

NATO's Changing Role and Türkiye: Security Dynamics and Evolution of Relations

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyse the structural and functional transformation of NATO in the post-Cold War period and the changes in Türkiye's position within the alliance. NATO has focused on new threats and transformed by playing an active role in areas such as the fight against terrorism, regional conflicts and global security threats. In this process, Türkiye, while maintaining its NATO membership, occasionally experiences disagreements within the alliance. The change in NATO's role and Türkiye's position has been reshaped by the interaction between historical and geopolitical factors and security concerns. Türkiye is a strategic actor with its geographical location and military capacity. Türkiye's purchase of S-400 air defence systems from Russia has raised compatibility and security concerns within the alliance. Nevertheless, the historical ties and common security interests between Türkiye and NATO have kept relations unbroken. In conclusion, despite global changes, cooperation and dialogue between Türkiye and NATO will shape the alliance's ability to deal with security threats and be effective on the international stage.

Keywords: NATO, Türkiye, Security, Alliance, Allied Relations

NATO'nun Değişen Rolü ve Türkiye: Güvenlik Dinamikleri ve İlişkilerin Evrimi

Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı, NATO'nun Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemdeki yapısal ve işlevsel dönüşümünü ve Türkiye'nin ittifak içindeki konumundaki değişimleri analiz etmektedir. NATO, terörizmle mücadele, bölgesel çatışmalar ve küresel güvenlik tehditleri gibi alanlarda aktif rol oynayarak yeni tehditlere odaklanmış ve dönüşüme uğramıştır. Bu süreçte Türkiye, NATO üyeliğini sürdürmekle birlikte, ittifak içinde zaman zaman görüş ayrılıkları yaşamaktadır. NATO'nun rolündeki değişim ve Türkiye'nin konumu, tarihi, jeopolitik faktörler ve güvenlik kaygıları arasındaki etkileşimle yeniden şekillenmiştir. Türkiye, coğrafi konumu ve askeri kapasitesiyle stratejik bir aktör konumundadır. Türkiye'nin Rusya'dan S-400 hava savunma sistemleri alması, ittifak içinde uyumluluk ve güvenlik kaygılarını artırmıştır. Buna rağmen, Türkiye ve NATO arasındaki tarihi bağlar ve ortak güvenlik çıkarları ilişkilerin kopmamasını sağlamıştır. Sonuç olarak küresel değişimlere rağmen Türkiye ile NATO arasındaki işbirliği ve diyalog, ittifakın güvenlik tehditleriyle başa çıkma ve uluslararası sahnede etkili olma yeteneğini şekillendirecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşması Örgütü (NATO), Türkiye, Güvenlik, İttifak, Müttefik İlişkileri

Received/Gönderim 01. 11. 2023 – Accepted/Kabul 08.12.2023

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Atf Bilgisi / Citation: Armutlu, A. (2023). NATO's Changing Role and Türkiye: Security Dynamics and Evolution of Relations. *Middle East Perspectives*, 2(1): 2-51.

Introduction

For thousands of years, states have struggled with each other to secure and further their existence. Unfortunately, states are not equal to each other in demographic, economic and military aspects and this makes it harder to accomplish security duties of states. Thus, states have always tried to counterfeit the greater ones via forming alliances. The history is full of such alliances but the most durable and institutionalized alliance in the history is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which was founded in 1949 and has reached 31 members lately. Türkiye has been a member of NATO since its first expansion in 1952.

NATO, an international organisation, has tried to protect NATO alliance countries against all kinds of attacks by creating a unique bond between its member countries since its establishment in 1949 (Güleç and Kışman, 2021:130). However, with the end of the Cold War, the role and importance of NATO in the new world order started to be discussed. NATO, which was established during the Cold War against the Soviet threat, seemed to have lost its purpose and reason for existence with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. However, the following years have shown that NATO is still an important security organisation. Especially after the 11 September attacks, NATO started to take an active role in the fight against international terrorism.

NATO is a defence alliance established to ensure military and political cooperation between North American and European countries. NATO's main objective is to enhance the collective defence capabilities of its member states and to ensure common security. The main objective of the alliance is the "Collective Defence Clause", Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which includes the commitment of other member states to come to the aid of one member country in the event of an attack on another. Moreover, Article 4 of the Brussels Treaty stipulated that in the event of an attack on a member state, the other states would pledge military and other assistance. However, the European states realised that their capacity to defend themselves against the Soviet threat without the support of the United States of America (USA). was inadequate and accepted that they needed a security organisation that included the USA. One of the most attractive aspects of collective security organisations is that an attack on one country is considered an attack on all alliance members (Karaca, 2022:29).

NATO plays an important role in ensuring international security, maintaining stability and strengthening co-operation among member states. However, the relation between NATO and Türkiye is not as good as Türkiye wants it to be because of NATO's negligence of its security concerns. As a result of this relationship, there is always a

debate on departure of Türkiye from NATO despite the fact that these two share common grounds and need each other.

As one of the founding members of NATO, Türkiye has been trying to maintain its place in the alliance. However, Türkiye's position within NATO has become controversial in the post-Cold War period. There is a widespread view in Turkish public opinion that double standards have been applied against Türkiye during NATO's enlargement process. Following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, NATO's attitude towards Türkiye continued to be negative. On the night of the coup attempt, a statement read on TRT screens stated that "the Peace at Home Council will fulfil its existing obligations with all international organisations, including the UN and NATO, and will take all necessary measures" (Hürriyet, 2016). In the aftermath of the coup attempt, there was a widespread belief among the Turkish public that NATO had supported the coup attempt. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, Türkiye strongly criticised the stance of Western leaders, especially NATO. The main reason for these criticisms is seen as the fact that Western countries were late in condemning this treasonous act that attempted to overthrow the elected legitimate government (Ercan, 2017: 17). Türkiye, which has not received sufficient support from its NATO allies, especially with regard to terrorist organisations such as the PKK and FETO, believes

that its security concerns are not given enough importance. Türkiye's decision to purchase the S-400 air defence systems was also met with reactions within NATO. In addition, the post-Cold War period has seen significant changes in NATO's role and structure. Türkiye, while maintaining its place in the alliance as a founding member, occasionally has differences of opinion with its NATO allies.

When the studies on this subject are analysed, Yost (1998), analysed NATO's new roles in international security in the post-Cold War era. Riecke et al. (2012), argue that NATO will be successful and achieve political stability in the regions if it expands its political space. To support this and help NATO gain influence, he concluded that innovative efforts towards better partnerships based on partners' needs is a prudent strategy. Demir (2021), states that NATO's greatest feature is that it renews itself and rapidly adapts to the conditions, and that due to this feature, NATO can protect security and stability against the global threats and risks of the 21st century, and that for this, it is important that the overlap between the strategic interests of the USA and the interests of Europe and the main powers on both sides of the Trans-Atlantic continue to believe in the existence of NATO. Demir also concludes that despite all these challenges, NATO will continue to play an important role in the establishment of peace and security in the 21st century.

Duman (2023), evaluates the consequences of leaving NATO and concludes that despite the problems of remaining in the Alliance, Türkiye will continue its membership unless a major problem arises. He concluded that this situation can be easily seen in the fact that Türkiye has made the process a bargaining chip for the membership of Sweden and Finland despite the negative picture.

From the very beginning, Türkiye has opposed the membership of these two countries to NATO when their applications for NATO membership came to the agenda. The main justification behind Türkiye's position is the alleged support of these two countries to the PKK terrorist organisation. In June 2022, at the NATO Summit in Madrid, Türkiye announced that it would support the membership of these two countries provided that bilateral agreements were signed with them. In this process, it was emphasised that the Republic of Türkiye was waiting to see the concrete steps to be taken within the scope of the tripartite agreement (Karaca, 2022:73).

A review of existing studies reveals that although NATO's post-Cold War transformation and enlargement process and Türkiye's relations with NATO in this period have been analysed separately, a comprehensive study that examines the causal relationship between these two phenomena in a holistic manner is missing in the literature. Analysing the interaction between NATO's structural and functional

transformation in the new era and Türkiye's changing position is a necessity for a better understanding of both the alliance's evolution and Türkiye's special position.

In this study, we wish to explore the nature of an alliance, discuss the grounds and future of NATO and debate whether Türkiye should leave the organisation or not. In this sense, how did the transformation in the structure and function of NATO in the post-Cold War period affect Türkiye's position and role within the alliance? An answer to this question will be sought.

The aim of this study is to analyse the transformation of NATO in the post-Cold War period and to reveal the changes in Türkiye's position and role within NATO in this process. Analysing the post-Cold War transformation of NATO and the changes in Türkiye's position in this process is of great importance in terms of understanding both the structure and function of the alliance in the new era and Türkiye's security policies.

In the first part of the study, the question of what is an alliance will be answered. In the second part, the history of NATO and its changing role after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) will be discussed, and in the last part, Türkiye's relations with NATO and whether Türkiye should leave NATO will be discussed. The structure of the study will be addressed by focusing on the creation of the

concept of alliances, an examination of NATO's history, and then Türkiye's engagement with the organisation. It is also to provide a comprehensive analysis to help readers understand the complexities surrounding alliances, the role of NATO and the unique situation of Türkiye's membership.

What is an Alliance?

The phenomenon of alliance is so broad and sophisticated that it can be associated with many dichotomies in international relations such as war-peace, conflict-cooperation, chaos-order. It is impossible to tell the story of mankind from the past to the present or to write a Political History without mentioning alliances. Although the aims, motivations, institutionalisation levels, qualities and quantities of each alliance are different, it is possible to encounter alliance formation in every period of history. For this reason, the subject of alliances is one of the most important fields of study in the discipline of International Relations (Demirkılınç, 2023:220).

For Walt (1987:12), "an alliance is a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states." According to Modelski (1963), alliances play a particularly important role in the international relations literature. With this important role, alliances can shape the balance of power between states and have a major impact on international politics. They can also

play a critical role in resolving international crises and preserving peace. Therefore, the study and analysis of alliances are fundamental to the understanding of international relations.

Walt (1987:17) described alliance formation under five categories, the first two categories stem from a threat and in case of a threat states either balance or bandwagon to cope with the aggressor. Balancing is “the proposition that states will join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory (Walt, 1985:5)”. Bandwagoning is, on the other hand, the proposition that states “ally with rather than against the dominant side (Walt, 1985:6)”. Another category of forming an alliance is ideology-based in which states with the same political, cultural or other different common background form an alliance (Walt, 1987:33). Foreign aid that Walt (1985:27) described as ‘bribery’ is also another category of alliance formation. According to Walt (1987:41), “the provision of economic or military assistance can create effective allies, because it communicates favorable intentions, because it evokes a sense of gratitude, or because the recipient becomes dependent on the donor”. The last category of alliance formation is transnational penetration which can be describes as “the covert or indirect manipulation of one state's political system by another (Walt, 1985:30)”.

Walt (1997) also discussed the endurance and termination of an alliance in his latter studies. For him (1997:158-164), an alliance ends because of ‘changing perceptions of threat, declining credibility and domestic politics (demographic and social trends, domestic competition, regime change, ideological divisions).’ On the other hand, an alliance persists because of ‘hegemonic leadership, preserving credibility, domestic politics and elite manipulation, the impact of institutionalisation, ideological solidarity, shared identities and “security communities” (Walt, 1997:164-170).’ Walt’s analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay of factors that influence the fate of alliances. By categorising these factors into those that lead to termination and those that promote continuity, he offers insights into the various dimensions that shape the trajectory of alliances in international relations.

For an alliance, for differences not to be fatal, it is necessary that the parties respect each other’s concerns and that this respect is reflected in strategic discussions and concrete preparations. Unfortunately, the allies do not fulfil these conditions sufficiently. Although there is a strategic convergence within NATO, it still does not reflect a real sense of solidarity. The long-standing capability gap between the USA and its European allies has undermined the integrity of NATO as a whole and American support for the alliance for

decades (Riecke et al, 2012:25). This shows that coordination and interdependence within the alliance needs to be strengthened.

The Changing Role of NATO

After the Second World War, the USA and the Soviet Union emerged as the two major superpowers in the world. After the war, a political conflict emerged between these two great powers and the world system turned into a bipolar structure, with one pole consisting of the West and the other pole consisting of socialist states (Seferoğlu, 2019:71). The end of the Cold War had led to the expectation that the threat to the West would decline, thus reducing the need for NATO. However, in the mid-1990s, the inadequate capacity of institutions such as the UN or the EU to resolve regional conflicts brought NATO's importance back to the agenda. In this period, NATO restructured itself and updated its policies in order to adapt to the needs of the age and increased its effectiveness. Especially in 2002, by adding the fight against terrorism to its agenda, NATO assumed a global role and gained more importance with this role (Rieche, 2012:4). In the light of these developments, NATO's redefinition of itself in the 21st century and its active role in the fight against terrorism have reinforced the alliance's central role in global security and can be considered as an indicator of its adaptive capacity in the changing world order.

The most institutionalised and durable alliance is the NATO, created for both security and ideological purposes. The underlying matter that formed NATO is to make the line clear between the West and USSR as the expansion of Soviet Russia reached to the borders of Germany. After the end of the Second World War, the USA started a development campaign which was known as the Marshall Plan to rebuild the war-thorn countries and collapsed economies of those countries (United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Iceland, Austria, Norway, Denmark, Denmark, Switzerland, Türkiye and Sweden). Soviet Russia had not only involved in the Marshall plan but also did prevent its satellite states in joining the plan. The coup in Czechoslovakia, the success of the communist party in Italy, the attempted coup in Greece, and Soviet threats to Türkiye were all the reasons of the fear of the European countries but the alarming event occurred in Berlin when Soviet Russia blockaded the Western parts of Berlin in 1948 that led the first flame of the Cold War. Several European countries (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands and United Kingdom) signed the Brussels Treaty in 1948 in order to form a collective security alliance which can be named as the prototype of the Washington Treaty. Meanwhile, the president of USA Henry Truman, was in search of persuading the congress to give up the historic isolationist foreign policy. The congress finally decided

to join an alliance outside the United Nations where that Soviet Russia could not veto (USA Department of State, 2019). NATO having 31 members today was established in Washington D.C. on 4 April 1949 after the signing of The North Atlantic Treaty (the treaty), also known as the Washington Treaty. The treaty came into force on 24 August 1949 and was amended on 22 October 1951 after Türkiye and Greece joined NATO. Once the USSR had been dissolved, the organisation was expanded by the new members from the former Soviet republics, former the Warsaw Pact members and from the former Yugoslavian republics.

NATO is both a political and security alliance as its “purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means (NATO, 2019)”. NATO is an international security organisation because it is established to settle disputes, promote peace, maintain security and prevent conflict. The most prominent feature of the agreement is its Article 5 which charges all members with defending any of its members if it is under an attack using any means including armed response under the condition of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It is also a political alliance that it promotes democracy by forcing its members to have some certain liberal features and institutions. Besides, NATO member states consult

each other in different forms of councils so as to cooperate and solve their problems.

International organisations, which are specific to the Cold War period, have felt the need to adapt to changing conditions. In the face of emerging developments, NATO, while maintaining its aim of ensuring the security of member countries, has also endeavoured to adapt itself to new conditions (Demir, 2016:236). NATO has demonstrated its ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances by reinventing itself more than once while maintaining its traditional missions. Due to these changes, there is a lack of unity among the alliance's members, which manifests itself as a lack of political will that prevents NATO from being equipped with the capabilities needed for an ambitious agenda. Without a clear consensus on the purpose of the Alliance, it is forced to focus on a limited number of tasks, while changes in the global strategic environment require greater openness and adaptability. This dilemma is exacerbated by the global financial and economic crises, which have led to uncoordinated reductions in defence budgets among NATO members (Riecke et al, 2012:25). The first change in NATO is its policies against the inclusion of former Soviet Republics to expand its liberal ideology to those countries.

However, in the aftermath of the Cold War, security understanding and strategies changed and issues such as human

rights violations and environmental problems started to be taken into consideration more as threat factors. In this period, the attacks of 11 September 2001 created a new breaking point and led to the diversification of threat factors. NATO, which was the main defence unit of the Western Bloc during the Cold War, experienced changes in its mission definition and field of application with the disappearance of the Soviet threat. New strategies and opportunities for co-operation against new threats began to be explored (Özer et al. 2010:568). In this process, NATO and other international organisations have focused on developing multilateral policies and cooperation to reshape the global security architecture.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, NATO's strategic concepts published in 1991, 1999 and 2010 were amended to focus on a security approach based on crisis management and cooperation with non-NATO countries, in addition to the alliance's main objective of collective defence. This new focus, with military interventions based on collective security rather than collective defence, represents an important change point that determines NATO's future and transformation process (Bağbaşıoğlu, 2020:367). The 2010 Lisbon Summit was a landmark event in which a new "Strategic Concept" was adopted for the period from 2010 to 2020. This strategic concept is called "Active Engagement Modern Defence" and has the main

characteristics of protecting member states against all threats, managing the most challenging crises and promoting international stability. It also emphasised the need to develop the capacity to cooperate more effectively with other organisations and nations in order to achieve these goals (NATO, 2012). These developments show that NATO has gained flexibility in the post-Cold War period, increasing its capacity to respond to global security challenges and adopting a broad security perspective by going beyond the traditional defence approach.

NATO's first military intervention under its new strategic concept took place during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which resulted in Bosnia-Herzegovina's declaration of independence and Serbian intervention. NATO intervened to help Bosnia-Herzegovina by creating the stabilization Force (SFOR), which partly brought peace, but the timing and scope of the intervention are still controversial. Moreover, during the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Türkiye participated NATO's military operation and this intervention was notable as NATO's operation to provide security independently of the UN. Türkiye's strategic importance and alliance within NATO were of great value and Türkiye also participated in the Afghanistan operation following the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo interventions (Yalçın, 2019:38-39).

Hence the developments in NATO's history can be divided into three historical periods. The first period is the Cold War period, during which NATO's mission was quite clear: Deterring the Soviet Union. The second period is the period between the end of the Cold War and the 11 September attacks. In this period, NATO used military force for the first time in its history. After the 11 September attacks until today, the main characteristic of this period is that the security threat can now come from anywhere in the world. In addition, another important change in this period was the definition of the enemy. The enemy is no longer a state or a group of states, but none-state actors such as terrorist organisations. The USA president George W. Bush's global war on terrorism concept is the implementation of a policy that reflects this change in this period (Karaca, 2022:44-45). Since the first Strategic Concept in 1991, NATO has shown surprising flexibility in intervening in areas such as Bosnia and Kosovo to halt internal conflicts in the Balkans. This new mission went beyond NATO's "in-area" responsibilities and was formally recognised in the Strategic Concept adopted in 1999. Its military intervention in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks was among these new tasks and was confirmed in the Strategic Concept in 2010. In addition to these new missions, NATO has not hesitated to emphasise in all its Strategic Concepts the task of defence against conventional aggression. NATO needs to have the necessary

capabilities and resources to effectively fulfil these two core tasks (Karaosmanoğlu, 2019:21).

In 1999 and in 2004 some of the neighboring countries joined the organisation which expands the borders of NATO to Ukraine and Georgia. The other expansion came after the collapse of the Yugoslavia leaving a few states out of NATO. However, the 9/11 terror attack in USA created a new threat for the organisation: terrorism. Once the war on terror was declared by the president of USA, NATO members actively stood behind USA in accordance with the article 5 of the treaty. The war on terror changed the defensive nature of NATO to a more offensive organisation by directly involving in Afghanistan by using armed forces to combat the non-democratic countries to bring them democracy so as to promote global peace in compliance with a Kantian theory. The offensive nature of the organisation appeared in Iraq's invasion, independence of Kosovo and the civil wars of Libya, Syria and Yemen. Nevertheless, the threat from Russia is still valid for the organisation so that NATO has deployed soldiers in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in the biggest military exercise in 2017 (NATO, 2019). In short, it can be said that NATO played an important role in the end of the Cold War and assumed an important role in ensuring global security in the 1990s and 2000s, and that it largely succeeded in this task (Demir, 2016:237).

When the Cold War came to an end, one of the main questions on many fundamental issues, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was what the organisation should do in the new era now that it had lost the basic dynamic of its founding. In the debates on this issue, the number of those who argued that the organisation had lost the reason for its existence and that it was therefore pointless to continue its existence had increased. Today, however, NATO has undergone a remarkable transformation and has become a successful security organisation in conceptualising what is known as "soft security", an important component of inter-state relations such as energy security. As of now, rather than questioning the existence of the organisation, the issue of where to draw its borders is being debated (Pekşen, 2016:36).

Besides, as declared in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, "as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance (NATO, 2010:14)". The 2010 Strategic Concept is the main text of the change in NATO with the title "Active Engagement, Modern Defence." There three core principles of the organisation is defined as 'collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security' (NATO, 2010:7-8). NATO, on one hand, keeps its defensive role and it will, on the other hand, pursue a more offensive role by "a continuous process of reform, modernisation and transformation" (NATO, 2010:9)

as well as developing cooperation with non-member countries including Russia. As it is inferred from the 2010 Strategic Concept document, NATO do not foresee new roles in the world politics instead of termination for itself so that the threats from USSR has gone away.

Türkiye and NATO

Türkiye joined NATO in its first enlargement in 1952 after its establishment. NATO member states are committed to developing and maintaining the alliance's defence capabilities, protecting each other's territorial integrity and defending each other when their security is threatened (Sokullu, 2012:152). Türkiye is a full member of NATO and has faithfully fulfilled its obligations since 1952. Before becoming a member of NATO, Türkiye had already embraced democracy by adopting competitive elections in 1946. This shows that Türkiye is in a key position as a strategic actor in both regional security dynamics and transatlantic relations.

In addition to external factors such as the change in the balance of power of the international system after the Second World War, the Soviet threat, and events in Türkiye's region, internal dynamics such as Türkiye's need for military and economic aid and the maintenance of a multi-party democratic system also played a role in Türkiye's decision to join NATO (Demirkılınç, 2023:220). For Türkiye, the

decision to join NATO in 1952 was not only a way to satisfy its security needs against the Soviet Union, but also a way to gain a Western identity in the long process of modernisation. An assessment of Türkiye's 70 years of NATO membership shows that since 1952 Türkiye has not had everything it wanted and has even had significant differences of opinion with NATO members. However, despite all these disagreements and negativities, Türkiye has supported NATO policies for 70 years as the second most powerful country in NATO after the USA (Duman, 2023:402). In this period, Türkiye's decision to join NATO was seen as an effective protection strategy against the Soviet threat, in addition to international security concerns and the need to strengthen its defence capacity. Türkiye's move was also important as an indication of its commitment to western democratic values and the preservation of its multi-party democratic system. For Türkiye, NATO membership was not only a shield against external threats, but also a combination of internal and external dynamics that shaped the country's foreign policy. This decision can be seen as both a response to regional security concerns and a symbol of Türkiye's alignment with western values.

The focus of NATO strategy was initially on Germany and Western Europe. In this context, the role of the South Wing, including Türkiye, was of secondary importance. From a strategic point of view,

however, Türkiye's role was crucial. Türkiye's NATO membership made the Soviet industrial areas, energy resources and military zones vulnerable to the Alliance's surveillance in peacetime, while leaving them open to attack in wartime (Karaosmanoğlu, 2019:10). While accusations of "world hegemony" were made between the other sides, Türkiye had no difficulty in choosing its own side in this polarisation process (Criss, 2012:2). However, Türkiye's entry into NATO was motivated by contemporary concerns about the expansion of the Soviet Union's influence. Through the implementation of the Truman Doctrine, both Türkiye and Greece were assisted to counter Soviet threats and prevent their rapprochement with the Communist bloc. As a result, both countries became NATO members in 1952. In addition to contributing to the strengthening of the Western alliance, Türkiye's inclusion in NATO was also influenced by its considerable military capacity, which was of particular importance given the state of post-war European armies. Moreover, Türkiye's proximity to the Soviet Union played a key role in its NATO membership, as this proximity allowed Türkiye to provide about a quarter of the total intelligence gathered on Soviet activities. (Güvenç, 2015:103,105). This strategic advantage gave Türkiye a unique position within NATO and enabled the alliance to better understand Soviet actions and intentions.

Moreover, when faced with political uncertainties, decision-makers often learn from past experiences and consider options for joining or staying out of alliances. From a historical perspective, this approach is important in supporting our thesis. The NATO alliance not only strengthened Türkiye militarily, but also ended Türkiye's long search for belonging. Türkiye's process of joining NATO can be explained by drawing on lessons learnt from past antagonisms between Türkiye and the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Therefore, at the system level, the question "Why NATO?" can be understood in a broader context when considered in a historical perspective (Criss, 2012:3).

The events of 1989 in Eastern Europe created a wave of change across the world, particularly in Europe. In 1991, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the scene had a significant impact on many countries, including Türkiye. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Eastern Bloc countries, it was claimed that NATO was no longer needed and therefore Türkiye's strategic importance or the strongest link connecting Türkiye to the West had disappeared (Armaoğlu, 2020:268). The events in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to major changes around the world, but in the process, claims were made that NATO had become

redundant with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Türkiye's strategic importance was questioned and some problems were caused.

Although Türkiye rendered all its duties towards NATO, the relationship between Türkiye and NATO has always been problematic for Türkiye. First of all, the acceptance of Türkiye had come after the Türkiye's participation in the Korean War, in other words by the expense of its soldiers' blood. After it had been accepted the organization, Türkiye advocated Western values among Middle Eastern and Balkan countries through Baghdad and Balkan pacts. Besides, Türkiye has participated in the international operations towards Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo and Mediterranean Sea.

Türkiye demanded that NATO take a more active and interventionist role in ending the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Notably, it supported the 1994 Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative, authorised the establishment of a training centre in Türkiye in 1998 and participated in NATO military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. Furthermore, Türkiye joined the NATO Emergency Response Force, which was announced in Prague in 2002 and activated in Riga in 2006, and contributed militarily to NATO operations in many regions outside Europe (Oğuzlu, 2012:103). However, when it comes to the Türkiye's national security, Türkiye's concerns were ignored. The first

conflict was the 1974 Cyprus intervention when USA imposed a weapon embargo on Türkiye neglecting the Turkish concerns. Also, Türkiye's fight with ethnic separatist terrorist organisation was not supported by its NATO allies. Moreover, Germany imposed a weapon embargo on Türkiye blaming it for using the weapons against its citizens in 1990s.

With the Justice and Development Party (AKP) coming to power in the 2002, Türkiye's questioning attitude towards NATO became more pronounced. After the 11 September attacks, it became clear that NATO could no longer be a defence organisation limited to the European continent and new concerns began to emerge in Türkiye's approach to the alliance. The most important of these concerns was the risk of NATO's policies conflicting with Türkiye's "new" foreign policy approach. In order to reduce this risk, Türkiye started to contribute more to the determination of the alliance's policies and to adopt a critical attitude when necessary (Oğuzlu, 2012:104).

In the face of tensions with Greece, Syria, Armenia and, to a lesser extent, Iran, as well as PKK-related casualties, NATO has not provided effective support to Türkiye, which has fulfilled the Alliance's responsibilities since its inception. Nevertheless, Türkiye co-

operated closely with the USA within NATO and supported its enlargement strategies (Gürkan, 1997:480-481).

After 9/11, Türkiye attached importance to cooperation with NATO in the fight against terrorism and provided support to operations carried out in line with NATO's Article 5. However, the lack of support from NATO in 2003, prior to the USA invasion of Iraq, led to increased scepticism towards NATO in Türkiye. Before the Second Gulf War, Türkiye's request for protection against Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was not met due to the negative attitudes of some European countries. This situation showed that Türkiye was still at risk of not receiving the support it expected from NATO. Nevertheless, Türkiye did not withdraw from NATO and continued to contribute to the organisation. Moreover, the "model partnership" process between the USA and Türkiye and the PKK and FETO issues affecting Türkiye's foreign policy have become the main issues determining Türkiye's relations with the West and NATO (Ataman, 2017:48; Çelik, 2023:107; Kardemir, 2021:96; Kibaroğlu, 2017:12). Another realm of conflict is Türkiye's air defense concerns. The issue first came into agenda during the Gulf War when Türkiye wanted to deploy Patriot missiles in the country that was encountered with unwillingness of NATO allies.

Recently, it has been reported that Türkiye's credibility towards NATO has decreased and the organisation has started to be perceived as a threat to Türkiye's national unity and integrity. This perception increased especially after the FETO coup attempt on 15 July 2016. A significant part of the Turkish public believes that NATO was behind this attempt. Moreover, there is a prevailing view that NATO has provided insufficient support to Türkiye in its fight against PKK, DAESH and FETO. The scandal at the "Trident Javelin" NATO exercise in Norway in 2017 and the timing of Türkiye's purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia further reinforced this negative perception (Kibaroğlu, 2017:8; Yiğittepe, 2018:281).

The 15 July 2016 coup attempt and the allegations that FETÖ was behind it have further questioned Türkiye's relations with NATO. Especially the patronage of FETÖ leader by the USA has reinforced this situation. In addition, the support given to FETÖ members in NATO, the lack of sufficient support from allied countries to Türkiye's security problems, the USA support for the PYD/YPG-PKK in Syria and Türkiye's rapprochement with Russia are among the main reasons for the tension in Türkiye-NATO relations (Özalp, 2018:418; Yiğittepe, 2018:218).

After the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, a negative perception of NATO has increased in Türkiye. The references to NATO in the coup

declaration reinforced the belief among the Turkish public that the organisation supported the coup. Moreover, the delayed reactions and inadequate support to Türkiye by Western allies, especially the USA, Germany, the UK, the UK and France, following the coup attempt have been criticised. While the SETA report stated that Türkiye was left alone after the coup attempt, it was also stated that NATO did not provide sufficient support to the PKK terrorist threat, which Türkiye has been fighting against for many years, and that some NATO members continued to support the PKK's extensions (Ercan, 2017:17; Hürriyet, 2016; Özalp, 2018:417; Telci et al, 2017:8). This situation is thought to have increased Türkiye's distrust of security and defence policies within NATO and raised serious doubts about the principles of solidarity and cooperation within the alliance.

Another area of conflict is Türkiye's air defence concerns. The issue first came to the fore during the Gulf War, when Türkiye, faced with the reluctance of its NATO allies, wanted to deploy Patriot missiles. Türkiye decided to procure S-400 air defence systems from Russia in order to take measures against terrorism-related security challenges. However, this decision was heavily criticised within NATO by the USA and Europe. The acquisition of the S-400 led to the exclusion of Türkiye from the F-35 fighter jet programme by the USA and led to a credibility crisis with serious decisions such as the USA

Senate's Countering Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) (SETA, 2022:17).

In 2017, Türkiye signed an agreement with Russia for the purchase of S-400 missile defence systems due to the lack of sufficient missile defence support from NATO allies. This demonstrates Türkiye's capacity to act independently in the context of NATO membership and its ability to make decisions in line with its own security needs despite warnings from NATO allies. In 2019, Türkiye received the first four missile batteries from Russia. This development increased the questionability of Türkiye's NATO membership and was considered as part of the steps taken by the country to meet its air defence needs after the 15 July coup attempt (Macias, 2020; Özalp, 2018:419).

Starting from 2011, Türkiye applied to NATO to strengthen its air defence systems due to the Syrian war and temporarily procured Patriot missiles from the USA, Germany and Spain. However, the withdrawal of these NATO countries from their missions and equipment in Türkiye led Türkiye to other alternatives. As a result of the failure of the USA to meet the demands, Türkiye developed strategic relations with Russia and turned to the purchase of S-400 missiles. During this period, Türkiye was criticised by its NATO allies for its operations in northern Syria and the purchase of the S-400, and

even debated its expulsion from NATO. Türkiye has accelerated its steps towards becoming a self-sufficient country in the field of defence, especially by noticing the USA's attitudes that are incompatible with the alliance relationship. This process is a continuation of the national defence move initiated after the USA arms embargo in 1975-1978 (Çelik, 2023:110; Güler, 2020:158; Sari, 2019).

For the USA and NATO, Türkiye's acquisition of the S-400 missile defence systems carries with it the risk of Türkiye distancing itself from the Western bloc. Türkiye, which is seen as a strategic ally of NATO, developing relations with Russia, which is considered a potential threat to the West, may weaken the common security structure between the West and Türkiye and shake the foundation of trust between the parties. In particular, Türkiye and Russia's joint efforts in Syria under the Astana Process could narrow the West's sphere of influence in the Middle East and shift regional control to Russia. This could lead to a loss of authority and power for the USA and NATO at the international level. Therefore, distancing Türkiye from Russia and keeping it within the NATO alliance is important to counter Russia's growing regional and global influence (Yılmaz, 2022).

Türkiye's agreement with Russia on S-400 air defence systems was met with a negative reaction by NATO members, particularly the USA. This was manifested in the USA raising the possibility of

suspending Türkiye's participation in the F-35 fighter jet project. On the NATO side, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, in his statement on Türkiye's S-400 purchase, pointed to the potential of this system to create security weaknesses and the possibility of incompatibility with NATO's own defence systems (Yiğittepe, 2018:284-285).

In response to Türkiye's resolute stance on the S-400, the USA and NATO members chose to impose significant sanctions, such as excluding Türkiye from the F-35 fighter jet project. When Türkiye's stance on this issue did not change, sanctions were imposed under the USA CAATSA law. Türkiye's refusal to back down on the S-400 issue has strained its relations with the USA, while further improving its relations with Russia. Especially during and after the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, Türkiye, which received Russia's support, questioned its relations with both the USA and other NATO members as a NATO member country due to the failure of the USA and NATO to take a clear stance on this issue (Yeltin, 2021).

Another difference of opinion between Türkiye and NATO is the difference of opinion on the Russia-Ukraine War, which has been going on since 2022. The tensions between NATO and Russia have significantly affected Türkiye, an important member of the Alliance. Türkiye's recent close relations with Russia have raised concerns, especially among the USA and other NATO members. During the

Syrian crisis that erupted in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Türkiye and Russia's search for a common solution to the Syrian crisis has increased their cooperation not only in the political but also in the military field. During the Syrian crisis, Türkiye strengthened its relations with Russia when it did not receive the support it expected from NATO against terrorist organisations such as YPG, PKK and DAESH, which threatened its national security. This situation has led Türkiye to re-evaluate its preferences for increasing its military power and implementing its security policies effectively (Yiğittepe, 2018:283).

Russia perceived Ukraine's rapprochement with the West and NATO as a threat to its security. Claiming that this rapprochement would prepare the ground for an attack against Russia, Russia demanded Ukraine to stop this process. As a result of the rejection of the demand, the relations between Russia and Ukraine turned into a war. Russia first recognised the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics as independent states on 21 February 2022 and intervened militarily in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (Sönmez et al., 2015:664; Yumuşak, 2023:188).

With the war that started on 24 February 2022, Ukraine was bombarded and some of its territory was occupied. In this process, Ukraine called for collective self-defence, but did not receive the actual and military support it expected from NATO. NATO's relationship

with Ukraine can best be described as "Constructive Ambiguity". Since 2008, NATO has not taken a serious step towards Ukraine's membership. While NATO has kept Ukraine close, it has not turned towards a cooperation and support that would provide a security perimeter. NATO's assistance to Ukraine was generally limited to limited areas such as logistics and cyber security, and no arms and ammunition support was provided. Ukraine, which turned towards the West, was deprived of NATO's support in its conventional war with Russia (Acer, 2022:8; Çalışkan, 2022:43).

Türkiye and Ukraine have a strong relationship, particularly in the field of tourism, and the two countries have a significant bilateral trade relationship. Throughout the political and military crises since 2013, Türkiye has expressed its respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity and did not recognise the annexation of Crimea. During the Russia-Türkiye plane crisis in 2015, Ukraine supported Türkiye despite Russian trade sanctions. Türkiye has played a mediating and conciliatory role in major crises between Ukraine and Russia, and Ukrainian President Zelensky made his first foreign visit to Türkiye after taking office. During the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye provided Ukraine with a significant amount of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and defence equipment. This support has been an important factor affecting the course of the war in strategic terms. While

providing this support, Türkiye took care not to damage its sensitive relations with Russia (Çalışkan, 2022:23-24).

Türkiye's policy of balance emerged at a time of high energy security threats, long before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite being a member of NATO, Türkiye has made a series of agreements with Russia in the fields of tourism, energy and even military. In particular, it took an opposing position to NATO with the purchase of S-400 defence systems, while signing the necessary agreement for Finland's NATO membership despite Russia's objections (Aydınlı, 2023:168).

Türkiye has both direct and indirect interests in a peaceful end to the Russian-Ukrainian war. The war is taking place between Türkiye's neighbouring countries and threatens Türkiye's security, especially the Straits and the Black Sea region, causing economic crises and migration waves. Türkiye takes an active role in ending this war and solving the problems and voluntarily undertakes mediation activities. On the other hand, Türkiye's political, economic and social relations with Russia have led it to play an important role in the region during the war despite being a NATO member. While acting as a diplomatic mediator, Türkiye has also played an important role in solving the global grain crisis, especially in the shipment of grain to the African continent. Moreover, it should not be ignored that Türkiye

may gain importance as a power station in the future (Aydınlı, 2023:160-161; Özsağlam, 2022:69; Yumuşak, 2023:179).

Türkiye's purchase of S-400 air defence systems from Russia has raised eyebrows among NATO allies and revealed the tension between Türkiye's obligations to NATO and its developing relations with Russia. This situation particularly disturbed the USA and led the USA Congress to adopt sanctions against Türkiye. The NATO membership of Sweden and Finland has been the most recent source of tension between Türkiye and NATO. When the membership applications of these two countries came to the agenda, Türkiye opposed these applications on the grounds that they provided support to the PKK. At the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, Türkiye approved the membership of Sweden and Finland on the condition of the bilateral agreement signed with them, but stated that it wanted to see concrete steps within the framework of the trilateral agreement (Karaca, 2022:73; Olimat, 2023).

Türkiye's relations with Russia in the fields of defence and energy, as well as its membership in a Western security alliance, require Ankara to pursue a complex balancing policy. In this context, Ankara needs to pursue a path to protect its national interests without undermining NATO's collective security obligations (Scheppele, 2018).

All this shows that Türkiye's foreign policy adopts a multilateral and balanced approach. As a member of NATO, Türkiye adheres to the alliance's collective security principles, but at the same time does not ignore its relations with Russia. This situation shows that Türkiye has emerged as a balancing factor in its security and defence policies. On the one hand, Türkiye's purchase of S-400 air defence systems from Russia and energy deals have surprised its allies within NATO and raised questions about Ankara's commitment within the alliance. On the other hand, Türkiye's stance on Sweden and Finland's NATO membership and its concerns about the PKK reflect Türkiye's sensitivities towards the alliance's enlargement and collective security. In its approach to the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye has demonstrated its strategic influence in the region through its role as a diplomatic mediator and its military support to Ukraine. This can be seen as part of Türkiye's effort to balance both its position within NATO and its relations with Russia. Türkiye's dual approach can be seen as an indicator of its capacity to protect its national interests and effectively intervene in regional security dynamics.

Recently, there has been increasing debate about NATO's contribution to Türkiye's security. These debates have emerged as a reflection of Türkiye's changing position both within the alliance and in the international arena, and can also be considered as a result of

Türkiye's recent self-confidence (Güvenç, 2015:102). These debates constitute an important basis for reviewing Türkiye's role in NATO, assessing the extent to which the alliance contributes to Türkiye's security concerns and analysing Türkiye's new position in international relations.

As a consequence of the bad relations between Türkiye and NATO, Türkiye's leaving the organisation has always been debated. To begin the debate, it will be useful to review the reasons of termination of an alliance. According to Walt's analysis (1997:158-164), the termination of an alliance can be attributed to factors such as 'changing threat perceptions, declining credibility, and domestic politics'. Although the perception of threats has evolved over time, several common challenges, such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation, continue to bind NATO allies together. Moreover, NATO's enduring credibility is evidenced by its attractiveness to new countries seeking collective security and shared ideological alignment. Furthermore, the consensus among Türkiye's elites to maintain NATO membership underscores the country's commitment to the alliance. The role of USA hegemony within NATO cannot be underestimated; it acts as a cohesive force that bolsters the alliance and sustains the shared ideological values among member states. In this context, there emerges no compelling theoretical basis to advocate for Türkiye's

departure from NATO, a highly institutionalized and functional alliance that remains deeply rooted in international security dynamics.

Despite the fact that the deteriorated relations between NATO and Türkiye and common criticism that Türkiye should leave NATO because of its negligence, it is better Türkiye stay in the alliance. Apart from the theoretical background, counter-independence between NATO and Türkiye is the most important reason why Türkiye should stay in the organisation. There are mutual benefits for each part from this alliance. First of all, Türkiye has long been a liberal country in fact of military intervention intervals so departure of Türkiye will harm the Western alliance's ideological stance. Departure from the liberal bloc also seems not feasible for Türkiye as there is no alternative for it for a nearly a half century old democratic state. Second, Türkiye has got two important factors that NATO cannot exclude it from the alliance and that Türkiye can use it as a bargain to leverage its position in the organisation. The geographical location of Türkiye is very important for NATO operations not only because the Mediterranean force is highly dependent on the shores of Türkiye but also has it borders with Russia, Russia's close neighbors and the Middle East. Departure of Türkiye will limit the capacity of NATO operations in those regions as a consequent of Also, the military capacity of Türkiye is important for NATO because of its size and capabilities. Türkiye is one of the very

few countries that established a high readiness force that is vital for the collective defense of NATO as a core principle of 2010 strategic concept. Moreover, there are also marginal benefits for Türkiye to stay in NATO in terms of institutional capacity transfer. Türkiye now commands multi-national joint armies in different parts of the world which helps the country enhance its military capacity, learn different geographies and cultures. The capacity transfer also includes modernization of its weapons and new weapons technology. As an emerging weapon production market, Türkiye needs to follow new trends in weapon market and NATO is the far most leader of this sector. Finally, Türkiye has a right in decision making process in NATO which means that it can affect the phase of the world politics not only because 3 of the 5 permanent member of the United Nations Security Council are in the organisation but also NATO can operate in both hemisphere of the world because of the geographical properties of its members. Besides being in the decision making process, being a member state in such a big organisation help Türkiye to make its voice heard to the world in any occasion that is against its security.

Conclusion

NATO is the only alliance which was established after ideological concerns and is still functioning today. Even after the treaty from USSR, it has transformed into another way of security alliance by

defining its core principles as well as transforming its security capacity. Türkiye is the only Muslim country in the alliance which gives a unique place in NATO. However, the relationship between Türkiye and NATO is problematic, mostly for Türkiye because the security concerns of Türkiye have always been neglected by its NATO allies. Nevertheless, Türkiye's geographical location, size of its army and its place in the operations make Türkiye a precious ally for NATO. Yet, Türkiye has some benefits in staying in NATO. First of all, as a liberal country, Türkiye shows its place among the other Western democracies. Also, the institutional capacity transfer is another aspect of being a member of NATO. As a part of overseas operation in Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina or Kosovo, Türkiye got military experience in terms of commanding, dealing with new societies and being ready to new fields of war. This also includes the access to the new defense technology. In addition, being a part of the decision making process of the most influential security alliance means having a right to deal with the world politics at first hand. To conclude, the liberal ties with the West make it difficult for Türkiye to leave the organisation. On the other hand, its geographical location and military capacity make it difficult for NATO to exclude Türkiye from the organisation.

In conclusion, this study analyses the transformation of NATO in the post-Cold War period and reveals how Türkiye's position in the alliance has changed in this process. The findings show that NATO has started to play an active role in different areas such as the fight against terrorism, regional conflicts and global security threats in the new era. However, Türkiye's relationship with NATO is a complex and volatile process. For both Türkiye and NATO, maintaining this relationship and continuing co-operation is important for international security and stability. Türkiye's relationship with NATO is of strategic importance for both Türkiye and the alliance. Ideological ties, military capacity, strategic position and international security contributions strengthen Türkiye's position within NATO. Despite the problems of this relationship, Türkiye's stay in NATO is important for both national and international security and stability and should continue.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study focuses on NATO's post-Cold War transformation. The pre-Cold War history and the establishment of NATO are not analysed in detail. The study analyses NATO-Türkiye relations, while relations with other NATO member states are excluded from the analysis. The study is limited to the post-1990 period. The first 40 years of NATO's history is not included in the study. In addition, for a more comprehensive study on this subject, the perspectives of different

NATO member states could be analysed through comparative case studies.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

Ethics Committee approval was not obtained for this study since it was considered that there was no situation requiring ethical approval.

Contribution Rate of Authors

All processes of the article were carried out by the author. In this context, the processes of determining the topic, literature review, writing the introduction and conclusion sections of the article, editing and revising the article were carried out by the author.

Statement of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to be declared by the author.

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