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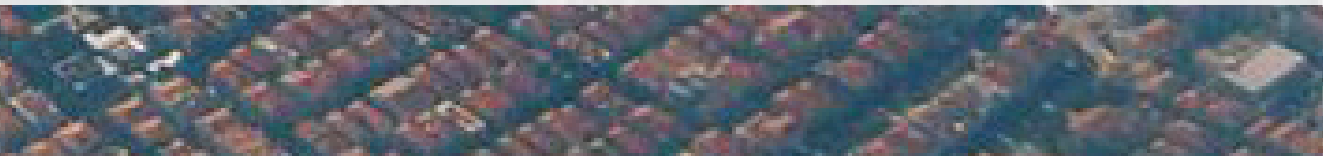

ARTICLE

Deciphering Turkey's Assertive Military and Defense Strategy: Objectives, Pillars, and Implications*

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ABSTRACT *This article argues that the change in Turkey's defense and military strategy stems both from Turkey's changing security landscape following the post-Arab spring regional disorder and Turkey's quest to be an assertive regional player. The reasons behind the change in Turkish defense and military strategy also include a desire to gain political influence in the international arena and improve Turkey's military capabilities to deter emerging security threats near its borders and abroad. The article seeks to unpack Turkey's growing assertive military and defense strategy by taking into account its main drivers, primary objectives and essential pillars, as well as its tangible repercussions on the military mindset. The article has two main sections. The first section contextualizes Turkey's new military and defense strategy by taking into consideration its main drivers, objectives and pillars. The second empirically scrutinizes Turkey's military strategy by focusing on its military activism in extra-territorial domains. In this section, Turkey's military interventions in Syria following the failed military coup and its strategy of power projection are examined to explain the question of how Turkey operationalizes its new military and defense strategies.*

Keywords: Military Strategy, Turkish Defense Industry, Assertiveness, Strategic Autonomy, Power Projection

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Introduction

The recent strategic moves in Turkey's military and security policy remain an interesting puzzle for those interested in Turkish foreign and security policy. Over the past two decades, Turkey has been fundamentally transforming its military strategy in the fight against terrorism at both the domestic and regional level, particularly since the failed military coup attempt in 2016. However, it has also been adopting a more 'assertive military activism' to protect its national security interests, prevent counter-balancing moves and ultimately gain strategic leverage against its adversaries in the regional and international geopolitical competition. As an integral part of its military and foreign policy activism in approaching different regional issues, Turkey's adaptation of assertive defense industry policies, such as acquiring S-400s from Russia while attempting to develop its own short-range to long-range surface-to-air missile system alongside its other hard power instruments, raises a wide set of questions ranging from tactical-operational level challenges to geopolitical ones. Why has Turkey adopted more assertive practices in which the use of military force and power maximization has become the linchpin in its new military and defense strategy formulation? What drives Turkey's new assertive military and defense strategy as the major foreign policy perspective shaping its bilateral relations and its motivation in regional and international politics?

Three lines of thought have emerged to explain the increasing assertiveness in Turkey's military strategy. The first seeks to explain Turkey's new military assertiveness from an individualistic perspective by locating the role of leadership in the decision-making process. By situating President Erdoğan as the main reference point, proponents of this line of reasoning argue that Turkey's gradual deviation in foreign and military policy practices can be understood as the product of Erdoğan's rational calculation of what is in his best interest.[1] The second attempt argues that transformation in military strategy is best understood not as a unique product of Erdoğan's preference, but as the culmination of tendencies in domestic Turkish politics in the context of the crisis of state-society transformation, particularly since the July 15 military coup attempt.[2] The final explanation concerning Turkey's new military and defense strategy underlines a two-level transformation. While some analyses point to the global and regional geopolitical consequence of the crisis of the U.S.-led international order by arguing that Turkey is not the exception in choosing an assertive strategy, others argue that political turmoil in Turkish foreign policy and military strategy is a product of the Syrian internal war and the regional geopolitical shifts in the post-Arab uprising era.[3] Such an argument frames Turkish foreign policy motivation as a counter-reactionary resistance against the international and regional crisis, which has ultimately shaped the counter-reactions necessary to Turkey's survival, as it has forced Turkey to adopt a new foreign and military strategy.

Turkey's new military and defense strategy have been under significant transformation since the Arab uprising started to reshape the regional order in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2011

Rather than focusing solely on a single determinant factor to make sense of Turkey's shift in foreign and military strategy, this paper takes into consideration dynamics in Turkey's domestic, regional, and international security landscapes as the prevailing drivers in shaping its new strategy of assertiveness. The article argues that the change in Turkey's defense and military strategy stems both from Turkey's changing security landscape following the post-Arab spring regional disorder and Turkey's quest to be an assertive regional player, which has in fact long been a central component of Ankara's post-2002 foreign policy objective. The reasons behind the change in Turkish defense and military strategy also include a desire to gain political influence in the international arena and improve Turkey's military capabilities to deter emerging security threats near its borders and abroad. The article seeks to unpack Turkey's growing assertive military and defense strategy by taking into account its main drivers, primary objectives and essential pillars, as well as its tangible repercussions on the military mindset. The article is composed by two main sections. The first section contextualizes Turkey's new military and defense strategy by taking into consideration its main drivers, objectives and pillars. The second empirically scrutinizes Turkey's military strategy by focusing on its military activism in extra-territorial domains. In this section, Turkey's military interventions in Syria following the failed military coup and its strategy of power projection are examined to explain the question of how Turkey operationalizes its new military and defense strategies.

Turkey's New Assertive Strategy

Turkey's new military and defense strategy have been under significant transformation since the Arab uprising started to reshape the regional order in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2011. Proliferation of non-state armed groups, decline of conventional state sovereignty, questioning of nation-state borders across the region, proxy war as the new tool of the foreign and security apparatus of the regional countries and power competition among the countries across the MENA region have all shaken Turkey's security landscape and forced it to adopt a new assertive military strategy in order to take a more proactive stance. Assertiveness in the context of Turkish military strategy has manifested itself through Turkey's extra-territorial rapid military operations and forward military posture as well as its growing de-

The new foreign policy vision initiated by the government started to shape the priorities of the defense industry, and the military eventually had to adapt itself as an integral part of the government's vision

fense industry. In addition to the regional geopolitical developments in general and the conflict spill-over effects of the Syrian civil war on Turkey's national security in particular, the global geopolitical turmoil with the return of great power rivalry and intense security, political and economic competition among the major global powers are perceived as a challenge to Turkey's national interests and foreign policy strategy in its surrounding regions. The Syrian civil war can be taken as a textbook example of how Turkish military strategy has been shaped and influenced by two superpowers' strategic and tactical competition over regional issues in the MENA region. As a result of the fundamental transformation of Turkey's geopolitical landscape both on the regional and international scale, Turkey has resorted to coercive posturing, the stated strategic objective of which is to contain the threats from the Middle East and recalibrate national and regional interest through the application of cross-border military force.

Drivers

The transformation in Turkey's new military and defense strategy is arising out of domestic, regional, and international developments. On the domestic level, the gradual change in the decision-making process and a change in Turkey's geopolitical vision are the main prevailing factors. In the context of internal political development, there has been a significant shift in the power differential of Turkey's civil-military relations in which the Turkish Armed Forces' (TAF) special role above politics had provided an exceptional position to the military in formulating the country's military and defense strategy. This exceptional role also granted an untouchable status for the military in Turkey's military-industrial complex.[4] More to the point, while the military was one of the central actors in planning Turkey's military and defense strategy during the 1990s, the civil government was an unresponsive actor that only had the right to speak during technical approval procedures.[5] In the post-2002 era of Turkish politics, however, the imbalance in civil-military relations fundamentally transformed so that the civil government became the ultimate authority in formulating defense and military strategy as a consequence of intense political struggle between the government and the military. The new foreign policy vision initiated by the government started to shape the priorities of the defense industry, and the military eventually had to adapt itself as an integral part of the government's vision. In the first phase of the AK Party era (2002-2008), the military was the only actor able to securitize foreign policy issues on behalf of its own strategic view, which was mainly formulated with reference to the role

of the TAF as the protector of the Republican regime.[6] The AK Party changed the balance in favor of civilianization and the democratization of civil-military relations.

With this shift already underway, the July 15 military coup attempt organized by FETÖ was a turning point in the history of Turkish civil-military relations, affecting the very nature of the military-industrial-political complex in Turkey. The first consequence of the failed coup involved a reshuffling of the TAF's organizational structure, in which the Ministry of Defense became the superior authority over the military decision-making process. Following the fundamental change in Turkey's political structure from a parliamentary to a presidential system after the 2018 constitutional referendum, the President became a powerful actor in civil-military relations and in Turkey's defense architecture.

Beside this revolutionary move in civil-military relations, the idea of building a more powerful national defense sector is another important dynamic behind the consolidation of the defense and military strategies that had already been under transformation. While the military as a tool of foreign policy had been reinvented to reflect Turkey's foreign policy objectives in the post-2016 strategic environment, the defense industry was designed as an integral part of Turkey's hard power instruments in order to gain more freedom of strategic maneuver against security threats in the region. The combination of a strengthened defense industry and military activism in the security crisis paved the way for an assertive posture in the defense and military domain that ultimately changed Turkey's military and defense strategy.[7] Turkey's assertiveness in the tactical and operational usage of its domestically-made drones, not only against non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations but also against Syrian regime forces and the Libyan National Army consolidated the vision of the military-foreign policy nexus and reinforced Turkey's quest to be a self-sufficient country in terms of its defense industry.[8]

Finally, the deterioration of Turkey's diplomatic relations with the U.S. and other supplier countries in the defense industry, and the rise of tactical and strategic divergences regarding the Syrian war and other regional crises had a trigger effect on Turkey's military and defense strategy in which Turkish decision-makers lost their trust in the value of partnership with Western countries.[9] Domestically, driven by the idea of establishing a self-sufficient national defense industry and taking unilateral military action in the case of direct military confrontation, the strategy evolved toward a more assertive posture.[10]

The change in Turkey's military and defense strategy was not only the product of domestic developments. At the regional level, geopolitical turmoil and the changing nature of the strategic environment in the post-Arab spring era

The return of territorial anxiety in which the fear of loss of territory was the central component of Turkey's conventional security culture put forward a military solution as the ultimate option

became another prevailing factor behind the transformation of Turkey's military and defense strategy. First and foremost was Turkey's changing strategic environment. The intensification of the Syrian civil war, including the rapid proliferation of non-state armed groups and the regionalization and internationalization of the conflict, significantly undermined Turkey's national security architecture at the domestic level as well as its regional security priorities. In the context of the Syrian conflict, the rise of the PKK and ISIS in Syria and the PKK's Syrian offshoot the YPG's territorial expansion in Syria posed a deep strategic challenge for Turkey's national security that ultimately forced Turkey to adopt a more assertive military strategy to prevent the PKK-YPG's territorial and military mobilization. While the PKK initiated a new strategy based on urban warfare tactics[11] in the southern part of Turkey to gain 'regional autonomy' as a part of its Rojova project supported by the U.S. and Turkey's other Western allies, ISIS directly targeted Turkey by aiming to expand its local network in Turkey and deepen the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Therefore, the first-tier zone of Turkey's core strategic environment was threatened by two terrorist organizations; this paved the way for the re-emergence of territorial anxiety, which had been the dominant security narrative in the early post-Cold war era among the extant security establishments. The return of territorial anxiety in which the fear of loss of territory was the central component of Turkey's conventional security culture put forward a military solution as the ultimate option.

The second prevailing dynamic on the regional level was the profound geopolitical antagonism among the major regional powers that produced a very restrictive security environment in which all the regional players embraced security-oriented strategic engagements. In this restrictive and competitive security environment, the regional players mainly embraced military and hard power instruments to overcome their geopolitical challenges. While some of the major players undertook direct military intervention against other states, others implemented an asymmetric strategy by using proxy elements, either to protect their near interests or to militarily support militant groups in extra-territorial terrains. Three geopolitical axes, namely Turkey-Qatar, Egypt-Saudi Arabia and UAE/Israel- Iran/Syria emerged following the Arab uprising which fundamentally reshaped Turkey's strategic reorientation. Meanwhile, while Russia became a direct game changer in the Syrian crisis, the U.S. portrayed itself as a leading actor in the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, a clash that ultimately threatened Turkey's top national security priorities in its neighborhood.

Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar visiting Mogadishu, Somalia, with the Chief of General Staff Gen. Yaşar Güler on November 8, 2018.

ARİF AKDOĞAN / AA

Change in the Middle East is not the only driver of the emergence of Turkey's new military and defense strategy. Geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics in the Mediterranean and the regionalization of the Libyan conflict also changed Turkey's strategic orientation in the region and enforced the adoption of a new engagement strategy. Local and regional competition articulated around the Libyan conflict and geoeconomic competition over hydro-carbon sources contributed to forcing Turkey to reformulate its military and defense strategy.

At the international level, increasing global geopolitical rivalry and the return of great power competition provoked Turkey to adopt an assertive strategy in its foreign and security policy, which ultimately reshaped its defense preferences. More importantly, the deterioration in Turkey's relations with the Western countries, particularly with the U.S., impelled Turkey to increase its national defense industry capacity in order to deal with the increasing threats. While the first domain reiterated that Turkey should change its strategy in the military-industrial complex, the second domain showed that Turkey should adopt an assertive military posture to contain security threats, especially those

emanating from the Syrian civil war. The latter also brought new challenges for Turkey in terms of consolidating its power status.

Objectives

Against the aforementioned background in terms of the main drivers, the objectives of Turkey's new military and defense strategy should be underlined. Three main objectives have become the dominant understanding for Turkey's mid- and long-term strategic priorities in military and defense policies. The primary objective is to achieve "strategic autonomy,"[12] i.e. to establish a sustainable and self-sufficient defense industry, first to maintain an assertive and deterrent military posture and second to overcome the primary security concerns emanating from the first-tier threat landscape. Here the concept of strategic autonomy refers to Turkey's ability to set its own strategic priorities and make its own decisions in matters of foreign, security and defense policies. More importantly, it underlines Turkey's ability to have the means to implement strategic decisions with or without its partners for crucial national security-related issues.

The question of how Turkey will gain and implement strategic autonomy depends on its ability to make unilateral decisions if necessary, which will ultimately provide strategic flexibility for Turkey's quest for political independence. Operational autonomy is the complementary step for gaining strategic autonomy; it requires improvements in the country's industrial and technological capacity. In terms of implementing strategic autonomy, there is a mutually constitutive relationship between military strategy and the defense industry. Gaining more independence in the defense industry, according to this approach, will provide more freedom of ability to take independent military action and ultimately facilitate the postulation of a strategic military posture abroad. Fulfillment of this goal necessitates a reformulation of the TAF's organizational structure, advancing its operational capabilities and filling the gap between its technological capacity and military capabilities. With the improvement of the TAF's operational capabilities, a more professional army capable of high mobility and more technologically equipped military units are desired.[13]

The goal of strategic autonomy is also an integral part of Turkey's regional geopolitical vision which brings the second dimension of the objectives of Turkey's new military and defense strategy into the discussion. By achieving strategic autonomy, Turkey seeks to portray itself as one of the dominant actors in its surrounding region. This foreign policy objective has been the linchpin of Turkey's regional strategic orientation since 2002,[14] and has manifested itself throughout Turkey's regional integration project based on region-wide economic mobilization, political dialogue and the de-securitization of conventional security issues, particularly with its neighboring countries. However, with the wave of regional insecurity following the Arab uprisings, Turkey's quest to be a regional power involved a new strategic orientation. The new military and defense

strategy was thus reformulated in accordance with the requirements of the assertive regional power of Turkey. While critical investments in the defense industry were allocated to provide Turkey with a more assertive military posture, Turkey's military activism became more apparent in the context of Turkey's regional policies.

The ability to act unilaterally, the ability to show Turkey's military power visibly and the ability to implement credible deterrence are the main components of Turkey's deterrence in military and defense strategy

The main driver behind Turkey's quest to become an assertive regional power was to achieve greater strategic weight to counter the new geopolitical antagonism in the region, which brings us to the third objective of Turkey's military and defense strategy: Gaining strategic leverage by increasing its military capacity has become an integral instrument of Turkey's strategic competition with the countries in the region. By increasing its military instruments and power projection capacities, Turkey has sought to achieve strategic dominance in the regional crisis and prevent any *fait accompli* actions against its primary interests.

Pillars

While Turkey aims to achieve strategic autonomy, assertive regional power status and strategic leverage against its adversaries in its strategic environment by increasing its military power, the question of how Turkey will operationalize these goals is another important discussion. Turkey's military and defense strategies are firmly based on three pillars: increasing its military readiness, pre-emptive status and deterrence capability. Together, these eventually aim to calibrate Turkey's strategic autonomy, power status and strategy dominance in regional geopolitics.

The first pillar involves increasing and strengthening the level of Turkey's "military readiness,"[15] defined as the ability of the TAF to fight and achieve the assigned strategic or political objectives. This pillar has been one of the key components of the TAF's transformation process since the end of the Cold War. However, following the structural changes in Turkey's strategic environment such as the proliferation of non-state armed groups, the PKK's territorial expansion in Syria and strategic competition between Turkey and other regional powers, military readiness has more recently emerged as a top priority. Two key sub-components are particularly important to implement military readiness as a pillar of Turkey's new military strategy. To prevent the mobilization of non-state armed groups, minimize their military and political existence and ultimately defeat them, especially in Syria and Iraq, the TAF highlights improving and deepening joint readiness as one of its key focus areas; this requires a powerful operational readiness, as witnessed in Turkey's four military interven-

Given the rapidly escalating nature of terrorist activities in the Middle East in the post-Arab uprising era, it is possible to argue that the rapid dominance has become a stronger military motivation for the TAF's cross border operations in Syria and north of Iraq

tions in Syria, the TAF's fight against the PKK in Iraq, Turkey's military assistance to the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya and finally Turkey's military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean to protect its sovereign rights. The second sub-component of military readiness consists of structural readiness in which the three major components of military power (land, sea, and air) should be integrated under the same military doctrine to achieve strategic superiority in regional competition with other regional powers.

The second pillar of Turkey's military and defense strategy is to have a 'pre-emptive force structure and strategy,' particularly in the fight against terrorism. Following the PKK's urban surge in 2015, its political and military expansion in Iraq and Syria and ISIS' territorial gains in Syria, preemptive military operations became an ultimate solution. Rather than solely based on a preemptive or preventive attack against the adversary's potential attacks, Turkey's preemptive capacity is based on a temporary military presence in extra-territorial terrains. Another dimension of Turkey's preemptive status is to display its military presence in order to prevent potential diplomatic loss. Turkey's military missions in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean highlight its preemptive move against its adversaries.

The final pillar of Turkey's military and defense strategy is to show Turkey's military deterrence. This was a central component of Turkey's military strategy in the post-Cold War era in the context of collective defense under the strategic framework of NATO.[17] Following the Syrian crisis and regional turmoil, deterrence re-emerged as one of Turkey's key military postures. The ability to act unilaterally, the ability to show Turkey's military power visibly and the ability to implement credible deterrence are the main components of Turkey's deterrence in military and defense strategy.

These pillars encapsulate Turkey's compartmentalizing defense policies in accordance with the TAF's changing role in international politics. As such, forward defense has become an integral part of Turkey's new military and defense strategy in order to detect national and regional threats across borders and carry out preventive interventions before the threats reach Turkish territory. By establishing bases in the near and far abroad, Turkey seeks to build a sphere of political-military influence in order to deliver its foreign policy objectives, especially in the MENA region.[17]

Table 1: Framework of Analysis in Turkey's Military and Defense Strategy

Grand Strategy and Objective	*Strategy*	*Pillars*	*Operational Art (Military Excellence)*	*Tactics*	*Defense Procurement*
– Protect territorial integrity of the nation – Protect long-term maritime interests – Advance country's international status and gaining leverage – Achieve strategic autonomy	– Balancing act between great powers – Build strong national defense industry – Deter, and compel potential adversaries – Gain and maintain intelligence superiority – Gain and maintain operation initiative	– Military Readiness o Operational/combat readiness o Structural readiness – Pre-emptive status o Preemptive intervention against Terrorist Organizations o Preventive military mission to prevent diplomatic loss – Deterrence	*Land* – Implement joint combined warfare – Build and enhance partner capabilities *Air* – Enhance overseas operation capabilities – Gain and maintain air superiority *Navy* – Enhance overseas operation capabilities – Deny access/area to adversaries	– Deploy special forces and commando brigades – Utilize drone power innovatively – Air & Land Battle – Utilize airlift capabilities – Utilize sealift capabilities	– Invest greatly in national defense infrastructure – Increase the sustainability of the defense industry – Strike a balance between force quality and quantity – Detect critical capabilities to prioritize – Seek foreign partners for transitory solutions in national difficulties – Build and enhance influence via defense trade

Source: *Compiled from author's own work*

Turkey's New Military and Defense Strategy in Practice

This section explores Turkey's new military and defense strategy by focusing on two different military missions in which the TAF has been involved in the last decade. To contextualize Turkey new military strategy, Turkey's recent military involvements are examined in terms of the structure/nature of the operation (i.e. low-, medium-, high- or no-intensity). The main missions of Turkey's military engagement are categorized as combating terrorism in the context of rapid decisive operations (RDO) and power projection (PP).

Rapid Decisive Operations

Since the 1990s, the TAF has undergone a little-noticed but prominent deviation from the orthodox military mindset. Giving that 'war itself is a mere extension of politics by other means,'[18] an emerging effect-based approach customizing military philosophy and structure, defense investment and procurement priorities has been adopted. This effect-based approach proposes a strategy that to achieve a highly desired political outcome, all military and non-military capabilities should be exerted in an interactive and progressive way.[19] Operationally, the effect-based approach is connected with a very particular concept: rapid decisive operations, also known as 'rapid dominance' or 'shock and awe.' RDOs are dependent on executing a sequence of constant strikes over multiple targets through the coordination of air, land, sea and space power to have an impact on the enemy's perception and to physically capture territory when necessary.[20] Given the rapidly escalating nature of terrorist activities in the Middle East in the post-Arab uprising era, it is possible to argue that the rapid dominance has become a stronger military motivation for the TAF's cross border operations in Syria and north of Iraq.

Four cases can be taken into consideration to make sense of Turkey's new military strategy and its implementation on the ground with the assistance of the Turkish indigenous defense industry. Operation Euphrates Shield (OES: August 2016-March 2017), Operation Olive Branch (OOB: January-March 2018), Operation Peace Spring (OPS: October-November 2019), Operation Spring Shield (OSS: February-March 2020) and Turkey's various military operations in the north of Iraq against the PKK are excellent examples of RDOs in which the TAF acted as the main military body. These military operations took place with the purpose of degrading and defeating ISIS and deterring the ongoing PKK/YPG[21] expansion in the north of Syria and Iraq. These operations are important turning points; they depict the extent to which military channels have become a central component of Turkey's foreign policy making, particularly since the July 15 military coup attempt. They resulted from the need to overcome the disturbed security landscape along Turkey's borders with Syria and the geopolitical necessity of establishing cross-border operational depth.[22] The means of conducting and the results of these operations are extremely significant to demonstrate how

Turkish military forces portray themselves on the battlefield. From tactical, operational, and strategic perspectives, these operations are also distinct from the former experiences of the TAF.

The Turkish Ministry of Defense shared footage displaying how Turkish UCAVs were effectively used in eliminating mobile and static targets

Operation Euphrates Shield: Defeating ISIS

In OES, Turkey's primary objectives were to strengthen border security, push ISIS away from its border (and, therefore, disrupt the organization's center of gravity and prevent ISIS attacks, particularly against border provinces)[23] and prevent the PKK/YPG from carving out a terror corridor by taking control of the east-west line in northern Syria.[24] Prior to OES, the ISIS-controlled territory along the Turkish border included districts, notably Dabiq and other strategically important sites, that enabled maneuverability and gave protection to ISIS.[25] This allowed the organization to control a vast geographical area.

OES represents the complex and constantly changing nature of operational environments in which confusing alliances and a surfeit of adversaries shape the dynamics on the battlefield. Indeed, at the time of OES, Turkey was conducting a multi-domain battle in the post-coup attempt period.[26] OES exhibits the TAF's expertise in joint combined arms maneuvers and the significance of land power for simultaneously attaining both political and geostrategic objectives. During OES, armored and mechanized infantry coordinated with indirect fire support from artillery and close air support from air command; with the support of the Free Syrian Army (FSA -later known as the Syrian National Army), these combined elements carried out a sustained, campaign-level land offensive.[27]

OES proved effective in terms of operational tempo, sustainability and military-geostrategic progress by clearing an area of 1,100sq km in the first 50 days, and subsequently controlling an area of 2,000 km^2.[28] However, during the course of the operation some drawbacks were observed. First, the need for mobility on the tactical, operative and strategic levels came to the surface as a stark reality. The initial use of older battle tanks like the M60A3 with insufficient applique armor and lack of organic or add-on explosive reactive armor with poorly-prepared terrain-based tactical adjustments increased the risk of exposure to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), leading to substantial military equipment losses and casualties.[29] Just before the al-Bab offensive, the Leopard 2A4 and M60T, equipped with explosive reactive armor, were deployed to the theater of war. And, on May 11, 2017, the *Fırat* M60T Project was initiated. Valued at $242 million plus ₺50 million, the project aimed to provide more effective armor protection to the M60T MBTs in the Land Forces Command inventory.[30] Regarding the

announced Leopard 2A4 modernization to be carried out by BMC, however, there has been no official signing ceremony or development to date.[31] Second, close air support (CAS) and intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities have vital importance in terms of both force protection and situational awareness on the battleground. Insufficient support to the anti-ISIS global coalition increased the importance of unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) as well as fixed-wing platforms and the integration of operations in the air and on land.

Operation Olive Branch: De-territorializing the PKK

Following OES, Turkey carried out OOB along with the FSA to curb the PKK's influence in northern Syria and to 'de-territorialize' it in the relevant region. More importantly, Turkey aimed to position itself as a strong and inevitable actor in the Syrian civil war via OOB, recalibrate its hard power to enhance its role in the slated negotiations on Syria's future and increase its deterrence power by showing its military might to convince the U.S. to desist from backing the PYD.[32] With OOB, Turkey's military activity spread to a wider geographical area on the western bank of the Euphrates; this hampered the PKK's westward territorial expansion and attempts to position terrorist elements in the area stretching from Ayn al-Arab to Afrin. In this regard, it is possible to argue that OOB aimed to consolidate Turkey's military gains from OES at the strategic level.

During OOB, effective employment of the multiple-fronts tactic impoverished the defense of the PKK/PYD elements by spreading out their forces. Most importantly, heavy use of kinetic air power during the first 72 hours of the operation protected units on the ground and empowered target acquisition by eliminating over a hundred targets. Moreover, it was observed that Turkey tried to fill the gap between its technological capacity and military capabilities by introducing indigenous military systems and technologies such as the Bayraktar TB2 UCAV developed by Baykar, MAM-L smart micro munition, Cirit laser guided missiles developed by Roketsan and T-129 ATAK helicopters developed by Turkish Aerospace Industries with partner AgustaWestland.[33] Indigenously built C4ISR solutions also enabled close coordination and efficient command and control among air and land units.

Operation Peace Spring: Defeating the PKK-YPG

Upon the Trump Administration's decision to withdraw from northeastern Syria, Turkey initiated OPS, which aimed to create a 30 km-deep safe zone to facilitate the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and to eradicate the PKK-YPG threat emanating from northeastern Syria.[34] During the first 24 hours of the operation, approximately two hundred targets were destroyed by air strikes, artillery and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) shelling concentrated over the Ayn Issa, Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ayn regions.[35] The Turkish Ministry of Defense shared footage displaying how Turkish UCAVs were effectively used in eliminating mo-

bile and static targets.[36] The major turning point of the operation was the capture of Ras al-Ayn on October 12, 2019, which enabled Turkish troops to reach the strategically important M4 highway,[37] a vital supply route for the PKK/PYD starting from the Faysh Khabur border gate at the Iraqi border and connecting Manbij and Qamishli. As a result of an agreement between the Syrian regime and the PKK/PYD, it was claimed that the PKK/PYD withdrew from Manbij, Ayn al-Arab and Ayn Issa. Afterward, the regime troops began to be deployed in Tabqa, to the south of Ayn Issa and Tel Amr and finally, on October 16, the regime forces entered Ayn al-Arab.[38] On October 22, 2019, Turkey and Russia reached a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the removal of the YPG in the territory to a depth of 30 kilometers from the Turkish border and setting the launch of joint Russian-Turkish patrols in the area at a depth of 10 kilometers from the Turkish border.[39] These strategic gains were achieved in less than a week without performing a significant armored and mechanized infantry operation, solely by establishing a coordinated command and control structure between the Somali National Army (SNA) forces and Turkish Special Forces and commando units with the assistance of air and artillery assets. OPS, therefore, demonstrated the success of Turkey's model for partnering with local armed groups and the military advancement of the SNA forces vis-a-vis the YPG, America's most reliable and efficient partner in Syria.

Turkey's soft power in Somalia may be seen in its regional investment policy, through which Turkey contributes to Somalia's struggle with disease, drought, and famine

Operation Spring Shield: Deterrence for Punishment

Turkey conducted OSS following an airstrike by the Syrian regime against a Turkish convoy in which 33 Turkish soldiers were killed in Balyun, Idlib.[40] Preventing the influx of refugees from Idlib toward the Turkish border and halting the Syrian regime's advances were the major objectives of conducting such an operation. By the end of OSS, the TAF had eliminated 3,400 regime forces; three aircraft including two SU-24s and a L-39, eight helicopters; eight air defense systems including Pantsir S-1 and Buk missile systems, 156 tanks including T-55, T-62 and T-72 MBTs, 108 cannons and MLRS, 24 armored vehicles, 49 improvised vehicles, 99 military vehicles, ten ammunition depots and two airports.[41] On March 5, 2020, Turkey and Russia agreed to a ceasefire providing the establishment of a secure corridor of six kilometers on either side of the M4 highway to be patrolled jointly by Russia and Turkey.[42] During and after the operation, Turkey increased its military build-up into the region alongside the air defense systems, which will be a test ground for the domestically produced Hisar-O Medium Altitude Air Defense Missile System.[43] OSS demonstrated the strength of Turkey's indigenously built Bayraktar TB2 and ANKA-S UAVs, along with an array of electronic warfare systems and Turkey's mastery of coordinated electronic and network warfare capabilities.[44]

Table 2: Turkey's Military Engagement in Syria

Operation Name	*Euphrates Shield*	*Olive Branch*	*Peace Shield*	*Spring Shield*
Framework	Unilateral action	Unilateral action	Unilateral action	Unilateral action
Environment	Multi-domain	Multi-domain	Multi-domain	Multi-domain
Conflict Type	High-intensity	High-intensity	High-intensity	High-intensity
Mission Type	Rapid Dominance	Rapid dominance	Rapid dominance	Rapid dominance
Target	DAESH	PKK/PYD	PKK/PYD	Syrian Armed Forces
Major Partner	FSA	FSA	SNA	SNA
Major Supportive Country	Global Anti-DAESH Coalition	Russia	Russia	—
Ends	Preventing the establishment of a terror corridor Limiting DAESH's ability to infiltrate Bolstering the TAF's public image	Preventing the establishment of a terror corridor De-territorializing the PKK/PYD	Preventing the establishment of a terror corridor De-territorializing the PKK/PYD Establishing a safe zone	Halting the advance of regime forces Preventing the influx of refugees
Ways	Joint combined arms maneuver Alternative model for partnering with local armed groups	Joint combined arms maneuver	Joint combined arms maneuver	Joint combined arms maneuver
Means	Special forces company Armored company Artillery unit	Special forces company Armored company Artillery unit	Special forces company Armored company Artillery unit	Special forces company Armored company Artillery unit

Source: *Compiled from author's own work*

Power Projection: Beyond Conventional Geopolitical Vision

The second characteristic feature of Turkey's assertiveness in military and defense strategy is power projection (PP), defined as "the ability of a nation to apply all or some of its elements of national power to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain forces to respond to crises, to contribute to deterrence, and to enhance regional stability."[45] It should be understood that power projection is an integral part of Turkey's quest to become an assertive regional power.

Turkey has changed its course of action accordingly with regard to regional crises by gradually taking the military dimension into consideration to effectively tackle the many security threats it has been facing

Considering the political objectives involved and the level of force deployed, Turkey's military power projection missions can be examined in two categories: operations that utilize soft military power and operations that utilize hard military power. The protection of sea lanes of communication, the evacuation of non-combatants in a state of turmoil, humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of a natural catastrophe and peacekeeping operations constitute soft power projection missions. Symbolic military presence showing political interest, the use of threat of military force in deterring potential adversaries, the punitive or offensive use of force and military intervention constitute hard power projection missions.[46] Turkey's forward military deployment strategy is the most significant and tangible strategic move in Turkey's power projection and should be examined as an integral part of Turkey's strategic priorities in its surroundings. Three cases can be treated as text-book examples to see how Turkey is operationalizing its power projection mission in the Middle East and Africa. While Turkey's military mission in Somalia represents its soft power instruments along with its forward military base presence to demonstrate Turkey's strategic interests in the Horn of Africa particularly throughout the sea power capacity, Qatar and Libya illustrate Turkey's willingness to become an assertive regional power.

During the last decade, Turkey has conducted a wide range of PP missions. One of those ongoing missions is conducted in the Horn of Africa, which became a theatre of strategic competition between Turkey, the UAE, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran in the aftermath of the Arab spring. Signaling its soft power projection, Turkey has conducted a range of trade and aid programs in Somalia, which is considered to be the strategic gate to the Horn of Africa. There are four strategic dimensions of Turkey's power projection mission in Somalia. The first is the product of Turkey's soft power there, where Turkey plays a vital role in state-building and infrastructure projects.[47] Turkey's soft power in Somalia may be seen in its regional investment policy, through which Turkey contrib-

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan poses for a photo with government ministers and soldiers during his visit to the Qatari-Turkish Armed Forces Land Command base in Doha, Qatar on November 15, 2017.

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utes to Somalia's struggle with disease, drought, and famine.[48] However, this multi-dimensional interaction has gradually turned out to be a manifestation of Turkey's proactive foreign policy, in the context of strategic competition over regional issues, which is the second element in Turkey's PP dynamics.[49]

The construction of a military training facility in the Wadajir district of Jazeera in Somalia, which began in March 2015 amid security -and development- related bilateral agreements with Mogadishu, represent Turkey's third type of PP in the context of partner capacity-building.[50] This objective is crucial in the fight against terrorism, which can be considered a fourth aspect of Turkey's PP mission. In this regard, Turkey has deployed over 200 officers and soldiers as trainers; they contribute to the improvement of the relevant capabilities of the SNA against the threat of the al-Shabab terrorist organization. Despite the fact that it has been targeted by al-Shabab several times, Turkey continues to perceive Somalia as a projection of Ankara's enlarged geopolitical and economic presence in the Horn of Africa.[51]

Qatar is another strategic move that boosts Turkey's power-driven stature in the Gulf region. Turkey established a military complex in Qatar in 2014 as the outcome of a military deal between the parties following the aftermath of a diplomatic dispute in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) relations.[52] This strategic move, first and foremost, is an integral part of Turkey's changing strategic approach to its power projection tools in the Middle East.[53] It is also about the fundamental challenges that have been negatively influencing Turkey's national and regional security priorities due to the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars. As a consequence of these experiences, Turkey has acknowledged that diplomatic efforts and Turkey's soft power alone are not enough to deliver Turkish national security interests in the region. Turkey has changed its course of action accordingly with regard to regional crises by gradually taking the military dimension into

By positioning a brigade-level joint force and constructing a naval base, Turkey has enlarged its realm of political activity in the Gulf

consideration to effectively tackle the many security threats it has been facing. Therefore, it can be argued that the Turkish way of utilizing military means has been heavily shaped by the Arab spring experience, in which obtaining a balance between diplomatic and military means is a vital necessity. This perspective emerged most vividly during the 2017 Qatar crisis, which Turkey perceived as a continuation of the new regional struggle among the major regional powers.[54]

The initial Turkish troop deployment to Qatar took place in 2015,[55] and it was expected that the military facility would eventually host more than 3,000 personnel, including ground troops, special operations teams and military trainers.[56] Following that came the December 2015 deal allowing a military drill, and an April 2016 deal on Turkish military deployment was ratified in the Turkish Parliament in June 2017.[57] Turkey and Qatar have reportedly agreed upon the construction of a naval base which will include a training center, primarily to take on maritime patrols and monitoring duties.[58] It appears that the alignment of foreign policy issues, such as support for the Egyptian revolution and similar attitudes toward regional conflicts, e.g. Syria and Palestine, have sparked an emerging mutual defense culture between Turkey and Qatar.

While the Qatar move symbolizes Turkey's recalibration of its foreign policy priorities to play a larger role in the Middle East and a balancing act to prevent prospective regional clashes, it also provides Turkey with a forward military position to project power in the Gulf.[59] Additionally, this assertive and strategic military posture presents Turkey with a share in the Gulf defense market, which was a part of Turkey's long-term Gulf strategy.[60] Qatar has ordered various land, naval and air military equipment and systems produced by Turkey, such as Bayraktar TB-2 armed UAVs, Ares 150 Hercules, two training warships, armored combat vehicles and multi-radar and electro-optic camera systems to secure its borders.[61]

In brief, by positioning a brigade-level joint force and constructing a naval base, Turkey has enlarged its realm of political activity in the Gulf. Moreover, the Turkish-Qatari strategic partnership is expected to provide Turkey and Qatar with mutual understanding regarding key defense issues. Further, with its forward military presence in Qatar, Turkey will get a chance to operate in a key center of military activity in which the U.S. has a strong air and naval posture as well.[62]

While the ultimate mindset of the planned Turkish troop deployments to Qatar and Somalia were announced in early 2015 as components of a proactive

Libya, one of the multiple theatres of war in which the TAF has engaged, illustrates how advancements in the TAF's expeditionary warfare capabilities may affect Turkey's future course of military action and presence

Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish military presence in Bashiqa, Iraq is mostly related to the preservation of Turkish national security interest in the Middle East. Turkey's military presence in Northern Iraq is a continuation of a shift from a defensive strategy to an active 'search and destroy' mission to remove the PKK threat. Cross-border counter-terror operations in the 1990s resulted in a brigade-level stationing in Northern Iraq.[63] Today, the main Turkish army facilities are located in the Bashiqa region of Iraq, about 30 kilometers northeast of Mosul. These were established in 2015 as a product of the cooperation with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and Sunni Arabs under the leadership of Atheel al-Nujaifi for a training mission against the ISIS threat.[64]

In Northern Iraq, the initial motivation behind the Turkish military presence in the 1990s was the adoption of a low-intensity conflict strategy against the asymmetric threat of the PKK. The changing nature of the operational environment from a low-intensity conflict to a small war-like crisis led Turkey to rethink its forward military presence in Northern Iraq.[65] Turkey's military posture in Bashiqa has served Turkey's objectives to stabilize the volatile region disputed among the main Kurdish factions, reassure the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) partnership, deter potential rivalries with Iran and the PKK, secure logistics and defense communication lines during counter-terrorism operations[66] and, immediately after the independence referendum in the KRG, establish ties with the Baghdad administration.[67]

In contrast to Qatar and Somalia, Turkey's involvement in Libya, which is a theater of active war, is both a part of Turkey's national geostrategic calculations regarding the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum and Turkey's unilaterally imposed regional stabilization efforts. Initial stabilization efforts started with Turkey's participation in the NATO Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in 2011, which was authorized by UN Security Council resolutions to impose an arms embargo against the Gaddafi regime and a no-fly zone to protect Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas. Turkey contributed to OUP with four frigates, a submarine, two tanker aircrafts and four F-16s fighters; the operation was successfully concluded on October 31, 2011.[68]

Since 2019, Turkey has deployed UAVs and sent soldiers to Tripoli in an advisory capacity to support the UN-recognized Government of National Ac-

cord (GNA) under the framework of a MoU signed between Turkey and Libya. It has been claimed that approximately two thousand members of the SNA were sent to Libya alongside an array of air defense systems, including medium-range MIM-23 Hawk missile systems, Hisar short-range SAMs and Korkut antiaircraft guns.[69]

With the help of kinetic air power provided by Bayraktar TB2s, Turkey's military assistance to the GNA brought about strategic gains on the ground such as the capture of the Mitiga International Airport previously controlled by Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and Watya Airbase; the shooting down of an Antonov An-26 cargo plane carrying ammunition for LNA forces near Tarhuna and the destruction of Pantsir-S1 air defense systems along with the Krasukha Electronic Warfare System provided for the Russian private military company Wagner to support their activities in Libya.[70]

In brief, Libya, one of the multiple theatres of war in which the TAF has engaged, illustrates how advancements in the TAF's expeditionary warfare capabilities may affect Turkey's future course of military action and presence. At the time of this writing, the military cooperation between Ankara and Tripoli is moving to the next phase. It is claimed that the deployment of Turkish UCAVs and air defense systems at Watya Airbase and the conversion of Misrata Port into a naval base for a permanent deployment of Turkish naval assets are planned.[71]

Conclusion

To become a potent, independent security player and increase the power status of a country, the ability to project national power is essential. In the case of Turkey, its assertive military posture emerges as an alternative in the eyes of security and political establishments. To overcome security and geopolitical challenges, Turkey started to exercise a coercive military posture via unilateral military action thanks to the advancements in its emerging indigenous defense industry. From Libya to Syria, its strategy of assertiveness seems to be successful in terms of serving Turkey's short- and mid-term military and political interests. However, the assertiveness in Turkey's military and defense strategy should take into consideration certain concerns regarding the relevant of its policies.

The first concern can be highlighted in the context of the sustainability of Turkey's assertiveness. Its assertive military posture should not be costly politically or economically; Ankara needs to consider the exploitation of Turkey's resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional reform. More importantly, the strategy should en-

Turkey's assertive military and defense strategy paves the way for different types of counter-balancing moves in its geopolitical environments that may ultimately run up high strategic costs that undermine its own interests

hance both current and future requirements to meet the country's political strategy and aspirations. The second concern is the possibility of becoming overextended in terms of military engagements. Here two dynamics are important. The first is the challenge posed by operational overstretch in which Turkey's multiple operational theaters, objectives and type of targets are heavily reliant on military instruments in such a way as to undermine its future capabilities. The second dynamic involves the strong link between the maintenance of Turkey's assertiveness and the growth of its defense industry, both of which require extensive economic resources.

The third challenge posed is that of questioning the logic behind over-emphasizing military assertiveness in achieving foreign policy objectives. The nexus between foreign policy and military strategy needs to be designed in terms of the nature of the conflict, the number and character of the actors involved in the crisis and the features of the strategic environment, i.e. whether it is competitive, restrictive or permissive while the military operation is taking place. Turkey's strategic environment since the Arab uprising has been a conflictual, competitive and restrictive space in which state and non-state actors are fighting against each other. Turkey's assertive military strategy is perceived as the ultimate way to overcome its security and geopolitical concerns. However, relying on the military instrument as the only tool for overcoming Turkey's geopolitical problems would pose a strategic challenge for Turkey which leads to the fourth challenge: counter-balancing costs. Counter-balancing is the natural result of military and geopolitical competition. Turkey's assertive military and defense strategy paves the way for different types of counter-balancing moves in its geopolitical environments that may ultimately run up high strategic costs that undermine its own interests. Counter-balancing moves may either instrumentalize political options such as geopolitically alienating, strategically containing or militarily restraining Turkey's freedom of action; or they may lead to a military option that includes hard balancing strategies that force Turkey to be even more aggressive in terms of its military build-up. Last but not least, Turkey should reconsider announcing a declarative White Book to explain its National Military and Defense Strategy which should be an integral part of its Grand Strategy. With the lack of a grand strategy in military engagement and the lack of clear objectives for the defense industry, the current military strategy could bring about a real strategic challenge in which escalation management and credible deterrence could deepen regional insecurity.

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* I warmly thank Sibel Koru for her contribution to this article.

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