Turkey's Response to Syrian Mass Migration: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Migration studies have seldom dealt with the foreign policy dimensions of refugee migration. Additionally, international relations (IR) theories have barely addressed migration policy. The present study seeks to address this gap by analysing Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration through the lens of neoclassical realist theory. Its purpose is to ascertain to what extent IR theories, particularly neoclassical realism, help us to understand Turkey's policies and politics addressing Syrian mass migration and changes over time. It questions the pertinence of Turkey's relative power and its foreign policy objectives in shaping responses to Syrian mass migration. The research also sheds much-needed light not only on dynamism in power-policy relations but also interaction between the international system and internal dynamics in designing migration policies. It aims to stimulate dialogue between IR theories and migration studies, with a particular focus on the foreign policy dimension of state responses to mass refugee migration.

Keywords: Turkey, Neoclassical Realism, Foreign Policy, Syrian Migration, International Relations Theories

Türkiye'nin Suriye Kaynaklı Kitlesel Göçe Yanıtı: Neoklasik Realist Bir Analiz

ÖZET

Göç çalışmaları alanında mülteci göçünün dış politika boyutlarıyla nadiren ilgilenilmiştir. Öte yandan, Uluslararası İlişkiler teorileri tartışmalarında da göç temasına oldukça sınırlı şekilde değinilmiştir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Suriye savaşı sırasında yaşanan kitlesel göçe verdiği tepkileri neoklasik realist teori yaklaşımı yardımıyla analiz ederek alandaki bu boşluğu gidermeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmada Uluslararası İlişkiler teorilerinin, özellikle neoklasik realizmin Türkiye'nin Suriye savaşı süresince değişen mülteci politikalarını anlamamıza ne ölçüde yardımcı olduğunu araştırılmaktadır. Özellikle Türkiye'nin göreli gücünün ve dış politika hedeflerinin Suriye kaynaklı kitlesel göçlere tepkileri şekillendirmedeki yeri sorgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, yalnızca güç-politika ilişkilerindeki dinamizme değil, aynı zamanda uluslararası sistem ile göç politikalarının tasarlanmasındaki iç dinamikler arasındaki etkileşime de ışık tutulmaktadır. Ulus devletlerin kitlesel mülteci göçüne tepkilerinin dış politika boyutuna odaklanmanın Uluslararası İlişkiler teorileri ile Göç Çalışmaları arasındaki diyaloğunu güçlendireceği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Neoklasik Realizm, Dış Politika, Suriyelilerin Göçü, Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri

Introduction

Debates over mass migration have intensified markedly since the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, causing the international displacement of 6.6 million Syrians.[1] The conflict has triggered a diverse range of policy responses to the emerging challenges of human security and refugee protection in Syria's neighbouring countries, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Turkey has hosted the largest number of refugees [2] in the world since 2014, and the number of Syrians exceeded 3.5 million in 2019.[3]

To date, however, little research exists that sheds light on how the migration policies of hosting states connect to their foreign and domestic policies. Existing studies are mostly descriptive, with limited theoretical engagement with either the forced migration literature or international relations (IR) theory. We contend that the contemporary refugee issue provides fertile ground for enhanced dialogue between IR theories and migration studies. Such a dialogue, we argue, offers theorists and policy-makers alike the opportunity to better understand the politics of migration[4] by directly addressing the question of how foreign and domestic politics intersect to shape migration policy and how migration policy has shaped politics.[5] With its emphasis on the core elements of the international system and domestic politics, neoclassical realism offers a comprehensive framework to analyse the complex and dynamic migration policy process.

This article rests on the proposition that Turkish policy towards Syrian mass migration from 2011 to the present has reflected a complex interplay between external and domestic political factors. It systematically questions the underlying drivers of the dependent variable—Turkey's changing responses to mass migration from Syria—through the lens of neoclassical realism. Turkey's response, which is our dynamic dependent variable, has evolved through at least four temporal stages that will be explained later in the article. The independent variables we isolate are: (1) Turkey's relative power in the anarchic international system and (2) Turkey's foreign policy objective to counteract the security threat from armed conflict in Syria. Ideational drivers and domestic politics are treated as intervening variables. We identify the two ideational drivers as the ambition of state elites to enhance Turkey's normative power at the systemic level through an emphasis on humanitarianism and elite perceptions regarding the Syrian issue. The impact of these drivers changes in relation with the context; thus, they are quite dynamic. Interactions among these variables form the outlines of the arguments we propose in the following paragraph.

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1   UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance", 2020, 18 June 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html. (Accessed 30 August 2020).

2   This article claims that the right term to identify that which Syria's neighboring countries experienced is conflict-induced mass migration or, in other words, mass refugee migration, which refers to the migration of forcibly displaced people crossing national borders in large numbers within a short period of time due to war. It should be noted that Turkey does not identify Syrians as refugees due to its national asylum law; rather, it defines them as asylum seekers benefiting from temporary protection status. In this context, this article uses the term refugee in its broadest connotation.

3   Directorate General of Migration Management, "Yıllara Göre Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyeliler", 11 November 2020, https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638. (Accessed 16 November 2020).

4   See S. Samid Suliman, "Mobility and the Kinetic Politics of Migration and Development", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 42, No 4, 2016, p. 702–23; Anne McNevin, "Irregular Migration, Neoliberal Geographies and Spatial Frontiers of the Political", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No 4, 2007, p. 655-74.

5   Gerasimos Tsourapas, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No 4, 2019, p. 464-481; N. Ela Gökalp Aras and Zeynep Şahin Mencütek, "The International Migration and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Case of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Turkey", *Migration Letters*, Vol. 12, No 3, 2015, p. 193-208. For extensive list see footnote 25.

The scope and ambition of Turkey's foreign policy has generally reflected its status as a middle power in the international system. However, in the last decade, there has been a change in the perceptions of foreign policy-makers about the degree of systemic pressures on the country and Turkey's capability to challenge the status quo based on its middle power status. This will be elaborated upon below in the analysis section of this article. The ambition of the Turkish leadership to enhance its normative power in line with its increasing material power widened its menu of foreign policy choices. Turkish leadership read the relative ambiguity at the onset of the instability in Syria as an opportunity to consolidate its normative power and shape its immediate external environment. This was first adopted through emphasizing a humanitarian approach to the influx of Syrian refugees. However, the accumulation of external security threats over time and the misperceptions about the extent to which the militarized armed conflict touched domestic sensibilities required the policy-makers to put forth gradually less accommodating and more restrictive policies to address mass migration from Syria. Elite consensus over ideational drivers enabled the extraction of the necessary resources from society needed to host millions of Syrian refugees, as well as the limiting of potential tensions and backlash in the domestic political arena until 2018.

The research is designed as a single case study for theory testing that relies on the method of within-case process tracing. The article proceeds as follows. It first presents theoretical IR perspectives about migration policies. It then points out the main presumptions of neoclassical realism. The following section provides a detailed narrative of Turkey's policy responses to Syrian mass migration from 2011 to 2020. It then analyses Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration through the lens of neoclassical realist theory. In this framework, the role and capacity of neoclassical realism helps explain Turkey's responses regarding the Syrian mass migration. Our analysis reflects the fact that the Syrian conflict remains a dynamic phenomenon. In order to provide empirical evidence, we draw mostly on secondary sources, including newspaper reports of policy-makers' public speeches; official and informal reports from national and international organizations addressing Turkey's migration policies; official statements on Turkish foreign and migration policy; and existing academic studies.

Theoretical IR Perspectives about Migration Policies

While IR theories attempt to explain why international events occur, they often speculate about relations between sovereign states.[6] With their emphasis on the primacy of states as the main actors of the international system, the realist approach does not see international migration as a problem at the system level.[7] Mainstream rationalist theories have some limitations in understanding politics of migration. Migration is given a minimal role in the crafting of foreign policies or is only treated as a demographic element of military power.[8] Classical realism also underestimates the agency of refugees and their impact of international system. Neorealism's exclusive emphasis on anarchy and self-interest

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6   Mustafa Aydın, "Uluslararası İlişkilerde Yaklaşım, Teori ve Analiz", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol.51, No 1, 2007, p. 94-95.

7   Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu, *Dış Politika ve Göç: Yugoslavya'dan Türkiye'ye Göçlerde Arnavutlar (1920-1990)*, İstanbul, Derin Yayınları, 2010.

8   Ibid.

makes it difficult to explain attempts by states to cooperate on migration affairs.[9] Thus, international migration remains either invisible or trivial to rationalist IR theories.[10]

On the other hand, liberalism may provide insights to understand cooperation attempts in dealing with migration, as it is seen as a common issue/problem that affects all states due to the highly connected word system.[11] Particularly, it helps to understand the role of multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHRC) in responding to refugee emergencies and protecting them. However, the UNHCR is not the sole actor in shaping nation-states' refugee policies. State authorities, to be sure, have a higher authority over its operations. Thus, liberalism only helps understand state-level responses to a limited extent.

Besides mainstream theories of international relations, reflexivism or relativist theory provides a promising framework for understanding migration issues with an emphasis on a wider range of actors, including non-governmental actors, individuals, international organizations, and multinational corporations. Post-structuralism, as a part of reflexivist thought, focuses on topics that are often underestimated by mainstream IR theory, such as famine, health, and development, as well as migration.[12] Moreover, its emphasis on gender, language, and knowledge-power relations helps address migration, but they may only partly explain the domestic and foreign policy interests of states in shaping their migration policies.[13]

Constructivism's arguments about norms[14] are highly relevant to how states, particularly European states, tend to cooperate in responding to refugee crises. In this approach, refugee rights are considered part of human rights, and multilateral organizations play a significant role in advocating for refugee rights. The 1951 Refugee Convention became the legal backbone of international refugee regime.[15] In 2018, the introduction of the Global Compact on Refugees reflected the ongoing cooperation efforts for maintaining norms about refugee protection.[16] Despite attempts for norm creation and internationalization, states are hesitant to respect these norms due to pressing concerns such as competition for labour markets and social welfare. The migrants—particularly irregular migrants and refugees—are often seen as a burden for receiving states.

Also, the constructivist perspective paves the way for the analysis of migration not only as a demographic movement of individuals but also as a transnational socio-political phenomenon.[17] Migration creates transnational spaces and the networks among the source as well as destination

9   N. Ela Gökalp Aras, "Uluslararası İlişkiler Disiplininde Dış Politika ve Göç", Bezen Balamir Coşkun and İnan Rüma (eds.), *Dış Politika Analizi: Konu, Kuram, Yöntem,* Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, N. 673, İstanbul, 2020, p. 199-225.
10 Baklacıoğlu, *Dış Politika ve Göç,* 2010, p. 48.
11 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", International Organization, Vol. 52, No 4, 1998, p. 887–91.
12 Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds.) *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Oxford, OUP, 2010, p. 321
13 Jorgen Carling, "Gender Dimensions of International Migration", *Global Migration Perspectives*, Vol. 35, 2005, p. 1-26.
14 Frank Dobbin et al., "The Global Diffusion of Public Policies: Social Construction, Coercion, Competition, or Learning?", *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol. 33, 2007, p. 449.
15 See Gill Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Anthony Messina, *The Logic and Politics of Post WWII Migration to Western Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
16 For the full text, see https://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf (Accessed 23 May 2020).
17 Baklacıoğlu, *Dış Politika ve Göç,* 2010, p. 57.

and transit countries. States have become more permeable and fragile with transnational move-ments.[18] This has produced global debates on migration governance that conceives of migration as a challenge similar to those of managing the environment, natural resources, or energy. Moreover, the constructivist approach directs focus to discourses, such as about securitization and politici-zation, as the Copenhagen School has famously studied through its emphasis on the very idea of threat.[19] Despite the promising insights of constructivism, the currently poor state of mass migra-tion responses cannot be solely explained by constructivist sensibility or in relation to norms and other intersubjective factors.

Middle range theories that fall between mainstream theories do, however, offer potential in-sights, as they narrow down the research field to a more specific aspect of politics. There has been a rich but fragmented scholarship on the international relations of migration and the politics of migra-tion, which draws from the broader realist and constructivist schools.[20] One of the first studies was that of Michael Teitelbaum (1984), which illustrates how sending and receiving countries use refugee and immigration affairs as a tool for achieve foreign-policy objectives, for example destabilizing or embarrassing adversaries.[21] Drawing from several case studies, further research has theorized complex foreign policy and migration relations by introducing several concepts, such as "coercive engineered migration" by Greenhill[22] and "coercive and cooperative migration diplomacy" by Tsourapas'.[23] The studies showed ways in which host states strategically use migration flows or the reception of refugees to obtain gains, to coerce, or to cooperate with negotiating states for developing mutually beneficial arrangements in interstate bargaining or bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, there is still a need to comprehensively address the question of how perceptions and interests intersect in shaping policy outcomes about mass migration. This necessitates that we revisit theories that seek common ground between realism and constructivism, such as realist con-structivism and neoclassical realism. Realist constructivism, as a synthesis of both theories, focused on "the relationship between the study of power in international politics and the study of international

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18 Ibid., p. 48.

19 Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, "Algı Mı, Söylem Mi? Kopenhag Okulu ve Yeni-Klasik Gerçekçilikte Güvenlik Tehditleri", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 8, No 20, 2011 Summer, p. 43-73.

20 Michael S. Teitelbaum, "Immigration, Refugees, and Foreign Policy", International Organization, 38(3), 1984, p. 429-450; Christopher Mitchell, "International Migration, International Relations and Foreign Policy", *International Migration Review*, 23(3), 1989, p. 681-708; Aristide R. Zolberg, "Changing Sovereignty Games and International Migration," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*: Vol.2(1), 1994, p. 153-170; Myron Weiner and Rainer Münz, "Migrants, Refugees and Foreign Policy: Prevention and Intervention Strategies", *Third World Quarterly*, 18(1), 1997, p. 25-51; Andrew Geddes, *Migration as Foreign Policy?: The External Dimension of EU Action on Migration and Asylum Rapport*, http://www.sieps.se/sites/default/files/528-2009-2rapport.pdf, 2009 (Accessed 20 June 2017); Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2010; Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher Betts, "Refugees in International Relations", A. Betts and G. Loescher (eds.), *Refugees in International Relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 1-28; James F. Hollifield, "Migration and International Relations", Marc R. Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Politics of International Migration*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 345-383; Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Migration Diplomacy in the Global South: Cooperation, Coercion and Issue Linkage in Gaddafi's Libya", *Third World Quarterly*, 38(10), 2017, p. 2367-2385; Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Migration Diplomacy in World Politics", *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No 2, 2019, p. 113-128.

21 Teitelbaum, "Immigration, Refugees, and Foreign Policy", 1984, p. 433.

22 Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*.

23 Tsourapas, "Migration Diplomacy in the Global South: Cooperation, Coercion and Issue Linkage in Gaddafi's Libya", 2017, p. 2.

relations as a social construction."[24] However, this theory has remained ambiguous for conducting empirical investigations.[25]

As another common ground theory, neo-classical realism proposes promising venues for empirical investigations that link research on migration policy and IR, as elaborated below.

Neo-Classical Realism

Originally, neoclassical realism emerged as a critique of neorealist approaches in IR. Neorealism has been criticized for failing to "explain the behaviours of states in great detail or in all cases" and for being not fully engaged with theories of foreign policy.[26] Neoclassical realism starts with the premise that "understanding the links between power and policy requires close examination of the contexts within which foreign policies are formulated and implemented."[27] It focuses on the interaction between the international system and the internal dynamics of states. It analyses the variables affecting the power and freedom of action of foreign policy decision-makers, such as the distribution of power capabilities among states, decision-makers' perceptions (and misperceptions) of systemic pressures, and other states' intentions or threats. Rose explained (1998) originality of neorealism clearly in the following sentences:

> The adherents of neoclassical realism argue that 'the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that "the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level." This is why they are neoclassical.[28]

Neoclassical realists aim "to explain why, how, and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states intervene between their leaders' assessments of international threats and opportunities, and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies that those leaders are likely to pursue."[29] They stress the importance of combining systemic and unit-level variables, in other words including both external and internal variables to the analysis.[30] The approach therefore occupies a middle ground between pure structural and constructivist approaches. In this regard, it is fair to claim that neoclassical realists accept the objective reality of relative power and read state preferences of those of decision-making elites.

According to Rose, neoclassical realism rests on four key theoretical assumptions. The first conceives of "international anarchy" as neither Hobbesian nor benign but as indeterminate; states

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24 J. Samuel Barkin, "Realist Constructivism", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No 3, September 2003, p. 325-342

25 Patrick T. Jackson and Danie Nexon, "Constructivist Realism or Realist-Constructivism?", *International Studies Review*, Vol. 6, No 2, 2004, p. 337-341.

26 Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics*, Vol. 51, 1998, p. 145.

27 Ibid., p. 147.

28 Ibid., p. 146.

29 Steven S. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. *Taliaferro, Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Massachusetts: Tufts University Press, 2012, p. 4.

30 Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism', Also see Randall. L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Under-balancing'", *International Security*, Vol. 29, No 2, 2004, p.159–201; Fared Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998.

have difficulty finding stable security, which fluctuates between "plentiful or scarce".[31] The second assumption relates to the quest for "security". According to neoclassical realists, states seek security, but since they are surrounded by ambiguity, this in practice takes the form of strategies that attempt to control, or at least shape, their external environment.[32] Rose proposes that as long as states can increase the amount of relative power they possess, their foreign policies will be dominated by attempts at external influence.[33] Their actions and ambitions will be re-shaped according to the reaction they receive to these efforts from the system. The third assumption is that the above-mentioned interactions underpin the broad contours or the general features of a state's foreign policy. As Rose notes, these interactions do not generate static or pre-determined options but rather set the range that is available to policy-makers. Finally, there is an interaction between a country's relative power, as it appears in the anarchic system and according to domestic-level variables. In particular, the consideration of domestic variables is seen as an important contribution of neoclassical realism because, "foreign policy choices are made by actual political leaders and elites, and so it is their perceptions of relative power that matter, not simply relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being."[34] In other words, rather than seeing the foreign policy-making formula as only the relation between the independent variable (relative material power as referring to the capabilities or resources of states vis-à-vis the rest of the international system) and the dependent one (the state's foreign policy behaviour), neoclassical realists also analyse the role of the intervening (domestic-level) variables

The theory recognizes a chain of causality between a country's relative power in the anarchic system and domestic-level variables.[35] Thus, domestic-level variables channel, mediate, and (re)direct pressures from the system, influencing the foreign policy choices of the state in question. Elite decision-makers' perceptions, as a crucial domestic-level variable in neoclassical realist theory, warrant further elaboration as they pertain to power capabilities. Neoclassical realists, such as Fareed Zakaria, contend that political leaders are the principal agents in foreign policy decisions; how each country's policy-makers actually understand their situation is crucial because they translate capabilities into national behaviour over the short and medium term.[36] In fact, there is no purely independent reality directly available to state officials and analysts. Identification of a state's material interests is an inherently interpretive process.[37] Policy choices may be inconsistent as well as non-strategic in times of crisis. Kitchen argues that "ideas (as distinguished from beliefs) can establish the framework within which interests are pursued and resolve uncertainty about how to pursue them".[38] He adds that ideas may intervene at the unit level through the specific individuals who hold them, through institutions in which they may become embedded, and through the broader culture of the state.[39] Zakaria adds another important factor: the ability of governments to extract and direct the resources of their societies to foreign policy ends. This makes it possible to evaluate whether there is a restriction of national

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31 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism", p. 152.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 147.

35 Schweller, "Unanswered Threats", p. 164.

36 Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power,* p. 42.

37 Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No 1, 2010, p. 128.

38 Ibid., p. 129.

39 Ibid., p. 130.

power in relation to the domestic state structure.[40] This variable, in a sense, defines how public opinion and pressure groups affect a state's ability to extract the maximum amount of resources from its society.

With these features, neoclassical realism seems suitable to explain the immigration-foreign policy relationship. In the existing literature, case studies drawing on neoclassical realist theory overwhelmingly focus on how great powers respond to their relative material rise or decline, form alliances, and develop domestic politics during wartime.[41] We believe that the theory can provide important insights into the foreign policy behaviour of smaller powers as well. Moreover, it offers ample theoretical scope to address non-mainstream IR topics, such as migration. The theory has not yet been utilized, however, to understand states' responses to mass refugee migration, which is closely tied with foreign policy. The following section briefly summarizes Turkey's dynamic policy responses to Syrian mass migration and then analyses it from the neoclassical realist perspective.

The Evolution of Turkey's Response to Syrian Refugees

Since 2014, Turkey has been hosting the largest number of refugees in the world, the vast majority of whom are 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection and who amount to 64.4% of the total displaced population.[42] (UNHCR, 2020). This has become one of Turkey's most pressing domestic and foreign policy challenges and carries significant implications for Turkey-West relationships,[43] foreign policy strategies in its immediate neighbourhood,[44] public diplomacy,[45] and the evolution of its overall migration governance and policy responses.[46]

Turkey's responses to Syrian mass migration can be separated into four temporal phases: 1) open doors supported by assertive foreign policy; 2) internationalization with increasing securitization, 3) EU-orientation with a de-facto closed-door policy;[47] and 4) new developments introduce a new phase that can be labelled "return turn."

In the first of these phases, Turkey unconditionally implemented an "open-door policy" that welcomed all Syrians fleeing the conflict. Unlike Turkey's "non-arrival policy" of the 1980s and 1990s, when refugees generated by the military conflicts in the Middle East, the Turkish border remained open to Syrians in 2011. The main approach in receiving Syrians was based on the government's as-

40 Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power.*

41 Amelia Hadfield Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity and Neoclassical Realism*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010; Wayne McLean, "Neoclassical Realism and Australian Foreign Policy: Understanding How Security Elites Frame Domestic Discourses, Global Change*", Peace and Security*, Vol. 28, No 1, 2016, p. 1-15; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State", *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No 3, 2006, p. 464-95.

42 UNHCR. 2020. "Turkey Fact Sheet", https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Turkey%20 Fact%20Sheet%20-%20September%202020.pdf (Accessed 25 October 2020).

43 Oya Dursun Özkanca*, Turkey–West Relations: The Politics of Intra-alliance Opposition*, Cambridge University Press, 2019

44 Birce Altıok and Salih Tosun, "Understanding Foreign Policy Strategies during Migration Movements: A Comparative Study of Iraqi and Syrian Mass Refugee Inflows to Turkey", *Turkish Studies*, 2019, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14683849.2019.1709055 (Accessed 24 October 2020).

45 Senem Çevik and Efe Sevin, "A Quest for Soft Power: Turkey and the Syrian Refugee Crisis", *Journal of Communication Management*, 21 (4), 2017, p. 399-410.

46 Juliette Tolay, "The EU and Turkey's Asylum Policies in Light of the Syrian Crisis", 2014, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/GTE_PB_10.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2020).

47 Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek, "The International Migration", 2015.

sumption that the refugee situation was "temporal"; it was expected that the Syrian conflict would be short-lived. During this period, Syrians were officially referred to as "guests" rather than being granted legal refugee status. This classification derives from the fact that Turkey maintains a geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention[48] on refugees and claims no obligation to give Syrians (or forced migrants from non-European countries) official refugee status. The "guest" policy shifted and the former Migration and Asylum Bureau, now the General Directorate of Migration Management (DGMM) under the Ministry of Interior (MoI), granted Syrians "temporary protection status" in the framework of the European Council's Directive on "Temporary Protection" of 2001.[49] Later, Turkey's own Regulation on Temporary Protection was institutionalized in 2014.[50] The most important aspect of this regulation was the clear definition of the refugees' legal status, concretised through issuing identity cards that give them access to public services. However, Turkey abstained from requesting international assistance as it wanted to prove that it could deal with matters, not only politically but also economically, on its own.[51] In international platforms, the cost of sheltering Syrians in Turkey was a constant reminder to the world community that Turkey was a strong and growing regional power as well as an exemplary model of a democratic, inclusive, and benevolent Muslim country in the Middle East. However, this discourse started to falter when Turkey encountered security issues in Syria and failures in its foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.[52]

The second phase of the refugee response started in late 2012 and ended around mid-2015, during which time Turkey began to look to regional and international initiatives for solutions.[53] After efforts failed to gain the support of the United States, criticisms began to be directed at Turkey, which made it increasingly isolated internationally.[54] Turkey itself classified its foreign policy as "precious loneliness" in relation to its worsening relations with Egypt, Iraq, Israel and Syria and tensions with Iran and Saudi Arabia.[55] During this period, the number of refugees increased, and Turkey decided to focus on "zero-point aid delivery"[56] to slow refugee arrivals in accordance with international law. After mid-2013, it became clearer that no end to the Syrian conflict was in sight, that there would be no international military intervention in Syria, and that Turkey had insufficient diplomatic and military instruments to control the course of the Syrian civil war. Meanwhile, Turkey signalled a need for

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48 Officially, the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, also known as the UN Convention on Refugees and often referred to as the Geneva Convention.

49 Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences there of: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:212:0012:0023:EN:PDF. (Accessed 8 June 2020). The UNHCR has published Guidelines on Temporary Protection or Stay Arrangements, http://www.unhcr.org/protection/expert/5304b71c9/guidelines-temporary-protection-stay-arrangements.html (Accessed 8 June 2020).

50 Official Gazette, Regulation on Temporary Protection, 2014. http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/10/20141022-15-1.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2020).

51 Souad Ahmadoun, *Turkey's Policy towards Syrian Refugees: Domestic Repercussions and the Need for International Support*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2014, p. 2; Kemal Kirişçi, *Syrian Refugees and Turkey's Challenges: Going Beyond Hospitality*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2014.

52 Dursun Özkanca, *Turkey-West Relations,* 2019.

53 Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek, "From Assertive to Opportunist Usage", 2016

54 Ibid.

55 Erdoğan's foreign policy adviser, İbrahim Kalın, termed this new epoch in Turkish foreign policy "precious loneliness" because it is a "value-based" policy against "immoral" actors in world politics.

56 Turkey has introduced the term "zero-point operation" for this form of aid delivery. Trucks carry aid as far as the border, from which Syrian people in need take it over the frontier with trucks.

refugee burden-sharing that increasingly emphasized the high economic costs of sheltering refugees.[57] During this period, a security discourse became apparent in the speeches of policy-makers but not to the extent that the Syrian refugees' presence in Turkey was itself securitized or criminalized. The attempts concentrated on preventing the arrival of more Syrian refugees on Turkish territory. Following several incidents along the border, Turkey unsuccessfully urged the United Nations Security Council to authorize the establishment of a "buffer zone" on the Syrian side of the border.

Starting from April 2014, registration of Syrian refugees began by the DGMM, in parallel with an unofficial, closed-door policy. Paradoxically, despite the evident temporary closure of the borders, there was no official declaration regarding the closed-door policy while political discourse continued to emphasize the open-door policy. In the words of President Erdoğan: "Ankara's open-door policy for Syrian refugees will continue due to our responsibility towards our Islamic civilization, contrary to Western hypocrisy."[58] Despite the political discourse of openness, events unfolded that showed an important transition in the public debate in Turkey, from that of a self-confident actor handling the refugee situation on its own to a country forced to plead for support from the international community. This has, in turn, forced Turkey to reconsider its "open-door policy" and to comply with the contemporary international protection trend in refugee regimes, summed up as a "non-arrival" and "non-asylum" policy. Nevertheless, due to the continuing war in Syria, the number of Syrians in Turkey increased from 1.5 million in 2014 to 2.5 million in 2015.[59]

Since mid-2015, Turkey has sought to externalize the burden to the EU and has behaved pragmatically in deploying the threat of an exodus of irregular migrants to Europe via the Greek islands. This is the third phase of the response to the Syrian mass migration.[60] The issue is at the heart of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016[61] and emerged as using refugees as a bargaining card against the EU,[62] for securing financial support, visa exemption for Turks traveling to Europe, and faster progress in Turkey's accession bid to join the EU, all of which would come in exchange for containing the influx of refugees to Turkey and not onward to Europe. After the failure of the previous two phases, the country started to use Syrians as a policy tool in EU-Turkey relations as well as its broader foreign and domestic policies. As Dursun Özkanca points out, although Turkey used active diplomacy and issue-linkage bargaining for the EU-Turkey Statement, its frustrations afterwards led to its usage

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57 Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek, "International Migration", p. 204.

58 Daily Sabah 2016, "President Erdogan: Turkey Will Continue Open-door Policy for Syrian Refugees", https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2016/03/13/president-erdogan-turkey-will-continue-open-door-policy-for-syrian-refugees (Accessed 21 May 2017).

59 Directorate General of Migration Management, "Yıllara Göre Geçici Koruma Altındaki Suriyeliler", https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638. (Accessed 8 June 2020).

60 Gökalp Aras and Şahin Mencütek, "From Assertive to Opportunist Usage", p. 105.

61 "The EU-Turkey Statement", http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2016/3/40802210113_en_635939208600000000.pdf (Accessed 21 June 2020).

62 Kelly, M. Greenhill, "Open Arms Behind Barred Doors: Fear, Hypocrisy and Policy Schizophrenia in the European Migration Crisis", *European Law Journal*, 22(3), 2016, p. 317-332: Çiğdem Nas, "AB'nin Suriye Krizine Bakışı: Türkiye Bir Ortak mı?" *Uluslararasi İlişkiler*, Vol. 16, No 62, 2019, p. 45-64; N. Ela Gökalp Aras, "Coercive Engineered Syrian Mass Migration in the EU-Turkey Relations: A Case Analysis for Future Reference", *International Migration*, Vol.57(2), p. 186-199; N. Ela Gökalp-Aras, "A Game Changer in EU-Turkey Relations: The Opportunities and Pitfalls of Migration Policy", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 54(4), p. 44-61; Oya Dursun Özkanca, *Turkey–West Relations: The Politics of Intra-alliance Opposition,* Cambridge University Press, 2019.

of blackmail power and coercive threats.[63] This tactic only achieved partial success, as the EU has not met its political promises on visa liberalization for Turkish citizens.[64] The Turkish government subsequently announced the suspension of the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement on 22 July 2019 unilaterally.[65] The national and international news confused the suspension of Readmission Agreement (2013) with the EU-Turkey Statement (2016).[66] At the time of writing in late October 2020, the statement appears to still be officially in force, despite ongoing oscillations in EU-Turkey relations. [67] The movement of thousands of irregular migrants in Turkey towards the EU border in early 2020 in relation to the rhetoric of Turkish politicians was met by strict border measures in Greece. The explicit support of the EU was considered as Turkey's losing the power of its immigration card.[68] However, the recently announced European Commission's Communication on "a New Pact on Migration and Asylum"[69] signals that EU-Turkey bargaining over migration control will continue due to the EU's stress on the return policy and the cooperation with third countries.

While this third phase is still ongoing, a fourth phase of Turkey's refugee response policies has started. This phase is based on broad return narratives and ad-hoc practices and techniques to promote 'voluntary' returns.[70] The issue of mass return/repatriation of Syrian refugees to the areas in northern Syria where Turkey has sought control was frequently brought to the agenda by the government, particularly during cross-border military operations.[71] The government has expanded its sphere of power in northern Syria by combining military operations with soft power means of aid and economic policies for reconstructing material and administrative infrastructures. The aim of mass return aim has also been voiced in relation to the creation of safe zones inside Syria.[72]

63 Dursun Özkanca, *Turkey–West Relations,* 2019.

64 Murat Erdoğan, "A Post-Modern Externalization Agreement". The 'Refugee Deal' - Four Years After the EU-Turkey Statement. 18 July 2020. https://www.projekte.hu-berlin.de/en/merge/publications/publications/snapshot-analyses-on-the-refugee-deal-four-years-after-the-eu-turkey-statement (Accessed 29 October 2020).

65 Daily Sabah, "Readmission Agreement with EU No Longer Functional, Ankara Says." 23 July 2019. https://www.dailysabah.com/eu-affairs/2019/07/23/readmission-agreement-with-eu-no-longer-functional-ankara-says (Accessed 28 October 2020).

66 Euroactiv. "The Turkish Government Has Announced Its Suspension of the Readmission Agreement Concluded with the EU in 2016, the So-called 'EU-Turkey Deal'. 24 July, 2019 https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/turkey-suspends-deal-with-the-eu-on-migrant-readmission/. (Accessed 29 October 2020)

67 European Commission. *EU-Turkey Statement: Four years on*, March 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200318_managing-migration-eu-turkey-statement-4-years-on_en.pdf. (Accessed 29 October 2020); EASO Asylum Report. 2020. "EU-Turkey Statement". https://easo.europa.eu/asylum-report-2020/23-eu-turkey-statement. (Accessed 29 October 2020); Directorate General of Migration Management, "Return Statistics: Irregular Migrants Received from 4 April 2016 under the 18 March Statement", https://en.goc.gov.tr/return-statistics (Accessed 29 October 2020).

68 Gazete Duvar, "Mülteci Kozu Tutmadı, Avrupa Paniğe Kapılmadı", 3 March 2020, https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/dunya/2020/03/03/multeci-kozu-tutmadi-avrupa-panige-kapilmadi (Accessed 28 October 2020).

69 Full text is available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601287338054&uri=COM%3A2020%3A609%3AFIN (Accessed 28 October 2020).

70 Zeynep Şahin Mencütek, "Turkey's Approach to Encourage Returns of Syrians," *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 62, 2019, p. 28-31.

71 TRT World, "Erdoğan Lays out Turkish Plan to Create Safe Zones in Syria", 17 February 2017, http://www.trtworld.com/turkey/erdogan-lays-out-turkish-plan-to-create-safe-zones-in-syria-296678, (Accessed 08.06.2020); TRT World, "Afrin Operation Close to Victory", 17 February 2018, https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/erdogan-says-afrin-operation-close-to-victory-15260 (Accessed 8 June 2020).

72 Ahmet İçduygu and Maissam Nimer, "The Politics of Return: Exploring the Future of Syrian Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No 3, 2020, p. 415-433.

Analysing Turkey's Responses to Syrian Mass Migration from the Perspective of Neoclassical Realism

To utilize neoclassical realism in analysing the refugee policy of Turkey, there is a need to highlight ideational drivers and the ways in which they mediate the effects of systemic pressures.[73] The ideational bases of Turkish foreign policy in the last decade were mainly developed by the former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu[74] and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Davutoğlu's doctrine of "strategic depth" as well as Erdoğan's assertive foreign policy objectives centre on the idea of challenging the status quo in the international system. They emphasise that Turkey is not just a middle power vis-à-vis the rest of the international system, but also a "regional great power" in its neighbourhood.[75] During Davutoğlu's term as the minister of foreign affairs (2009–2014), Turkey held the ambition of enhancing its relative material and normative power in order to become an "agenda setter/order settler" in the Middle East and then becoming a "centre state" in the region. The spread of the Arab uprisings to Syria was a turning point for Turkey, moving it towards to act as a "revisionist state."[76] The Turkish government first considered the regional realignments as an extension of revolutionary movements as diplomatic opportunities that it might bridge foreign policy making and foreign policy discourses.[77] Contrary to the traditional Turkish foreign policy orientation based on preserving the status quo and enhancing roles using soft power, Turkey started to take roles requiring hard power and material capabilities.[78] The evident examples are Turkey's immersion into the conflict in Syria and then recently in Libya, unilaterally and with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

This foreign policy echoes the first phase of the Turkish response to the Syrian mass migration. Turkish policy-makers used international platforms to challenge the existing international system. One of Prime Minister Davutoğlu's speech displayed Turkey's assertiveness in this regard, particularly in the way that it criticised the United Nations (UN):

> What institution represents human consciousness in world politics? Is it the UN Security Council or the UN General Assembly? […] The judgement of which of these bodies represents the opinion of humanity? The UN today does not respond to global challenges properly. I can give you many other examples on the environment, climate change, etc.[79]

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73 Neoclassical realism was previously adopted to examine Turkey-Syria relations with an emphasis on how both governments choose at key points to use religion and ethnicity against each other. See Ahmet K. Han, "Paradise Lost: A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy and the Case of Turkish-Syrian Relations", R. Hinnebusch and Ö. Tür (eds.), *Turkey Syria Relations: Betweeen Anmity and Enmity*, London, Routledge, 2013.

74 Prime Minister of Turkey from August 2014 to May 2016. He previously served as minister for foreign Affairs (2009–2014) and as chief adviser to then Prime Minister Erdoğan (2003-2009).

75 In IR theory, a middle power refers to a sovereign state that is neither a superpower nor a great power, but still has large to moderate influence and international recognition. The following studies have identified Turkey as a middle power. William Hale, *Turkish foreign policy since 1774*, New York, Routledge, 2012; Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, İstanbul, İletisim, 2001.

76 Burak Bilgehan Özpek and Yelda Demirağ, "Turkish Foreign Policy after the 'Arab Spring': From Agenda-Setter State to Agenda-entrepreneur State", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2014, pp. 328-346,

77 Doğan Gürpınar, "Foreign Policy as a Contested Front of the Cultural Wars in Turkey: The Middle East and Turkey in the Era of AKP", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No 65, 2020, p. 3-21.

78 Özgür, Özdamar et al., "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 11, No 42, Summer 2014, p. 93-113.

79 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Speech at the London School of Economics and Political Science", London, 7 March 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-ofturkey_-in-the-university-of-london-school-of-economics.en.mfa (Accessed 20 June 2020).

In the course of the war in Syria, criticisms by Turkish elites targeting the international community intensified and have peaked since 2015. According to policy-makers, Turkish humanitarianism in responding to Syrian mass migration has offered a contrast between Turkish policies and those of the Western powers, who have mostly eschewed their humanitarian obligations.[80] This has enabled Turkey to claim the moral high ground vis-à-vis a "reluctant" Europe.[81] The following statement delivered by Davutoğlu exemplified this kind of criticism and comparison:

> For the last four years, Europeans have ignored the refugee issue. Now, as refugees begin to reach their borders, they feel the urge to do something about it. Over that same four-year period, my virtuous fellow citizens have embraced their brothers and sisters and opened their hearts and homes without any complaint and without any external financial support.[82]

Such statements have been used to cultivate a sense among foreign observers that Turks are more charitable and humane than people of other cultures.[83] As Karakaya Polat argues, "Turkey's refugee policy has become a source of pride and enabled the AKP to claim moral superiority both *vis-à-vis* the West and its political opponents at home."[84] In parallel, Turkey's humanitarian assistance towards Syrians has been broadcast as an alternative model of regional politics that does not require closed borders or military intervention.[85]

Religious and historical references are also embedded in the ideational drivers of policymakers and in their public justification of their policy decisions. These discursive markers serve the government in its drive to extract resources from society and contribute to its "positive self-representation as the defender of all oppressed people."[86] They also impede any resistance or backlash that might stem from costly policies, such as hosting a non-Turkish mass refugee population. For the general public, the Turkish leadership often cast the open-door policy in terms of pan-Islamic solidarity:

> In another international meeting, one of my Syrian brothers came and thanked me. He said, "thank you for what your country did for us Syrians, we are indebted." I told him, "no need to thank us, there is no need for gratitude. All the debts between Turks and Syrians were paid by our ancestors when they fought against the Crusaders and other assaults directed at Muslims.[87]

80 Eduardo J. Chemin and N. Ela Gökalp Aras, "The Syrian Diaspora in Contemporary Turkey: From 'Refugee Crisis' to "Minority Problem", Melani Barlai, Birte Fahrnich, Christina Griessler and Markus Rhomberg (eds.), *Political Communication Research*, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2017, p. 321–36.

81 Chemin and Gökalp-Aras, "The Syrian Diaspora".

82 Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Monthly Speech", September 2015, http://www.bbm.gov.tr/Forms/pgNewsDetail.aspx?Type=4&Id=15464, (Accessed 7 September 2017).

83 Chemin and Gökalp-Aras, 'The Syrian Diaspora in Contemporary Turkey'.

84 Rabia Karakaya Polat. "Religious Solidarity, Historical Mission and Moral Superiority: Construction of External and Internal 'others' in AKP's Discourses on Syrian Refugees in Turkey." *Critical Discourse Studies* 15 (5), 2018, pp. 500-516. (p. 500) Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Speech at the London School of Economics and Political Science", London, 7 March 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-ofturkey_-in-theuniversity-of-london-school-of-economics.en.mfa (Accessed 20 June 2020).

85 Chemin and Gökalp-Aras, 'The Syrian Diaspora in Contemporary Turkey'.

86 Polat. "Religious Solidarity, Historical Mission", 2018, p. 500

87 Ahmet Davutoglu 'Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Syrian Turkoman Assembly Meeting', Ankara, 30 March 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-suriye-turkmenleri-meclis-kurulus-toplantisinda- yaptiklari-konusma_-30-mart-2013_-ank.tr.mfa (Accessed 19 June 2020).

Here, we see political elites avoiding the presentation of Syrian refugees as a threat or risk, instead referring to them as guests and brothers who will return home as soon as it is safe to do so.[88] Use of the term "guest" was designed to invoke the strong Turkish cultural inclination to hospitality towards strangers as well as public sympathy towards Syrian refugees. This discourse was pragmatic, designed to tamp down tensions between host communities and Syrians as well as to slow their marginalization in the increasingly likely scenario of permanent settlement in Turkey. More broadly, Erdoğan's speech to the UN General Assembly in 2016 reprimanded the international community for being unreliable and unresponsive to most of the conflicts costing human lives, while also questioning the purpose of the UN if it could not act decisively during moments of crisis and conflicts.

A similar juxtaposition is evident regarding mass migration from Syria to Europe. While European countries see this as a "migration crisis," Turkey approached the issue as an opportunity to prove its importance to Europe. Its humanitarian response to Syrian mass migration has become a more credible asset for Turkey in the context of a cautious European refugee response as well as Turkey's problematic foreign policy in the Syrian conflict. Humanitarianism towards millions of Syrian refugees casts Turkish generosity against European cynicism, as the following statement from Erdoğan indicates:

> Refugees running away from death and tyranny face degrading treatment in European cities [...]. This is a disgraceful picture that injures human dignity and disturbs the human conscience. Has anything come from the EU? Unfortunately, the EU has not been able to keep its promises.[89]

Referring to the four phases of policy responses that we have outlined above, with a special emphasis on the first, Erdoğan concluded by saying:

> We have taken care to act in close contact and cooperation with regional and global actors, in the belief that this matter is a common issue for all of humanity. We could not, did not, and will not remain silent in the face of this catastrophe, which the Syrian people—our neighbours and relatives—have been living through. Regardless of ethnic, sectarian or religious differences, we have embraced three million Syrians taking refuge in Turkey. We will continue our support for those we host in a container- and tent-cities in Turkey... I address the entire international community and all our European friends who perceive Syrian refugees as a vital threat to themselves. It is futile to look for peace behind barbed-wire fences and high walls.[90]

To sum up, these statements show that Turkish state elites frequently criticized the international community for its lack of attention. The refugee issue provided Turkey with the opportunity to exert its normative power in the ambiguous international system based on the alignment between its religious ideology and global discourses of humanitarianism. While, as we have argued, Turkey had

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88 Since 2014, the PM (then President) Erdoğan has been stating the possibility for return, which becomes even clearer with the new statements: 'We will enable our Syrian brothers and sisters to return to their homes', 20 June 2016, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/94615/-we-will-enable-our-syrian-brothers-and-sisters-to-return-to-their-homes- (Accessed 20 June 2020).

89 President Erdoğan Addresses the UN General Assembly', 20 September 2016, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/52361/president-erdogan-addresses-the-un-general-assembly. (Accessed 10 June 2020).

90 Ibid.

previously been a status quo power, the failure of the great powers to deal with the humanitarian crisis triggered by the Syrian civil war enabled Ankara to challenge the existing distribution of international spoils and sources of prestige in the system. In fact, as a characteristic of middle power countries, Turkey was not capable of taking an action by itself as a superpower, but the refugee issue increased its leverage.

Revisiting the Assumptions of Neoclassical Realism in the Case of Turkey

We argue that by underlining the interconnectedness of all levels of analysis, neoclassical realism provides a promising theoretical framework to explain the policy process and outcomes of Turkey's responses to Syrian mass migration. Neoclassical realism offers a systematic framework, moreover, for analysing foreign policy behaviour in the context of refugee politics. Here we will revisit the main assumptions of the theory and how they work within the context of Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration.

The first assumption of neoclassical realism is the existence of international anarchy. Neoclassical realism assumes that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by attempting to shape their external environment to the maximum extent possible given their capabilities. Any increase in its relative power thus extends the scope of a state's capacity to do so. However, it is not possible to simply reduce state behaviour —in our case, Turkey's post-2011 refugee policy—to the international structure, including relative power differentials or changes in elite threat perceptions. Instead, neoclassical realism's emphasis on changes in relative power vis-à-vis domestic politics—particularly how power shifts are perceived by policy-makers—offers a framework for making sense of Turkey's policy towards Syrian refugees. Thus, the relative power of Turkey in the anarchic international system appears as the first important factor, while its foreign policy in the face of external security threats is the second important factor. These factors are closely connected to refugee policies because large flows of migrants and refugee have often been perceived as a national security threat and a challenge to state sovereignty.[91] But these perceptions are mediated by policy-makers' broader ideational drivers about the level of systemic pressure and the country's ability to challenge the status quo. The ambition of Turkish policy-makers to enhance the country's normative power in line with its increasing material power[92] has widened its menu of foreign policy choices.

In the case of refugee policy, this perception generates diverging policies as it interacts with international and regional pressures to relax or tighten border controls and coordinate migration policies with other international actors. However, the growing effect of external security threats in the course of the conflict in Syria and the misperceptions about the spillover risk required Turkish policy-makers to change their policies towards tightening border controls and coordinating with international actors. In general, the uncertainty of international anarchy facilitates the spillover of conflicts

91 Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed., New York, Guilford Press, 2009.

92 According to the score of National Material Capabilities (NMC) Dataset (measuring nation's material capabilities through total population, urban population, iron and steel production, energy consumption, military personnel, and military expenditure), Turkey's composite scores were almost stable from 1994 to 2012. https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities (Accessed 11 June 2020).

into the neighbouring countries. This risk is high in the Middle East because of the the ethnic and religious ties across countries, the presence of many non-state actors, relatively weak states, and the high mobility of people across borders. The Syrian war spilled over in a series of Syrian-Turkish border incidents, which compelled Turkish policy-makers to seek alternatives that provided security and control over its borders.

Second, as neoclassical realism proposes, the ambitions and interests of states emerge dynamically, being (re-)shaped according to feedback from the system. When it became clear that there would be no direct UN-sanctioned international military intervention against the Assad regime in Syria, which Turkey fiercely advocated in mid-2013, the limited range of possible policy options available became clear. As a middle power, Turkey cannot alone determine outcomes in the Syrian conflict, meaning it must pursue policy under constraints given by the international system. These include limited support from allies for the policy responses that Turkey proposed, reluctance by the United States to become directly involved in the Syrian war, the consequent moves by Russia to fill this vacuum and its consistent support to Assad regime, and the ongoing crisis in the EU. Various balance and imbalance conditions among the United States, Russia, Iran, and Turkey intermixed in the Syrian conflict,[93] shaping the short-lived cooperation and conflict patterns. In the end, the relative material power of Turkey vis-à-vis the international system limits the menu of foreign policy choices, despite its growing normative power. As envisioned by neoclassical realism, Turkey had to act within the limits of middle range powers.

Neoclassical realism enables us to understand how domestic factors, called as intervening unit-level variables, permit or constrain decision-makers' responses to external pressures. In our case, the intervening variables are ideational drivers, elite perceptions, harmonisation, and agreement in policy-making, as well as domestic politics. More specifically, ideational drivers are two-fold: 1) the ambition of Turkish state elites to enhance the country's normative power at the systemic level through an emphasis on humanitarianism and 2) their perceptions about the Syrian issue. As architects and implementers of foreign policy, former Foreign Minister Davutoğlu and current President Erdoğan were united in their assessment that the Syrian refugee flow was an opportunity to claim Turkey's growing power via humanitarianism. They held misperceptions about the temporality of the conflict in Syria, the sheer numbers of refugees that would cross, and Turkey's capabilities. Assuming the conflict would be short-lived, Turkish government elites avoided asking for international aid at the onset of the war. In this challenging context, elite consensus regarding ideational drivers allowed policy-makers to extract resources from the society and to limit possible tensions and backlash in domestic politics.

An important question for the neoclassical realist to ask is how public opinion and pressure groups affect a state's ability to extract the maximum resources from its society.[94] There is an agreement and harmonisation at the state elite level about the governance of the Syrian refugee issue. This is principally due to Turkey being ruled by the same single-party government since 2002. Refugee governance is a centrally administered policy in which the government has substantial power to extract and direct resources.[95] Secondly, throughout the evolution of Turkey's Syria policy, domestic

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93   Serdar Ş. Güner and Dilan E. Koç, "Leverages and Constraints for Turkish Foreign Policy in Syrian War: A Structural Balance Approach" *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 15, No 59, 2018, p. 89-103.

94   Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power.*

95   Zeynep Şahin Mencütek, *Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East*, London, Routledge, 2018.

political opposition was very weak; more importantly, the opposition parties did not want to be seen as on the wrong side of a humanitarian crisis when the government was extolling the virtues of hospitality and solidarity. Third, government elites tended to reject any criticism of their foreign and migration policies. Rather, they generally used any type of criticism to consolidate their legitimacy either by not accepting the criticism or deliberately crafting emotional responses to negative representations.[96] This confirms the finding that foreign policy turned into, once again, inextricably connected to identity politics and proceeded "as a political asset and populist platform" for the government.[97]

In the specific field of mass migration policy, public opinion and pressure groups gradually pushed the government to make a "return turn," at least in the discursive level, as observed in the fourth phase. Earlier acceptance and solidarity of local communities with Syrians has rapidly deteriorated over time. Anti-immigration discourse towards Syrians grew more frequent among the main opposition parties and general public. According to the comprehensive survey Syrian Barometer prepared by Murat Erdoğan, 81.8% of Turkish society is unsympathetic to the idea of coexistence with Syrians and support the following solutions to varying degrees: Syrians living in safe zones inside Syria" (37.4%); "leaving them in the camps" (28.1%); "deporting them" (11.5%); and "establishing a Syrian-exclusive city" (4.8%).[98] A current survey found that only 7.4 per cent of Turkish respondents are content with the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey, while 24.9 per cent do not have an idea, and 67.7 are opposed.[99]

In line with public opinion, the return issue remained at the top of the domestic agenda prior to the presidential elections in 2018. Both government and opposition parties' election manifestos articulated their commitments on Syrian refugee policy, which emphasised deportations. The government party committed to "increase the efficiency of its deportation processes and to establish of National Voluntary Return Mechanisms" for those under the scope of deportation.[100] On several platforms, the main opposition party (The Republican People's Party, CHP) explained its plan for returning Syrians, using the phrase "sending Syrians back to their home country," if it were to become the governing party.[101] The government party won the 2018 election, but discussions about return have remained on the public and political agendas since then. The number of returnees is occasionally mentioned by the governing party, which wants to give the message that it supports returns in parallel to its military incursions in Syria. The issue of Syrian returns again became a highly politicized issue during the local election campaigns in 2019 because of growing anti-Syrian sentiment among local Turkish communities, exacerbated by deepening economic recession, soaring unemployment, and inflation.[102] As

96   Deepa D. Prakash and A. Asli Ilgit, "More than a Feeling: Emotional Responses to International Criticism in Erdoğan's Turkey", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 43, No 1, 2017, p. 130-151.

97   Burak Bilgehan Özpek and Bill Park (eds.), *Islamism, Populism, and Turkish Foreign Policy*, London, Routledge, 2019; Lisel Hintz, *Identity Politics Inside Out: National Identity, Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018; Behlül Özkan, "Turkey, Davutoğlu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism", *Survival*, Vol. 56, No 4, 2014, p. 119-140; Doğan Gürpınar, "Foreign Policy as a Contested Front of the Cultural Wars in Turkey", 2020.

98   Murat Erdoğan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi: Suriyelilerle Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi*. İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018.

99   Mustafa, Aydın et al., "Research on Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy", Center for Turkish Studies – Kadir Has University, 4 July 2019. https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TDP-2019_BASINENG_FINAL.PDF. (Accessed 16 November 2020).

100 Party Manifestos. 2018. *24 Haziran 2018 Seçim Beyannameleri: Kadınlar, Engelliler, Göçmenler*. p.10

101 Mynet, "Suriyeli Kardeşlerimizi Geri Göndereceğiz", 22 April 2015. https://www.mynet.com/kilicdaroglu-suriyeli-kardeslerimizi-geri-gonderecegiz-110101806017. (Accessed 10 June 2020).

102 Euronews, "Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Bakış Olumsuz Yönde Değişiyor: Peki, Suriyeliler Ne Düşünüyor ?", 21 August

elsewhere, refugees were scapegoated for these problems, while the proposed ideal solution was the return of as many Syrians as possible. The election resulted in losses for governing party in two large provinces, İstanbul and Ankara. Many believed that the defeat in the mayoral election in İstanbul was caused by the Turkish constituency's reaction to the high number of Syrians in the city.[103] Thus, the return discourse continues to shape the governing party's electoral concerns.

Conclusion

In analysing the case of Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration from mid-2011 to mid-2020, neo-classical realism enables us to weigh the role of the Turkey's structural position, domestic politics, and ideas. These determined foreign policy choices towards Turkey's immediate neighbourhood, which in return has influenced the direction of Turkish refugee policies towards Syrians. Neoclassical realism provides a plural perspective for IR theory, migration studies, and Turkish foreign policy by combining elements of system, structure, and domestic politics in analysing dynamic and complex policy processes. Thus, it links theoretical claims to supporting evidence from a specific case. Although the fast-growing field of research about Syrians in Turkey comprehends a number of ideational driving forces behind politics and policy, the perspective from neoclassical realism offers broader perspectives that systematically links domestic and foreign policy dimensions.

The study shows that neoclassical realism goes beyond just being a useful lens to understand Turkey's policies towards Syrian mass migration. Neoclassical realism may also offer an alternative framework for similar analyses bridging foreign policy and policies towards refugees/migrants in particular and the international politics of migration in general. The article highlights an alternative terrain – migration/refugee governance – in which neoclassical realism can be utilized as a framework to add further theoretical rigor.

Drawing from neoclassical realism's conceptual framework, this case highlighted the possible contribution of this theory to explain the policy process and outcomes of Turkey's responses to the Syrian mass migration. There is no doubt that neoclassical realism does not have a final say on this topic. Similar to other IR theories, neoclassical realism shows the tendency of overgeneralization and can be criticized for "being an ad hoc effort."[104] Any analysis that bridges migration and IR theories needs to take these risks into account. Developing middle range theories inductively as "refugee rentier state behaviour" exemplifies another promising strand of theorization attempts to address the relationship between forced migration and foreign policy decision-making.[105]

Nevertheless, single and comparative cases illustrate that dialogue between IR theory and migration studies can enrich both fields. This case also demonstrates the significant dimensions of mass refugee migration policies, namely that international politics dimension can be better understood by

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2019. https://tr.euronews.com/2019/08/20/suriyeli-multecilere-yonelik-bakis-olumsuz-yonde-siginmaci-gunah-istanbul-turkiye-gocmen (Accessed 20 June 2020).

103 Fatma Sibel Yüksek, "Türkiye'de Siyaseti Kuşatan Sorun: Suriyeli Göçmenler" Euronews, 13 September 2019, https://tr.euronews.com/2019/09/13/turkiye-de-siyaseti-kusatan-sorun-suriyeli-gocmenler-siyasi-partilerin-tutumu-akp-mhp-chp. (Accessed 16 November 2020).

104 Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism", *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No 2, 2008, p. 294-321.

105 Gerasimos Tsourapas, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis", 2019.

building links with IR theories. Also, dynamism in the relationship between power, geopolitics, and policy-making enables scholars of both IR and migration studies to unpack relevant factors through interdisciplinary studies.

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