ARTICLE

Turkey's Grand Strategy in the Post-Liberal Era: Democratic Assertiveness

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Abstract

The global security environment has been in flux for almost two decades now, and Turkey has been at the center of the major global shifts that have taken place since the end of the Cold War. The demise of the Soviet Union, the democratic revolutions in the Eastern European countries, the Gulf War, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Arab Spring and the subsequent domestic turmoil in some of its neighboring countries, such as Syria, have influenced Turkey dramatically. Among the recent major challenges, one can count an unprecedented refugee flow, the loss of interest by the U.S. in the Middle East and the ensuing opening of a sphere of influence for authoritarian countries like Russia and Iran to fill the vacuum, the revival of terrorist attacks and the halting of the long-awaited peace process to achieve a long-lasting solution to the Kurdish problem, and the strained relations with the EU. All of these challenges coincide with a period in world history characterized by the decline of the institutions-based order, rising nationalism and authoritarianism in the most advanced democracies and-last but not least-a shift from a unipolar world to a multipolar one. In order to meet these challenges, I recommend that Turkey employ a grand strategy of democratic assertiveness, which consists of

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(a) persistent democratic reforms in the domestic realm and (b) an assertive defense strategy in the military realm. In the present article, I analyze the existing state of the international environment to identify the risks and opportunities and to assess the overall instruments available to policymakers. I conclude with a presentation of the main pillars of Turkish grand strategy for a concrete recipe for policymakers.

Keywords

Democratic assertiveness, unipolarity, hegemonic order, regime of dissidence.

Introduction

Grand strategy is conventionally perceived to be an overarching foreign policy plan for great powers. Indeed, it has rarely been discussed in the context of middle power states, since such states' influence is thought not go beyond their immediate region.[1] Nevertheless, the decline in American hegemony and, with it, the weakening of the post-WWII liberal institutions accompanied by the rise of China and Russia led to the resurrection of the major power rivalry and an increase in the significance of middle and/or regional power states. This complex global security environment presents challenges for countries like Turkey as well as some opportunities. I argue that the key to make the best use of these opportunities is to maintain a stable domestic political environment guided by the principles of rule of law and democratic institutionalization. In this context, I propose that Turkey should follow a grand strategy of *democratic assertiveness* in order to minimize the threats to its security and interests from states and non-state armed actors in the long run. A strategy of democratic assertiveness builds on two foundations: (a) persistent efforts to implement democratic reforms in the realms of individual rights and liberties, freedom of speech and rule of law and (b) an assertive defense strategy that is transparent and consistent and coordinated with long-term security partners, such as the NATO and the EU.

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The major problems that will face the world in the future will stem from great power rivalry, the prevalence of proxy conflicts and the risk of nuclear war. This does not mean that global issues such as climate change, cyberattacks, economic crises and contagious diseases are not as important. Nevertheless, my

focus in this paper is on the former. We are at the juncture of a transition from a rules-based international order to a post-liberal order characterized by states constantly competing with each other to achieve status, either globally or in their region.[2] The uncertainty that characterizes this transition is exacerbated by a confused unipolar state, the U.S., with respect to the role it wants to play: whether to be the shaper of this new era or allow its role to be shaped by other major powers such as Japan, Russia, China and the EU. The confusion of the U.S. stems from two factors:[3] (1) the cognitive gap between policymakers and academics, who are experts on the broader patterns of interstate relations, and (2) the gap between the foreign policy establishment, which has been motivated to shape the world in the shadow of the U.S. ever since the end of WWI, and the American public or domestic audience, which feels neglected by the establishment's long-standing project of liberal hegemony.

The future structure of the international system will be determined by how these two gaps are closed in the upcoming years. The major characteristics of the current international environment are as follows:

1. A troubled unipolar state that is not fully committed to playing the role of a hegemon,
2. An increasing number of imbalanced interstate relations characterized by constantly shifting interstate alliances,
3. The absence of a competing worldview with which to achieve a classical balance of power,
4. Tension between nationalism and liberalism (long invested in the idea of global governance),
5. The increasing cooperation with non-state armed groups to achieve foreign policy objectives.

In order to identify the risks and opportunities available to Turkish foreign policymakers, it is essential to fully comprehend the kind of international system these characteristics yield, and to discuss the likely scenarios for the role of regional and global powers in this newly emerging system. The national security policy of every state is influenced by the material and ideational nature of the international system. The material nature refers to the distribution of power among the major powers in the world. The ideational nature refers to the dominant norms, ideas, values and institutions that make up the global governance patterns for economic relations and security related matters among states.

In the rest of the paper, I will first talk about the challenges and opportunities posed by the changing international environment and its main features as described above. Next, I will talk about the risks and opportunities for Turkey and identify major priorities in its domestic and international political environment. Then, I will present the potential policies Turkey can implement toward a grand strategy of democratic assertiveness.

Grand Strategy in an Age of Uncertainty

There are various definitions of grand strategy in the existing research. Posen defines it as "a nation state's theory about how to produce security for itself."[4] He then states that it entails "the preservation of sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and power position."[5] Brooks and Wohlforth define grand strategy as "a set of ideas for deploying a nation's resources to achieve its interests over the long run."[6] A categorical definition of grand strategy was offered recently by Silove, who argues that grand strategy can be thought of as (a) a grand plan about the choices related to which objectives to prioritize and resources to be allocated towards these objectives, (b) a set of principles related to "decisions across spheres of statecraft with the view of achieving long-term goals," such as the U.S. policy of containment during the Cold War era and (c) a pattern of behavior consistently displayed over time, such as U.S. policies toward the foundation of a hegemonic order in the post-WWII period.[7]

Regardless of how grand strategy is defined, anarchic structure of the international system, i.e. the absence of a world government to run to the rescue of states in times of external attacks to their security and survival, obligates each state with formulating a strategy to maximize its chance of survival. Edward N. Luttwak states that "all states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or not."[8] Going into this strategy are (a) a list of objectives that need to be realized to maximize security and survival and (b) making appropriate choices with respect to the extraction and allocation of domestic resources toward achieving each objective. Figure 1 presents a basic process through which grand strategy is made. I start with the assumption that domestic political affairs cannot be isolated from any strategy that strives to be a grand plan for a state's future.

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Figure 1. Designing Grand Strategy

States' domestic policies have increasingly become influenced by developments in their external environments, and these policies in turn influence foreign policy decisions.[9] The extent to which these two realms have come to be intertwined is almost unprecedented. Several factors are contributing to this trend, such as increasing interdependence among states, the U.S. emphasis on democratic government and human rights in the aftermath of WWII, and particularly in the post-Cold War era as a condition for the sovereign recognition of states, and an increasing number of non-state armed groups that regularly challenge states' authority, bringing about weak states that are vulnerable to third-party interventions. These developments have also led to the erosion of sovereignty as an organizing principle of interstate relations.

While some argue that the American predominance has been gradually fading away and we are in the middle of a transition from a unipolar to multipolar period, some argue that American hegemony will continue for several decades, as long as it is willing to pursue a leadership position in an increasingly multipolar world.[10] This transition period itself deserves special attention if we want to identify a roadmap for a Turkish grand strategy that will serve the country's interests in this highly turbulent and volatile environment. Next, I examine the recent major shifts in the international environment to identify the risks and opportunities facing Turkish foreign policymakers.

A Confused Unipolar Power

The post-Cold War era began with an optimism celebrating the success of liberalism against communism and the anticipation that liberal democracy would prevail as the dominant form of domestic political governance. This success, it was believed, would lead to world peace and stability under the guidance of the U.S.-led liberal hegemony. The present affairs of interstate relations could be described as anything but peaceful and stable, however, and hegemony has turned out to be an extremely ambitious goal, even for the most preponderant unipolar state human history has ever witnessed. The U.S. has been involved in armed conflict abroad for almost two of the total

three decades since the end of the Cold War.[11] During these three decades, the attacks of September 11, the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 2008 financial crisis, the failed Arab Spring, the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, the Russian transition to a revisionist regional power, the rise of populist regimes and "illiberal democracies," the rise of non-state armed groups, insurgents, and terrorists, the trade wars between the U.S. and China and last but not least, a global pandemic make the top ten on the world scene in a long list of issues.

One would anticipate that all these troubles would be better dealt with in a post-bipolar world, where there is a hegemon acting as the guardian of liberal institutions, rules and regulations. Instead, the hegemon has reached a point where it has begun to retrench from its long-held commitments to liberal institutions and democracy promotion abroad.[12] What went wrong? In a 2017 *Foreign Affairs* article, Ikenberry describes the decline of American hegemony with the following words:

Is the world witnessing the demise of the U.S.-led liberal order? If so, this is not how it was supposed to happen. The great threats were supposed to come from hostile revisionist powers seeking to overturn the postwar order. The U.S. and Europe were supposed to stand shoulder to shoulder to protect the gains reaped from 70 years of cooperation. Instead, the world's most powerful state has begun to sabotage the order it created. A hostile revisionist power has indeed arrived on the scene, but it sits in the Oval Office, the beating heart of the free world. Across ancient and modern eras, orders built by great powers have come and gone-but they have usually ended in murder, not suicide.[13]

Trump's foreign policy pursuits after gaining office in 2016 might have caught the international community by surprise or shock. The rule-based order was being challenged by the very state that had championed its foundation. Both the security alliance and the trade systems that had dominated the post-WWII world were being denigrated as useless, in terms of advancing American interests, by the new president. Although it came as a surprise to U.S. allies and trade partners, the debate about whether the U.S. would sustain its role of a liberal hegemon[14] or apply restraint in its foreign policy through selective engagement[15] had long been going on prior to Trump's election.

Whether the recent election of Biden as the new president will bring the U.S. back to the world scene as a hegemon remains to be seen.[16] Should that occur, there is almost scholarly consensus that it will not be on the terms of the U.S. only.[17] Many argue that America should open space for rising powers such as Russia, Japan and China. For scholars who write in the realist tradition, this is not a choice, but an inevitability of the classical balancing strategy. Coun-

terbalancing will occur regardless of whether the U.S. makes room for rising powers or not. On the other hand, liberals argue that the U.S. should engage more deeply with these states to prevent them from balancing against the U.S. and to determine the mode in which they rise as regional and global powers.[18]

Obviously, the international community is facing an unwilling unipolar power. Conventional U.S. allies, other than Israel, are facing a disengaging ally that also happens to be the guardian of the liberal international order. It is not even clear if the U.S. *wants* to continue its hierarchical relationships anymore, such as those with Japan and South Korea. Hence, it has been very difficult for other countries to predict the terms of their alignment with the U.S. In the case of Turkey, the U.S. seems unable to move beyond perceiving Turkey as a strategic ally. This made sense during the Cold War period, when the two states faced a common threat from the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the Cold War period, Turkey remained a member of NATO. Yet the strategic alliance between the U.S. and Turkey had already begun to falter by the time the Syrian conflict began; a major issue of contention had emerged when, in early 2014, the U.S. decided to support the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, an extension and/or partner of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in its operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (DAESH). The two allies now also differed with respect to the source of threat, which is the most significant foundation of a strategic alliance. It was not that Turkey did not see DAESH as a threat; rather, it was the fact that the U.S. was pursuing a policy that increased the sense of insecurity of a major ally in the Middle East by allying with an armed group affiliated with PKK, which Turkey had been fighting for decades till then. This was very disturbing for Turkish policymakers.[19]

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As a result, in the context of the Syrian conflict, Turkey frequently found itself aligning with Russia. This partnership was not necessarily a choice but a necessity on the part of Turkish policymakers at the time. The problem with such an alliance is that it is extremely asymmetrical, leaving little space for Turkey to pursue its interests autonomously. Indeed, U.S. support was occasionally needed to bolster a resilient stand against Russia. This two-tier alliance system further strained Turkey's relations with NATO and the U.S., as did the purchase of the S-400 missile system.

How to navigate between a disengaging hegemon, the U.S. that also happens to be a long-time strategic ally, and an emerging regional power, Russia that strives to dominate the Middle Eastern political landscape? It is time to move on and change the nature of the alliance with the U.S. and NATO from a strategic-based to a principle- or idea-based alliance. NATO already embodies the grounds for such an idea-based alliance. Common ground must be found for restructuring bilateral relations between the two countries beyond a partnership, which only exists in the presence of a common threat. The election of Joe Biden might provide a window of opportunity for a better coordination of the strategic and ideational interests of Ankara and Washington. This would require a consistent effort on the part of Ankara with respect to a realignment of the values, ideas and norms that govern domestic politics and those that govern its foreign affairs. A strategy based on democratic assertiveness can help close the ideational gap between policies across these two realms. It is also the key for formulating a principle-based alliance with the U.S. that goes beyond spontaneous strategic calculations. A revised alliance with the U.S. will make it easier for Turkey to navigate in its asymmetrical alliance with Russia as well.

Increase in Imbalanced Interstate Relations and Shifting Interstate Alliances

Interstate alliance formation has historically been a key component of world politics. Specifically, realist scholars argue that balancing is a natural consequence of anarchy if a state is unable to deter external threats on its own. Both during the Cold War and in its aftermath, the scholarly community used balance of power theory to predict stability, the absence of major power war, in the world.

The complex issues and actors involved in international politics in recent years point to powerful shifts in the nature of international relations. It is time that we question how much these classical methods will help to reinstate stability. The different layers of issues and actors require us to employ different methods so that we can provide policymakers with informed policy recommendations. Two states might concurrently agree and disagree with each ither depending on the range and nature of issues. They might be allies and enemies at the same time. Let us take the Syrian crisis into consideration; for example, although Turkey is a member of NATO, it has dramatic differences with its major NATO ally, the U.S., when it comes to post-conflict power distribution in Syria. The U.S. and Russia have distinct perspectives over the crisis in Ukraine and Georgia, but they seem to have an agreement on specific aspects of the Syrian conflict. Each example illustrates the paradox in inter-state relations called relational imbalance.[20]

A new approach to examining these complex layers of interactions among international actors is network analysis.[21] From the perspective of the U.S., DAESH is an enemy. Russia, a rival of the U.S., perceives DAESH as an enemy as well. The scenario presents the following triadic network relationship from the perspective of the U.S.: the enemy of my enemy is my enemy. It is a form of imbalanced relationship. If there were balance, the enemy of one's enemy should be one's ally. In other words, DAESH is anticipated to be an ally of the U.S., but that is not the case. Such imbalanced relations cannot endure. Therefore, actors will realign their strategies to reinstate balance in their relations.

What does this imply for interstate relations in general and for Turkish foreign policy in particular? We know that as the number of imbalanced relations increases in the world, states are more likely to engage in armed conflicts with each other.[22] The present affairs in the international environment are germane to the rise of imbalanced relationships because the present era is not as rigid as the bipolar Cold War period. Writing in 2009, Ikenberry, Mastanduno and Wohlforth talked about the disciplining effect of bipolarity during the Cold War era.[23] The external threat disciplined the American interest groups and lobbyists so that they deferred to key decision makers to define the national interests and how best to achieve them. By the same token American decision makers used caution when catering to interest groups and public opinion, so that the latter did not capture the foreign policy decision-making process. The authors stated that, under unipolarity, with less at stake in foreign policy, it is harder for leaders to discipline societal actors and easier for societal actors to capture aspects of the foreign policy agenda to suit their parochial needs… the likely results are in less coherent foreign policy and a tendency for the state to underperform in the international arena, missing opportunities to exercise influence commensurate with its preponderant capabilities.[24]

The U.S., the unipolar power of the present era, has pursued a very incoherent foreign policy in key regions in which it has been involved since the end of the Cold War. The Middle East, for example, has been gradually abandoned by the U.S. This strategy is not limited to the Trump period. It goes well back to Obama's presidency. If one examines the debates in academic and policy circles, the present attitude of the U.S. in the Middle East does not come as a surprise. In 2016, Stephen Walt and John

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Mearsheimer stated the following in defending their argument for offshore balancing:

In Syria, the U.S. should let Russia take the lead. A Syria stabilized under Assad's control, or divided into competing ministates, would pose little danger to U.S. interests. Both Democratic and Republican presidents have a rich history of working with the Assad regime, and a divided and weak Syria would not threaten the regional balance of power. If the civil war continues, it will be largely Moscow's problem, although Washington should be willing to help broker a political settlement. In Europe, the U.S. should end its military presence and turn NATO over to the Europeans. There is no good reason to keep U.S. forces in Europe, as no country there has the capability to dominate that region. The top contenders, Germany and Russia, will both lose relative power as their populations shrink in size, and no other potential hegemon is in sight.[25]

Given this background, Trump's attitude toward NATO countries and the Syrian civil war do not appear unrooted in American scholarship and policy circles. And this shift in the U.S. attitudes over the last several years and the subsequent disengagement is one the main reasons behind the turbulent international environment we experience at present. It is characterized by constantly shifting alliances, which fit perfectly to relational imbalance scenarios. Alliances seem to be more pragmatic and issue-based, reminiscent of the interstate alliances prior to WWI. They are formed based on common interests rather than shared ideas, values or worldview.

There is a risk for countries like Turkey if they plan their foreign policy strategy in accordance with this pragmatic tendency, however. An alliance pattern that is constantly changing is not sustainable or helpful for a long-term grand strategy. Existing research finds that the order of preferences among democracies when making decisions about whether to form an alliance with a state or not is the following: joint democracy, shared enemy and common culture.[26] In other words, Turkey is more likely to form alliances with democratic states if it also chooses the path of further democratization. Nondemocratic states prioritize the motive of a common threat or shared enemy above all. This means that in the absence of a common threat it is very difficult to form alliances with authoritarian states. This might explain the challenges Turkey is facing in its relations with Russia. Empirical evidence also suggests that alliances between two democratic states are more durable than those between democracies and authoritarian states and between two authoritarian states.[27]

Going back to the earlier examples of imbalanced relations, Turkey's alliance with Russia is, in a way, an alliance with the enemy/rival (Russia) of its ally

(U.S.). In a triadic context, from the perspective of Turkey, it is an imbalanced relationship: the enemy/rival (Russia) of my ally (U.S.) is my ally. However, if it were balanced, the enemy/rival of one's ally should be one's enemy/rival as well. Of course, this does not mean that Turkey should not cooperate with Russia or that it should adopt an unfriendly attitude toward it. Rather, it means that balance should be brought back into the triadic relationship between Turkey, Russia and the U.S., especially in high security matters.

The Absence of Alternative World Views

The demise of communism was widely perceived as an ideological victory by Western states against the communist Soviet Union. Liberalism managed to defeat fascism twice in WWI and WWII and communism by the end of the Cold War. Yet, according to Fareed Zakaria, the efforts to rebuild post-communist societies led to a new form of democracy, which he labels 'illiberal democracy' that emerged in ethnically divided societies with no historical experience of constitutional democracy.[28] Indeed, transitions to democracy in ex-Soviet and Eastern European states were often accompanied by ethnic tensions, an elevated sense of nationalism and civil war. Bosnia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were among the pioneering cases in which democratization led to contention among diverse groups. Zakaria further posits that every wave of democratization was met with a reverse process, dominated by "demagogues who were very popular" in the beginning and elected by the people. In order to handle this "virus of illiberalism", the most important task is to help democracy to consolidate and take deeper root in the societies in which it already exists, rather than trying to spread it to new societies and countries. Writing in 1997, Zakaria claimed that this was the most important role the U.S. could play at the time.[29] Unless measures were taken, he warned, illiberal democracy would discredit democracy itself as the most respectable form of governance.

It is not clear if democracy is to be discredited, but it certainly faces many challenges at present.[30] Whether it will endure in the end as the most consolidated and common system of governance depends on the most powerful democratic state's attitude toward it. The U.S. foreign policy of the last decade does not warrant much hope for it. Nevertheless, we also do not seem to have an alternative worldview emerging as an organizing principle of both the domestic and international political realm. Most international relations experts agree that China looms on the horizon as a major rival against the U.S.[31] Nevertheless, they also agree that one significant component of China's power that impedes its role as an alternative hegemon is its inability to develop an alternative worldview that challenges the perception of the U.S. hegemony's

benign character and soft power. Without ideas that can unite different countries around commonly shared social and economic goals, it is very hard for China to establish an alternative hegemonic order. Therefore, the alternatives posed by Russia and China usually remain to be "counternorms, such as sovereignty, security and civilizational diversity,"[32] that are short of a universal ideology that promises peace and prosperity for all.

Tension between Nationalism and Liberalism

A significant characteristic of the present international environment is the tension between nationalism and liberalism. The failures of the Arab Spring, the rise of right-wing populism and the increasing inequality, xenophobia and racism even within the most advanced liberal democracies have undermined the attractiveness of liberal ideology globally. Mostly, these troubles have been claimed to emerge as a reaction to increasing globalization around the world in the last couple decades or so. Furthermore, a hegemonic power, which had promised peace and prosperity to the world on the premise of democratic ideals, respect for human rights, liberal institutional cooperation and interdependence has recently reneged on its promises by falling victim to these recent global shifts. Trump is the first American president in the seven decades following the end of WWII to question the value of the American hegemony for the American people.[33]

In *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities,* Mearsheimer argues that liberalism has always been existing in a world populated by nation-states. And, therefore, when national issues come to the forefront of a state's agenda, nationalism will always trump liberalism.[34] Nationalism is an ideology aiming to bond people who live in the same territory. It is based on the innate understanding that one's own nation is the priority. Liberalism, on the other hand, is based on designing foreign policy to help other societies. This is because liberalism favors equal rights and liberties for all human beings, regardless of where they live in the world. When some societies fail in protecting these rights and liberties, a liberal state ends up defending this idea through armed coercion, if necessary. This is why the U.S. has found itself at war with other states for almost twenty out of the total thirty years since the end of the Cold War. Whether this tension is resolved by the U.S. policymakers by tilting towards nationalism or liberalism is also to determine the future strategic and normative environment in the international system.

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The Rise of Nonstate Armed Groups (NAGs) and States Alliances with NAGs

The post-WWII period has been characterized by the rise of organized violent and nonviolent groups seeking political reforms and/or territorial concessions. Almost half of these armed groups have managed to secure outside state supporters that were/are willing to provide them with safe havens, weapons, funds, training camps, logistics and troops.[35] This trend is mostly due to the decline in conventional warfare, by which states used to confront each other directly to gain territorial or political concessions. In the era of nuclear weapons, however, it is too risky for states to engage in direct war.

Rough estimates indicate that almost 20 million people have lost their lives in the internal conflicts that have occurred since the end of WWII. This high number of casualties is to some extent driven by third-party interventions, which often prolong conflicts rather than resolving them.[36] Since there are no established rules about whom to side with once a conflict erupts, internal conflicts frequently transform into transnational proxy conflicts that become a theatre for the escalation of interstate rivalries and animosities. Most recently, the Syrian conflict turned into an internationalized conflict due to the interventions of several state and nonstate actors. Empirical findings also reveal that states increasingly rely on armed groups to pursue their foreign policy objectives.[37] Indeed, they often substitute conventional state allies with non-state ones.

The post-WWII period has been characterized by the rise of organized violent and nonviolent groups seeking political reforms and/or territorial concessions.

There is no reason to think that this will change in the near future. Whether armed groups are of ethno-national, religious or some other ideological origin, unless there is collective action based on a multilateral international framework for dealing with dissidence, it is very difficult to contain them. The U.S. declining role as a norm-setter makes it more complicated to develop a joint plan for dealing with domestic dissidence. Although from the end of WWI to the present several principles and norms emerged in response to the major challenges the modern state faces, such as self-determination and the responsibility to protect (R2P), there is hardly any consensus on how a new state enters into the international system. The UN, embodying the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention as a solution to global governance, falls short or occasionally contradicts itself when it comes to issues related to domestic governance.

Therefore, in the absence of an international **regime of dissidence,** states undergoing internal conflicts are vulnerable to outside intervention by states that would like to pursue their own agenda and exacerbate those conflicts. By regime of dissidence, I mean *a set of formal and informal norms and principles outlining the conditions under which an organized group of people, who have grievances against a government can actually share and/or influence governance or dissent peacefully*.

Extant research on international regimes finds that they reduce transaction costs and informational imperfections, thus facilitating cooperation among states.[38] The formulation of an international regime of dissidence would reduce uncertainty in the international system by laying out (a) certain rules for governments about how to handle dissidence, (b) rules for dissidents regarding the legitimate course of action to pursue their grievances, and (c) rules for potential outside interveners about the circumstances under which several forms of intervention are legitimate. Such a regime would be strengthened by setting standards for liability when parties fail in compliance. Some scholars recently went beyond recommending an international regime and suggested that a cosmopolitan global governance body needs to be established to identify cases of repression and human rights violations.[39] For example, Kaldor argues that the international community needs "to develop democratic processes for authorizing the use of legitimate force."[40]

Although the R2P principle states that the international community may intervene to prevent a crime against humanity, such as mass killing, genocide or ethnic cleansing, even in clear cases of mass atrocities, multilateral action to protect civilians has been hard to coordinate. Nevertheless, the developments in Ukraine (the Euromaidan protests), the Arab Spring and the crisis in Venezuela paved the way for expanding R2P to other areas of human suffering, such as authoritarian repression and state failure. One could consider the intervention in the Libyan civil war as the first multilateral effort toward the creation of a regime of dissidence. On March 17, 2011, the UN passed Resolution 1973 addressing the situation in Libya, which was the first UN-authorized "use of force for human protection purposes against the wishes of a functioning state," namely Libya.[41] Though the subsequent intervention proved the difficulty of achieving consensus on what kind of military attacks by third-party states constitute "human protection," it was obvious that there was an agreement on a new principle, namely that the international community has a mission to protect individuals from grave crimes. Clearly, we have transitioned to a world in which the nonintervention principle has been traded for the R2P principle.

If the U.S. manages to form a new platform or union of democratic states, it might try rewriting the rules of engagement in the internal politics of troubled states. Otherwise, a more turbulent world is awaiting us since major powers will use internally troubled states as a battleground to expand their sphere of influence in specific regions.

Risks and Opportunities for Turkish Foreign Policy

The main components of Turkish foreign policy in recent years can be listed as activism, humanitarianism and security maximization.[42] Turkey has been dealing with a humanitarian crisis and threats to its security and territorial integrity, both spreading from the civil wars in Iraq and Syria, while simultaneously trying to fulfill certain regional and global aspirations. A significant spillover effect of the Syrian civil war is the 2.7 million refugees who escaped the violence and atrocities of either the Assad regime and/or the armed groups that populated the Syrian battlefield from the beginning of the civil war. Turkey pursued an open-door policy toward these refugees.[43] Another effect is the threat posed by armed groups, such as DAESH and the PKK that were using Syrian territories as safe havens and occasionally engaging in cross-border attacks.

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Trying to offset the spillover effects from these civil wars, Turkey frequently found itself navigating between the U.S., the European countries and Russia. Ankara's vital foreign policy priorities were a multilateral solution to the refugee crisis and the protection of Syria's territorial integrity during the extremely turbulent times described in the previous section. Turkey's main difficulty lay in its lack of experience with a unipolar world, where the U.S. was not fully committed to playing the role of the hegemon as prescribed by liberal-oriented scholars. This lack of experience is obviously not unique to Turkey, since the post-Cold War unipolarity is an unprecedented system in world history.[44] The Syrian crisis came at a time when the U.S. was already exhausted from its prolonged engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the lingering effects of the 2008 financial crisis on the U.S. economy.

This turbulent international context, characterized by a reluctant hegemon, an increased level of relational imbalance and major global shifts due to China's rising economy, present both opportunities and risks. In the next section, I conduct an assessment of these risks and opportunities.

Territorial Threat/Aggression

Territoriality constitutes the foundation of the modern state system in the international arena. Indeed, a minimum size of territory is required to validate any claims of sovereignty.[45] These claims are justified by security delivered to the people who populate a specific territory. Borders are considered a major defense against outside threats. Of course, this assumption relies on the fact that the threat to a state's territorial integrity is usually conventional and from other states. But as we get closer to the recent era, it is obvious that humanity faces threats that transcend national borders, such as terrorism, diseases, global warming, etc.

The post-WWII international order was founded on the principles of sovereign equality and nonintervention. The liberal understanding championed the motto that sustainable peace is only possible if security is no longer divisible. In other words, sovereign entities should feel equally secure from aggression or use of force against their territorial integrity or independent existence.[46] This collective security notion, embedded in the UN, has been the major instrument for mitigating anarchy's effects on interstate relations. The idea was to make sure that even the minor states felt secure from the intervention by relatively strong states. Up until the annexation of Crimea by Russia in early 2014, the international community had settled on the idea that aggression, basically the forceful acquisition of territory, was banned and the days of imperial expansion were over. Although Russia had pursued revisionist policies prior to this incident, i.e. its occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia since 2008, it was not anticipated to annex the territories of these two runaway regions. Indeed, Russia had launched an invasion of the entire territory of Georgia in 2008 until the U.S. launched a "humanitarian convoy" accompanied by U.S. warships as a "signal to Russia" to stop its aggression against Georgia.[47] Russia's annexation of Crimea six years later undermined the mental barrier, embedded in the UN charter, against the forceful acquisition of territory. Although Russia based its annexation on a referendum and the principle of self-determination, in a statement issued by then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Russia's act was pointed out to be obsolete: "You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped up pretext."[48]

Should Turkey anticipate such a threat against its territorial integrity by outside states? The short answer to this question is NO. Considering the fact that Turkey is located near Russia, which has been known to engage in many glaring attempts at the forceful acquisition of territory in the post-WWII era,[49] one can easily get skeptical about Russian intentions towards Turkey. Still, it is not

realistic to anticipate such a threat directed toward Turkish territory. Instead, it is already known that Russia can make it hard for Turkey to achieve specific foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. The recent confrontation in Idlib is an example of such a challenge. More significantly, the fact that the U.S. has been disengaging from the Middle East and shifting its focus to China and East Asia, does not help the situation at all.[50] To mitigate the effects of increasing Russian regional influence and the disengagement by the U.S., Turkey has been trying to strike a delicate balance between its long standing allies, the U.S. and NATO and bandwagoning with Russia to get some leverage in the Middle East.

As mentioned above, the risk is that Turkey's relationship with Russia is more asymmetrical than its relationship with the U.S.[51] Obviously, Turkey does not need natural gas from the U.S. The opportunity is that Russia can open space for some Turkish leverage on the issues of the Middle East at a time when the U.S. is withdrawing. But how much space Russia opens is directly correlated with the nature of relations Turkey has with the U.S., NATO and Europe. In the absence of a direct threat to its territorial integrity by regional and major powers, Turkey can forge idea-based principled alliances with other states.

Domestic Instability and the Kurdish Issue

Turkey's peace process in regard to the Kurdish issue has been interrupted due to several factors. The war in Syria and the subsequent power vacuum encouraged the PKK to start planning for a semi-autonomous or fully autonomous Kurdish state in Syria.[52] From the beginning of the conflict with Turkish government, the PKK has received considerable support, such as financial and logistical support, safe havens and weapons, from third-party states throughout its existence.[53]

Third-party state support of the PKK is one example of handling foreign policy through proxies, which has been a common practice for many states in the aftermath of WWII, as mentioned above.[54] Research reveals that there are several motives behind state support of armed insurgencies, such as getting even with rivals and protecting transnational ethnic kin. Interestingly, 52% of all armed groups manage to acquire external state backing in the form of safe havens, arms, funds, etc. Obviously, none of these instances of support were authorized by the UN. Each was a result of a unilateral decision-making process by individual sovereign states. In total, 132 states, almost 68% of all the states in the international system, have provided some form of support to an armed group in the post-1945 period.[55]

In order to prevent external rivals from gaining a bargaining chip against Turkey, it needs to take trust-building measures towards the solution of the Kurdish issue. We know from existing research that any perception of internal vulnerability creates an opportunity for outside rivals to exploit.[56] A grand strategy of democratic assertiveness should rely on political institutions that serve for the consolidation of democratic ideas and norms for every segment of the society.

Economics-Related Threats

Domestic economies have never been so interdependent with the rest of the world. We already know that increased communication technology facilitates interaction among individuals of different countries, and people see many different parts of the world as potential places to live rather than staying limited to their home countries. What matters for Turkish grand strategy is to calculate the potential areas that are most vulnerable to outside intervention in the realm of economy. This could be the energy, agriculture or food sector, the IT sector and/or the financial sector. Focusing on the security realm is not sufficient to reduce the vulnerability of Turkey in the face of increasing international economic issues.

The instability of the Turkish Lira's value in recent years vis-a-vis strong currencies, such as the U.S. Dollar, the Euro and the British Pound, make it more difficult to attract long-term investments into Turkey's borders. A domestically strong Turkey with a high degree of societal consensus is very hard to achieve when there is inequality across different segments of the society. Without foreign investment, no state is able to achieve long-term development.

Furthermore, Turkey has a high level of dependence on outside sources of energy. In 2019, 34% of the natural gas consumed in Turkey was still imported from Russia, despite the recent efforts to diversify the suppliers (17% of natural gas was imported from Iran and 21% from Azerbaijan). This creates an asymmetric interdependence with Russia. Although the recent discovery of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean provides an opportunity for cooperation in the region and a reduction of Turkey's energy dependency, it also exacerbates the existing tensions among the main actors involved, including Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and Israel.[57] Therefore, the hopes for natural gas discovery bringing peace to the region seem to be on

Focusing on the security realm is not sufficient to reduce the vulnerability of Turkey in the face of increasing international economic issues.

hold now. But the parties to these tensions should realize that the discovery of shale gas and liquified natural gas (LNG), as well as innovations related to renewable energy, will in the long run contribute to the diversification of energy resources, thus reducing the energy-driven interdependence among states. Long-term cooperation and prospects for peace should not be sacrificed for short-term gains.

On November 16, 2020, China signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) treaty with 15 countries that account for almost 28% of world trade. On the global scene, "a hybrid international order" is about to emerge, that consists of the traditional Bretton Woods institutions and new ones, led by China, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).[58] These new institutions have a different approach when it comes to providing financial support to developing countries. They promote a Beijing-style authoritarian state capitalism, which will have significant repercussions with respect to market-state relations. Although these new institutions offer alternative venues for acquiring autonomy from the West in fiscal policy, they come at a cost. They may lead to an increase in the asymmetric ties with the East that are more difficult to sustain in the long run. This, in turn, might leave Ankara isolated.

Main Pillars of a Turkish Grand Strategy of Democratic Assertiveness

Any grand strategy designed for Turkey cannot ignore the present, dramatic power shifts in the international environment. Two major developments that took place in the past decade pose significant challenges for Turkish foreign policy: (1) the traumatic experiences in the Middle East following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the disappointing consequences of the Arab Spring, and (2) the dramatic decline of American power accompanied by the unpredicted resurgence of Russia as an influential regional and global power. The U.S. domestic public's pressure to reduce troops on the ground gave Russia an opportunity to run to the rescue of the Assad regime. Eventually, this is what the proponents of offshore balancing strategy had recommended to U.S. policymakers: let Russia take care of the Middle East.[59] Therefore, it was not necessarily a choice for Turkish policymakers, but rather a necessity to work with Russia on the future of Syria.[60]

The comprehensive analysis presented earlier revealed that the U.S. is shifting its attention toward China and East Asia as well as Russia. In an article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 2014, Richard K. Betts, a senior fellow at Coun-

Any grand strategy designed for Turkey cannot ignore the present, dramatic power shifts in the international environment.

cil on Foreign Relations, a very influential think-tank founded in 1921 with a specialization in U.S. foreign policy, states that "for a quarter century, Washington had the luxury of concentrating on second- and third-order challenges: rogue states, medium-sized wars, terrorists, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian relief. But the time has come to focus again on first-order dangers. Russia is back, and China is coming."[61] The U.S. National Defense Strategy of 2018 clearly stated that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."[62]

Understanding the future of American policy abroad is vital for any country's design of a grand strategy, since it seems that the U.S. will not easily give up its dominance over world politics. But it will try to contain the negative effects of these aspirations on the economic and social aspects of Americans' lives, and prevent major powers from being skeptical of America's real intentions. Figure 2 tries to capture the current features of the international environment, the foreign policy instruments needed to handle these shifts and how these instruments can help Turkey pursue a grand strategy of democratic assertiveness that can, in turn, help it continue to claim its regional and global influence. Realization of this influence is vital for security maximization and sustainable economic growth, which are the ultimate national interests.

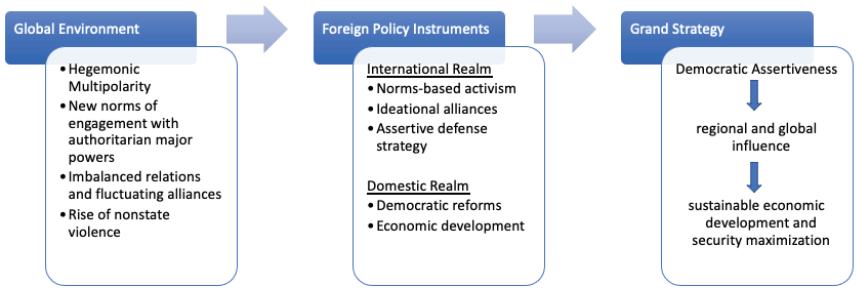

Figure 2. Global Environment, Foreign Policy Instruments and Turkish Grand Strategy

Norms-based Activism

Long gone are the days when Turkey tried to strike a delicate balance between two rigid power poles led by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The aftermath of the Cold War presented a significant opportunity for Turkey in initiating cooperation with the ex-Soviet Turkic states of Central Asia. This activism has later spread to Ankara's interactions with other regions, and has continued throughout the entire AK Party period.

Many experts agree that the U.S. will not be as involved in certain parts of the world as it was in the first two and a half decades after the Cold War. President Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and the UN Human Rights Council and threatened NATO, the most enduring military alliance in world history. The U.S. attitude can hardly be described as rules- and norms-based anymore, and it is uncertain how much President-elect Biden will be able to reverse Trump's actions, given that there are immediate issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and its increasing death toll, racism and economic inequality, that require immediate attention.

The common misconception is that the decline of American hegemony, and thus the liberal order, equals a decline of liberal ideas, norms and values. Since there is not a new power stepping up to take the role of world leader, the anticipation is that individual governments will adopt their own rules, ignoring the institutions, alliances and values that bound them together in the past. This might well be the case, but the desire for the rule of law, liberty, freedom of expression and respect for human rights are universal. In the current world, no government can endure ignoring these claims from its citizens. Even China will find itself in a situation where it is required to be more transparent and open, especially if it wants initiatives such as BRI and AIIB to succeed. Oth-

erwise, it will be very difficult to market Chinese hegemony and leadership to the world.

Why should Turkey continue pursuing a rule-based strategy in a world characterized by the decline of liberal institutions, norms and values? The U.S. is a major power and it seems that its unmatched military and economic capacity will not be matched by any other rising power soon. After it takes time to handle issues at home, the U.S. will once again turn to the world. It cannot afford isolationism or restraint for a long period of time. Such times of restraint have been a constant feature of the American foreign policy, but only temporarily. When the U.S. decides to come back and engage with its allies more, Turkey should be in a position to offer a competitive advantage. That competitive advantage is Turkey's identity as a democratic country in the very turbulent region of Eurasia and the Middle East. Ankara cannot afford to be excluded from the club of democratic states that the U.S. will forge against Russia and China. Indeed, President-elect Biden signaled the formation of such a club in early 2020 in an article titled "Why America Must Lead Again," stating:

During my first year in office, the U.S. will organize and host a global Summit for Democracy to renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world. It will bring together the world's democracies to strengthen our democratic institutions, honestly confront nations that are backsliding, and forge a common agenda...

The most effective way to meet that challenge is to build a united front of U.S. allies and partners to confront China's abusive behaviors and human rights violations...

We must ... rally the free world to meet the challenges facing the world today. It falls to the U.S. to lead the way. No other nation has that capacity… We have to champion liberty and democracy, reclaim our credibility..."[63]

Biden has already signaled that liberalism must win over fascism and autocracy.[64] A grand design for Turkish foreign policy can only be successful in realizing its objectives if it engages with the world through a norms-based activism that is substantiated by endurable patterns of alliances and a defense-oriented military strategy.

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Formation of Ideational Interstate Alliances

The current international environment is characterized by a degeneration of international institutions and a preference for ad hoc alliances, which do not seem to be sustainable and reliable over the long run. This is not a pareto optimal state for the international community to continue living in. It is temporary and Turkey should make sure that it does not choose sides in these ambiguous times. Indeed, it should figure out areas of cooperation with every major actor in the international system and do so without irritating the others. Economics estimates show that the U.S. will continue to be the dominant superpower for decades to come. China has a lot to do to catch up and Russia does not even seem to be close.[65] At some point, the U.S. will go back to norm entrepreneurship as it did immediately after the end of two major wars. When that happens, Turkey does not want to be excluded or isolated. Developing stable relations in its region will provide leverage for Turkey to build deeper relations both with the U.S. and the EU in the long run.

One feature of the present international rivalries is that ideology does not drive them. During the Cold War, alliances were formed around shared interests and supplemented by a common world view. At present, this does not seem to be the case. Even if we acknowledge that we are approaching the end of the liberal era, China and Russia do not offer an alternative worldview or way of living for societies. Great powers usually have plans about how to run the affairs of humanity, not only their own domestic affairs. Both the U.S. and USSR had such plans.

If Turkey wants to rise to be a regional power, it must also develop plans that promise a better future to the societies it wants to target for the realization of its foreign policy objectives.

If Turkey wants to rise to be a regional power, it must also develop plans that promise a better future to the societies it wants to target for the realization of its foreign policy objectives. It seems that the U.S. will allow for the rise of a parallel order in the Middle East under the leadership of Russia. The role Turkey plays in this regional order will be determined by the amount of space Russia will allocate to states in the region, such as Iran and Turkey. Sustaining stable relations with the U.S., EU and NATO might be helpful in bargaining with Russia over a bigger role. Many scholars now agree that conventional wars that aim to achieve structural change are no longer anticipated.[66] Rather, the new agents of change are "social movements and new forms of communication."[67] The present transition is considered to be leading toward a deep-

er evolution than could be achieved by conventional warfare. Instead, the challenges the world community faces can be tackled with global governance according to some, who also argue that it would mean a shift away from the conventional state system.[68] All of this provides further support for a Turkish grand strategy focusing on democratic reforms at home and ideational alliances abroad.

Some U.S. foreign policy experts argue that the best strategy other states can pursue against the U.S. is leash-slipping, which means that states can gain autonomy from the U.S. in the realm of security.[69] By acquiring the S-400 missile system from Russia, for example, Ankara might have thought to break free from the pressures of the U.S. against its interests in the Middle East. Yet it was obvious from the many encounters between Turkey and Russia that their alliance was not on an equal footing. Rather, Russia frequently pushed Turkey to accept its interests and objectives in the region, such as negotiating with Assad and not allowing Turkey to secure the entire territory at its border in the Northern Syria. Turkey's alignment with Russia is an example of an issue-based alliance formation rather than a principled or value-based alliance formation, which is very hard to sustain in the long run. The fact that Turkey has seemed to fluctuate between Russia and NATO does not appear to be very profitable so far. It also reduces the predictability of Turkey's intentions in the eyes of the Western countries, an assessment that might end up alienating Turkey during significant regional and global developments.

Democratic Reforms

By the end of WWI, Turkey's great power status was over. For almost the entire 20th century, its foreign policy has primarily focused on protecting its territorial integrity and handling the threats that were posed against the country's security and survival. This concern was exacerbated after the first Gulf War and the ensuing power vacuum in Iraq, the northern part of which turned into a safe haven for PKK militants to carry out cross-border attacks into Turkey.[70] Turkey's domestic issues, such as the prolonged conflict with the PKK, a nascent democracy interrupted by three military interventions in 1960, 1971 and 1980, and economic and fiscal crises that continued well into the early 2000s prevented policymakers from putting their energy into devising a grand strategy.[71] In other words, Turkey's process of democratization always continued side by side with other challenges it had to address, such as terrorism, military's dominance over civilian authority, and economic crises.

Most of the democratic reforms in Turkey were prompted by its expectation to accede to the EU. Throughout the 1990s, Turkey's discourse with European countries was mostly dominated by its efforts to persuade the EU countries

and the rest of the international community to designate the PKK as a terrorist organization. The most successful outcome related to Turkey's counterterrorism strategy was reached when it continued with liberal reforms both in the political and economic realm and had stable relations with major powers such as the U.S. and the EU. Several examples in Europe, such as the IRA and ETA, prove that violence by armed groups is not perceived to be legitimate once such violence is carried out by armed groups that oppose democratic countries. The assumption is that democratic systems allow for the peaceful expression of grievances; therefore, it is difficult to find legitimate grounds for violent attacks against democracies by non-state armed groups.

Power maximization through defense investments and alliance buildup will not be sufficient to protect Turkey's national interests in the long run. The PKK has a high likelihood of receiving external backing from third-party states (given the past history) if the latter acquires some capability to restart its attacks at a large-scale in the future. When deciding whether or not to resort to violence, new research shows that both governments and armed groups design their strategy after an assessment of anticipated third-party support.[72] The resolution of the Kurdish problem is thus a pivotal part of a grand strategy that relies on democratic assertiveness. The broader democratic reforms spreading across every segment of the society will also help close the ideational gap between domestic and international policies. Ankara can pursue an assertive and securitization-oriented foreign policy strategy more comfortably by reinstating Turkey's image as a democratic power in the Middle East. Its status as a regional/middle power will be better recognized by the international community if it is also a consolidated democracy.

Assertive Defense Strategy

In the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that one of the grave risks awaiting humanity is nuclear warfare. Probably not among the great powers, but more likely among the second-tier or middle powers, such as India, Pakistan and China. The border disputes between India and China caught our attention when soldiers of the two countries fought with fists and rocks along the border between the countries on June 15, 2020. Nuclear weapons are mostly maintained by major powers to deter existential threats from each other. Yet recently we have heard leaders such as Putin, Trump, Kim Jong-un and Modi issue subtle threats or exchange rhetoric implying nuclear warfare. The real risk is that the more some leaders talk about nuclear weapons as an instrument of national security, the more they encourage non-nuclear states, such as Germany, Japan, South Korea and Australia to start nuclear acquisition programs.

Turkey is a neighbor to three nuclear states on its east, i.e. Russia, Israel and

Iran. Yet it is also the case that none of these countries have territorial conflicts with Turkey that would escalate to an armed confrontation. We know from existing research that the territorial conflicts have the highest risk of escalation into interstate armed conflicts.[73] Therefore, Turkey's defense strategy is best served by continuing to be an engaged member of NATO and deepening its existing security cooperation with the U.S. and European states. Despite the recent disagreements, Turkey and the Western countries, including the U.S., have a higher convergence of interests with respect to rising powers, such as Russia and Iran in the Middle East. Turkey can set off the excessive influence of these two countries in the region by aligning its interests with the U.S. and European countries.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis positions Turkish grand strategy in the nexus of the complex global security environment by taking into consideration the continuing global shifts. Conducting a comprehensive analysis of the global order, the major state and nonstate actors involved and the risks and opportunities they pose, I made predictions about the future of world politics. This is necessary to provide informed policy recommendations to Turkish foreign policymakers. In addition, domestic policies are presented as an instrument of foreign policy given that the distinction between local and global has been increasingly blurred for all countries for a long time. A stable domestic political environment is crucial for the realization of foreign policy objectives. The liberal order created an international system in which states form their opinions about each other on the basis of the perceived legitimacy of their domestic governments. This perception is directly correlated with each state's respect for basic individual freedoms and liberties within its borders. Whether or not liberalism will continue to shape interstate relations is a separate discussion. But we know that the values, norms and ideas it promoted for decades are here to stay with us.

Hence, I recommended that Turkish grand strategy be built on persistent democratic reforms alongside an assertive defense strategy. These reforms are essential to meet the challenges of the post-liberal order, such as a confused hegemon, rising authoritarianism and nonstate armed groups, the tension between liberalism and nationalism and the increasing number of imbalanced relations among states.

It is a political project to achieve the societal consensus that would support this grand strategy. Without domestic resources, it is very difficult to fund

foreign policy initiatives. This political project can only be realized through genuine effort and planning by Turkey's politicians to develop the institutions that will foster trust among the citizens. Not polarized societies, but those that are able to maintain channels of communication and dialogue across different segments of their population will be able to sustain themselves in the long run.

The resilience of many states will be tested against an increasingly turbulent international environment and only those that maintain such consensus and inter-communal trust will survive-or be less likely to compromise their sovereignty to major power states. The realization of Ankara's regional and global aspirations depends on how well policymakers can coordinate their efforts and policies at the domestic and international levels. Norm-based activism, the formation of ideational alliances that can endure beyond common threats and enemies combined with democratic and economic reforms are major instruments to this end.

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