-strategic-implications-of-the-china-eu-investment-deal/>  
For the highlights of the investment deal between the EU and China. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2542](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2542)

assert greater strategic autonomy from the West to deal with an ever-challenging security environment. However, this shift should not be interpreted as a full-steam reorientation towards non-Western powers. Instead, Erdoğan's Turkey aims at getting a higher status within the West by emphasizing its importance to the West through instrumentalizing tactical cooperation with non-Western powers. Erdogan recently expressed that 'We are a NATO country. We can never accept to be guided by NATO co-members'<sup>32</sup>. In the age of hybridity which is heading towards multipolarity, Turkey does not want to comply with the mostly liberal dictates of its Western allies but to be an equal player within the Western framework. Thus, this paper concludes that Turkey's push for greater strategic autonomy (largely informed by illiberalism at home) and its Western orientation (its historical integration within liberal democratic institutions of the West) pose a serious challenge to the West. It can be reconciled in the current framework only if the West welcomes Turkey with a higher appreciation of its status and ignores Turkey's domestic illiberal tendencies. However, most preferred choice would be Turkey's liberal democratization and orientation in the West, but it is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future.

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<sup>32</sup> YETKIN, M. "Signals of revision in Turkish foreign policy", *Yetkin Report*, January 18 2021. Available at: <https://yetkinreport.com/en/2021/01/18/signals-of-revision-in-turkish-foreign-policy/>