
ARTICLE

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN A TRANSFORMING WORLD ORDER: MIDDLE POWER STRATEGIES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This article examines Türkiye's role as a middle power in a changing global order, exploring whether the country fits this classification and how its foreign policy under Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reflects this. Türkiye emerges as a significant actor with the capability to shape international affairs both in its region and beyond. The analysis emphasizes Türkiye's proactive foreign policy approach, highlighting its capacity to undertake greater responsibilities on the global stage. In the era of Foreign Minister Fidan, Türkiye seems to be transitioning into a "middle power with significant global responsibilities". By examining pivotal foreign policy initiatives under Fidan and Türkiye's strategic engagements, this study elucidates how Türkiye is advancing its middle power status. Additionally, the article offers valuable insights into potential future paths for Turkish foreign policy, taking into account emerging regional and global challenges as well as opportunities. The article aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of Türkiye's evolving foreign policy and its wider implications.

Keywords

Foreign policy, global order, Hakan Fidan, middle power, Türkiye

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Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a notable shift in global politics, presenting a substantial challenge to the efficacy of current governance frameworks in tackling the intricate demands of global society. International organizations tasked with overseeing trade, environmental conservation, public health, and security encounter considerable obstacles in adapting to swift transformations. At the same time, the functions of long-standing military alliances are being redefined as they confront the evolving global challenges and threats of the modern era. Despite the pressing nature of these challenges, creating efficient mechanisms for global governance remains a formidable undertaking. In this context, many nations prioritize individual responses over actively engaging in global cooperation, showing a hesitance to join collective endeavors.

Given the intricacies of the present landscape, nations such as Türkiye have strategic opportunities to assert their positions and make a lasting impact on the global arena. Therefore, this article contends that Türkiye, led by Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, has adopted a more assertive stance in its foreign policy to broaden its influence and take on greater responsibilities in global affairs. In this context, Türkiye is actively participating in significant initiatives and forging strategic partnerships to position itself as a crucial middle power aspiring for the status of a great power.

However, Türkiye's pursuit of global influence may encounter obstacles due to various challenges. The presence of regional conflicts entangled with terrorism, ongoing crises such as the situation in neighboring Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Russia-Ukraine War, all present intricate diplomatic and security challenges. Additionally, they contribute to geopolitical tensions, notably in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The multifaceted and transnational nature of these challenges underscores the pressing need for enhanced global governance structures. These challenges also highlight the hurdles that Türkiye must surmount to sustain its current position and accomplish its objectives.

Therefore, this article asserts that Türkiye, positioned as a middle power within the current international system, holds the potential to make noteworthy contributions to enhancing global governance and addressing urgent global issues. In this endeavor, Türkiye has the potential to significantly shape the future of global governance by capitalizing on its geopolitical position, harnessing its existing resources and diplomatic expertise, and fostering collaboration with other middle powers. In order to succeed, Türkiye needs to adopt a strategic

approach that adeptly integrates its material capabilities with its national interests and foreign policy vision. This requires Türkiye, as a middle power, to adhere steadfastly to key behavioral traits such as multilateralism, cooperation, and constructive engagement with the global community.

The evolving role of Türkiye as a middle power, coupled with its ambitions for global influence, carries significant implications for the future landscape of global politics.

The evolving role of Türkiye as a middle power, coupled with its ambitions for global influence, carries significant implications for the future landscape of global politics. Through the adoption of a forward-looking foreign policy, cultivation of strategic partnerships, and advocacy for robust global governance, Türkiye holds the potential to make substantial contributions

towards tackling the multifaceted challenges confronting the world today. As Türkiye navigates the intricacies of the modern global landscape, it possesses considerable potential to shape the course of international politics and foster peace, stability, and prosperity both within its region and on a broader scale.

From our perspective, Türkiye displays the attributes of a middle power while concurrently aspiring for acknowledgment as a great power. Our analysis of recent shifts in Turkish foreign policy commences with an elucidation of the concept of middle power. We then go on to examine closely Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's foreign policy speeches, interviews, and writings to comprehend his policy objectives and vision. Through an assessment of Türkiye's foreign policy objectives and transformations under Foreign Minister Fidan, our aim is to shed light on the country's regional and global foreign policy endeavors. In the last section, the article culminates by providing recommendations for potential future foreign policy trajectories for Türkiye as it endeavors to take on increased responsibilities on the global platform.

The Concept of Middle Power and Türkiye's Power Status

In recent years, particularly in the last decade, the idea of middle power has garnered considerable attention within the realm of International Relations (IR) literature. A significant amount of scholarly investigation has been dedicated to examining how the concept can be used to analyze the power dynamics among different states in the international power hierarchy. Despite the abundance of

literature on the subject, reaching a unanimous understanding of its meaning proves to be difficult. The reason for this variation lies in the fact that different traditions in the literature prioritize different facets of the concept based on their unique theoretical underpinnings. However, the notion of middle power can be divided into two fundamental strands: the realist strand and the liberal strand. The realist strand primarily considers material capabilities as the defining factor for middle power status, while the liberal strand places greater emphasis on the foreign policy characteristics and behaviors demonstrated by states.¹ Going into details, Holbraad stands out as a prominent figure embodying the realist perspective. Middle power, as he describes it, pertains to a state that falls between small nations and principal members of the state system in terms of power, being notably stronger than the former but notably weaker than the latter.²

Holbraad's assessment of a state's power status primarily revolves around the evaluation of tangible resources. A state's GNP and population size are deemed to be the primary indicators, while the size of the army, military expenditure, and the quantity of specific armaments are considered secondary indicators.³ A middle power is defined as a state that possesses tangible resources that are not as abundant as those of great powers yet surpass the resources of small powers. These resources grant middle powers a wider range of maneuverability in the realm of international politics when compared to small powers. Moreover, as White suggests, a middle power is not limited merely to complying with the demands of great powers, but instead has the capacity to engage in negotiations and even exhibit resistance to some extent.⁴

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Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that middle powers are not immune to the influence exerted by great powers. In fact, when it comes to pursuing their own interests in the realm of international politics, middle powers face certain limitations in comparison to the great powers. Consequently, while a middle power may seek to break free from the dominant influence of great powers, its position in global politics is ultimately shaped by the nature of the interactions between great powers in a multipolar international environment.⁵ Additionally, the nature of the relationship between a middle power and great powers is

another key determinant in shaping the policies pursued by the middle power in the realm of international politics.

The proponents of the liberal strand find the analysis based on rank in the material power hierarchy to be problematic due to its heavy reliance on quantifiable measures of power.⁶ The realist strand has been accused of neglecting crucial aspects such as the behavior of middle powers, their soft power capabilities, and their foreign policy strategies. To rectify these omissions, the liberal strand examines the conduct of states in international politics, with a particular emphasis on identifying a state as a middle power. This alternative viewpoint seeks to offer a more comprehensive analysis of middle powers and their significance in the global context. In this respect, Evans and Grant identify specific behavioral patterns exhibited by middle powers, including a preference for multilateral approaches to global issues, a willingness to seek compromise in international conflicts, and a commitment to upholding principles of good international citizenship in their diplomatic endeavors.⁷ In addition, Higgott and Cooper contend that middle powers conform to, promote, preserve, and bolster the norms of the international system.⁸ Cooper et al. have also identified three distinct patterns that characterize the behavior of middle powers, namely the role of a catalyst, a facilitator, and a manager. The concept of being a catalyst refers to a middle power's capacity to initiate and inspire action on an international issue, thereby attracting followers. Being a facilitator entails the ability to foster collaboration and form coalitions in specific areas related to the issue at hand. Lastly, being a manager signifies a middle power's skill in establishing institutions and shaping norms within the realm of international politics.⁹

The primary behavioral feature of middle powers within the liberal framework is their inclination towards seeking multilateral cooperation. Keohane argues that middle powers, in this context, refer to states that lack the capability to act independently with effectiveness; however, they possess the ability to exert significant influence either within a collective or by leveraging international institutions.¹⁰ Mares reinforces Keohane's position by recognizing that middle powers can bolster their presence in the global system by creating and actively engaging in coalitions.¹¹ Hence, middle powers often turn to multilateral cooperation to avoid being overshadowed by great powers. Middle powers find opportunities to voice and advance their own interests with greater autonomy in multilateral frameworks than in bilateral contexts.

Although the realist and liberal perspectives offer distinct viewpoints on the concept of middle power, they should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Müftüler and Yüksel posit that the integration of these two strands is essential for a comprehensive definition of the concept and a more extensive comprehension of the power status of states.¹² Accordingly, a middle power is situated between great powers and small powers in the international power hierarchy due to its moderate level of material resources. Additionally, middle powers utilize their economic, military, diplomatic, and political resources to form alliances, spearhead initiatives, engage with other states, and play an active role in international organizations to advance their own interests. Furthermore, middle powers demonstrate good international citizenship by adhering to the norms and regulations of the global system.

Considering these elements, we assert that Türkiye can be identified as a middle power due to its material capabilities and foreign policy behavior. From a realist standpoint, Türkiye is situated in an intermediary position in the international system, owing to its tangible resources such as geography, GDP, military power, and population. Accordingly, Türkiye's geographic location grants it a significant advantage; situated between the industrialized West and the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Caspian, Türkiye occupies a pivotal position.¹³ Furthermore, the strategic value of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits enhances Türkiye's effectiveness in the realm of international politics.¹⁴

The significance of economic indicators cannot be overstated for middle powers such as Türkiye, as they are fundamental for assuming a successful middle power role on the global stage. Despite facing chronic economic crises and instability in the 1990s, Türkiye has been able to recover from its economic disorder and achieve stability since the 2000s.

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Türkiye's economy, as measured by its nominal GDP in 2022, reached an estimated value of \$907,118 million. This placed Türkiye in the 19th position among the world's economies. Türkiye's economy also represented the 11th largest purchasing power GDP in 2022 with an estimated value of \$3,182,086 million.¹⁵ Türkiye's economy earns it a place in the Group of 20 (G20). With a sizable economy, Türkiye possesses a substantial population. As of 31 December

2023, Türkiye's population stood at 85,372,377. The demographic composition of this population exhibits a youthful and vibrant structure: approximately 68.3% of the population falls within the age range of 15-64.¹⁶ Furthermore, approximately 50% of the populace consists of individuals below the age of 30 while projections suggest that this youthful and vibrant demographic will surge to approximately 93.4 million by the year 2050.¹⁷

Türkiye also possesses a substantial military force and defense budget. By the year 2023, Türkiye boasted a grand total of 890,700 military personnel, with 355,200 serving on active duty, 156,800 in the gendarmerie, and 378,700 in the reserves, positioning it as the second-largest army within NATO, following the United States.¹⁸ Türkiye's military expenditure in 2022 amounted to \$16,195 million, ranking it seventh among NATO member countries.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Turkish Armed Forces is recognized as one of the most technologically advanced armies worldwide and the advancements achieved by the Turkish defense industry greatly contribute to this reputation. At present, the Turkish defense sector has successfully diminished the reliance of the Turkish Armed Forces on external sources and has emerged as the primary contributor to their formidable capabilities. Türkiye has the capability to manufacture a wide range of wheeled and tracked armored and unarmored ground vehicles, such as tanks, howitzers, air defense systems, ballistic missiles, combat vehicles, and personnel carriers. Additionally, Türkiye is proficient in producing naval platforms like corvettes, frigates, destroyers, coastal security boats, submarines, and other types of vessels. Türkiye also has the capacity to develop armed and unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles, helicopters, and training aircraft. Türkiye is self-sufficient in producing various types of ammunition, including infantry rifles, anti-tank weapons, electronic warfare systems, and radar systems. In 2021, Türkiye's defense industry sector recorded a turnover of \$12,196 million, out of which \$4,396 million was generated through exports. Alongside the United States, many nations in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America have exhibited interest in Türkiye's defense industry offerings.²⁰

Besides its material assets, Türkiye can be considered a middle power in terms of its foreign policy conduct. Middle powers, as per the liberal strand, typically opt for collaborative approaches to global issues, act as mediators in the international sphere, adhere to international norms, and exhibit responsible international behavior to steer their diplomatic endeavors. Turkish foreign policy has been in line with the typical behavior exhibited by middle powers, particularly after the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came into

power in 2002. Historically, Türkiye held the belief that it was encircled by adversaries.²¹ This mindset influenced Turkish foreign policy, leading to strained relations with neighboring nations.²² To counteract this perception, since the 2000s, Türkiye has initiated efforts to reengage with its surrounding regions, fostering economic and political interconnectedness. As a result, within the realm of economics, there have been scholarly debates surrounding Türkiye's evolution into a trading state,²³ which aligns aptly with the distinctive behavior exhibited by middle powers. Furthermore, Turkish leaders, diplomats, and officials have commenced highlighting the importance of cultural and historical bonds with their neighboring regions. The transformation in rhetoric is apparent in Türkiye's reconfiguring of its geographic imagination: rather than prioritizing security concerns, Türkiye now views its geography in terms of the social, political, and economic benefits it offers.²⁴

The evolving perspective in Turkish foreign policy has been supported by strategies designed to promote the security and stability of the global system. Accordingly, Türkiye has successfully implemented proactive measures in its foreign policy by creating mediation and peacekeeping mechanisms, engaging in high-level political and diplomatic dialogues, fostering economic integration with neighboring countries, and promoting multicultural initiatives. With regard to mediation and peacekeeping mechanisms, Türkiye not only launches unilateral initiatives, but also actively participates in multilateral mechanisms, including assuming co-chair positions in the Groups of Friends at the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); organizing international Mediation Conferences; and implementing the "Mediation for Peace Certificate Program."²⁵ Türkiye's efforts to mediate between Syria and Israel, Syria and Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia, as well as Hamas and Fatah, and its role in promoting peace agreements in Gaza and Lebanon are among its unilateral initiatives. As part of its multilateral initiatives, Türkiye has been actively engaged in various conflict resolution efforts across a wide geographical area. These efforts have included initiatives aimed at fostering internal reconciliation in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan. Türkiye has also spearheaded two separate trilateral cooperation processes involving Serbia and Croatia, with the goal of establishing lasting peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore, Türkiye has initiated a trilateral cooperation mechanism with Afghanistan and Pakistan, which plays a crucial role in maintaining peace and security in the former. Türkiye has also been involved in the "Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process" initiative, which aims to promote regional ownership. Türkiye has been actively

involved in dialogue efforts to resolve Iran's nuclear program issue peacefully, support talks between Somalia and Somaliland, assist in the peace process in the South Philippines, and facilitate dialogue between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.²⁶

The most notable effort among these is the Black Sea Grain Initiative, also known as the "Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports," which is often referred to as the "Grain Deal" in media reports. This agreement was established during the Russian invasion of Ukraine and involves Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, and the UN. In July 2022, the signing ceremony was held at Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, Türkiye. The ceremony holds great significance as it signifies the first major agreement between the conflicting parties since the Russian invasion commenced in February 2022. The signed documents encompass provisions for the secure transportation of grain, foodstuffs, and fertilizers, and include the creation of demined corridors in the Black Sea, through which ships can safely navigate. Meanwhile, Türkiye has taken on the responsibility of inspecting all merchant vessels. Concurrently, another agreement was reached to enable the UN to facilitate the unimpeded export of Russian food, fertilizers, and raw materials.²⁷

Türkiye has also emerged as a significant benefactor in the realm of humanitarian development on a global scale. The Global Humanitarian Assistance Report reveals that in 2018, Türkiye maintained its position as the largest donor country worldwide, providing an official humanitarian aid amounting to \$8,399 million. Türkiye also retained its title as the "Most Generous Country" in 2018, allocating 0.79% of its gross national income (GNI) to official humanitarian assistance.²⁸ In this regard, Türkiye allocates its resources to various sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, shelter, and administrative and civil infrastructure development. These efforts extend to 170 countries across the globe, encompassing regions like the Middle East, Africa, Balkans, Central Asia, Latin America, and Caucasia.²⁹ By investing in these areas, Türkiye showcases its growing soft power capabilities, an asset for middle powers in the realm of international politics.

Consistent with the concept of multilateralism, a fundamental trait of a middle power, Türkiye has demonstrated a proactive approach in its foreign policy by actively participating in global organizations and fostering relationships multilaterally with countries and regions across the world. As a result, Türkiye

has aimed to establish a prominent global presence by expanding its influence globally and striving to maintain a balanced relationship between the East and West, and the North and South. Türkiye has shown significant involvement in a wide array of international organizations including the OIC, UN, NATO, OSCE, D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8), G20, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), MIKTA, and various other global institutions.³⁰

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Türkiye's strategic focus lies in fostering ties with the U.S., Russia, China, and European Union nations simultaneously. This strategy underscores the importance of multidimensional engagement with various global players, a characteristic often associated with middle powers. By broadening its network of relationships, Türkiye aims to bolster the efficacy of its foreign policies in line with the assumption that a middle power's influence in world politics is contingent upon the strength of its connections with great powers and the quality of its engagements with them. Alongside great powers, Türkiye is continuously reinforcing its close relationships with the countries in the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa, South Caucasus, and South and Central Asia. Moreover, Türkiye is furthering its partnership strategy in Africa and steadily extending its outreach to the nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Asia Anew Initiative, which was announced in 2019, has enabled Türkiye to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive and holistic policy towards Asia and the Pacific, where the influential powers of the 21st century are emerging. Due to its expanding and diversifying comprehensive strategies, Türkiye has established the fifth-largest diplomatic network worldwide, consisting of 261 missions. Utilizing a variety of political, economic, humanitarian, and cultural instruments, Türkiye engages in a diplomacy that considers global perspectives while implementing actions at a local level across the globe.³¹

Consequently, taking into account its material capabilities and foreign policy conduct, particularly since the 2000s, Türkiye can be identified as a middle

power according to both the realist and liberal strands. Türkiye holds concrete assets exceeding those of small powers yet falling short of great powers. Additionally, it engages in a proactive approach to foreign policy within the realm of global politics by adhering to international norms, promoting peace and stability in its vicinity and beyond as a responsible global player, striving for meaningful participation in international organizations, and broadening its connections with various global actors.

Hakan Fidan's Leadership: Elevating Türkiye's Foreign Policy to Embrace Greater Responsibilities

As Türkiye often faces numerous challenges on both regional and global scales, when Hakan Fidan became foreign minister, the country's foreign policy was already burdened with many significant political issues. Türkiye was already struggling with challenges arising from conflicts in neighboring regions, including the Syrian Civil War, political instability in Iraq, and tensions with regional actors in the Eastern Mediterranean. These tensions were compounded by the country's counterterrorism efforts and struggle to manage the refugee flow. Concurrently, disagreements with Türkiye's "key allies" persisted on these and other matters.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan envisions Türkiye as a fully independent country with an international agenda. He sees Türkiye as a key player capable of disrupting designs by others on international and regional settings when necessary, tirelessly seeking to strengthen its position in global politics. He

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describes a foreign policy focused on enhancing the unity, security, and prosperity of the Turkish state and nation. This policy is based on increasing capabilities shaped around civilizational values and is independent of any external influence.³² In his latest article, Fidan explains Türkiye's foreign policy with reference to four

dynamics: (1) the challenges in global politics; (2) Türkiye's foreign policy vision; (3) Türkiye's foreign policy objectives; and (4) the transformation and adaptation of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³³ Fidan claims that the world is moving through a complex era where many interrelated and simultaneous crises are occurring, and that these crises are challenging the current international system. Existing global governance mechanisms have

turned into fields of clashing great power interests and have consequently lost their effectiveness in addressing global crises across various issue areas such as politics, military, economy, environment, technology, and society. It is essential to combat challenges globally and regionally, including armed conflicts, terrorism, irregular migration, xenophobia, Islamophobia, the climate crisis, food shortages, and cyber threats. These challenges arise in various areas and exacerbate each other. Moreover, alongside the security risks stemming from the Russia-Ukraine War, the world lacks global governance mechanisms capable of addressing issues like global inflation, economic recession, energy crises, and food insecurity. Many of these crises and challenges have emerged, particularly in and around Türkiye and the heart of Europe.³⁴

In the face of these issue areas, Fidan seeks to develop an active and multidimensional foreign policy vision for Türkiye, whereby the country aims to improve and contribute to a more “inclusive, effective, fair and secure” international system based on “solidarity, rather than polarity.”³⁵ Through patience and determination, Fidan demonstrates, Türkiye seeks to become an architect of such a system that prioritizes welfare, peace, security, stability, and prosperity for all. Based on this vision, Fidan determines and describes four main objectives for Türkiye: “[i] Contributing to Peace and Security in the Region and Creating New Cooperation Models (...); [ii] Further Institutionalization of Foreign Relations (...); [iii] Development of an Environment of Prosperity (...); and [iv] Advancement of Global Goals.”³⁶ In line with these objectives, Türkiye’s foreign policy is turning pro-active both in its region and in global politics. While eliminating the threats to its security, the country will seek to develop new economic and political ties in its region and beyond. Türkiye aims to maintain and strengthen existing alliances and commitments, on the one hand, and establish new strategic relations, on the other. These relations will be used to further develop the country’s economy, which according to Fidan will serve not only Türkiye but its partners around the world as well. Türkiye, through solidarity with other international actors, aims to offer solutions to global problems including, but not limited to, development, food security, environmental degradation, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.³⁷

In various speeches following his appointment, Fidan frequently refers to both regional and global political crises and Türkiye’s potential role in their management.³⁸ He describes a proactive stance in regional politics, addressing counterterrorism, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Russia-Ukraine War, and relations with regional actors such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. He

focuses on Türkiye's relations with its allies, specifically mentioning NATO, and emphasizes the inadequacy of existing global governance mechanisms. He observes a shift in the post-WWII world order and stresses the necessity of reform in global politics. Under Hakan Fidan's leadership in the foreign ministry, Türkiye, demonstrating a willingness to play a role in managing all these issues, envisions "great power" responsibilities.

As discussed in the previous section, we argue that Türkiye can be considered a middle power. Under Fidan's leadership, Türkiye appears to become a middle power shouldering great power responsibility. However, there are certain limits that may hinder the fulfillment of this vision. While foreign policy visions may be expansive, ultimately foreign policy behavior tends to align with or be constrained by the country's power status; in other words, the realization of aspirations is significantly influenced by power dynamics. From this perspective, assuming responsibilities in various issues and attempting to expand their sphere of influence is particularly challenging for states classified as middle powers.

In the context of a transforming global order, three fundamental foreign policy strategies can be proposed for middle powers. First, such states should refrain from exceeding the limits of their material capabilities in their aspirations to shoulder responsibilities or ascend to great power status. Ultimately, a state's position and potential are determined by its material capabilities or limitations. When formulating foreign policy, identifying a strategy that aligns with the state's power status and *realpolitik* would be a suitable starting point for middle powers. Second, middle powers should keenly observe shifts in global politics and strive to wield influence effectively in areas where they possess a comparative advantage. They can assess opportunities to become influential players in specific issue domains. For instance, beyond traditional foreign policy concerns such as war and defense, they can significantly contribute to enhancing governance mechanisms aimed at addressing emerging global challenges across various sectors, including health, environment, sustainability, human rights, migration, and mass mobility. Lastly, as middle powers endeavor to enhance their material capabilities, they should also focus on increasing their prestige. Just as the accumulation of material elements such as military and economic power takes time, so does the acquisition of prestige. Having substantial power does not necessarily imply effective utilization of that power in foreign policy. Prestige is a value that enhances power, multiplying its impact

in foreign policy; at the same time, it is a value that is challenging to build yet easy to lose.³⁹

These fundamental foreign policy strategies are also applicable to Türkiye's foreign policy envisioned by Fidan. The transformation in the global system, driven by shifts in geopolitical dynamics, presents not only challenges but also significant opportunities for middle powers like Türkiye, which aim to elevate their power status beyond material limitations. While great powers are busy with their own rivalries and

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competition, new opportunities rise for middle powers. We can anticipate that middle powers with significant spheres of influence in their geographical regions will have greater maneuverability. There are emerging areas in international politics where both Türkiye and other middle powers can play more effective and significant roles. The exploration of these areas can help Türkiye identify new directions and transform existing ones within its foreign policy. While Türkiye continues to enhance its military and economic power, it should also maintain its role as an advocate for global peace and stability. Türkiye can continue to offer widespread and regular healthcare and development assistance, like the aid it provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. Middle powers can prioritize interest-based cooperation mechanisms and thereby achieve a much more effective position in the new world order. Türkiye should also strengthen cooperation with other middle powers via focusing on shared strategic interests. Such collaborations can focus on areas such as the global climate crisis, technology and defense, migration, and mass mobility. "If the old-world order is changing and a new one is being established, Türkiye could emerge as a highly influential actor in this new order if its foreign policy vision is realistically crafted."⁴⁰ Under Fidan's ministry, Türkiye appears poised to assume greater responsibility in global politics by cooperating and collaborating with other significant middle powers. The burden of global transformations should not be borne by a single country but rather by counterparts with shared interests. It is a significant task for the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify those shared interests and determine with whom they are shared.

Conclusion

Türkiye demonstrates qualities of a middle power in the international system both in terms of material power hierarchy and foreign policy behaviors. This is to say that Türkiye boasts a significant advantage, particularly in its geography, GDP, and military capacity when compared to smaller powers; however, it still falls behind compared to great powers. Hence, Türkiye occupies a position in international politics as a middle power, situated between small and great powers. By actively engaging in international organizations, adhering to the norms and regulations of the global system, promoting international peace and stability, and advocating for diplomatic and multilateral approaches to global issues, Türkiye's foreign policy demonstrates the characteristic behavior of a middle power.

This article expanded on the idea that Türkiye shows all the signs of a middle power, taking on responsibilities similar to those of a great power under the guidance of Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. Türkiye sees itself as a key player capable of influencing global events not only within its own region but also on a broader scale. This is evident in Türkiye's active participation in significant endeavors and the forging of strategic alliances in order to position itself as a prominent middle power with ambitions for achieving great power status. Türkiye assumes responsibilities in various issues while attempting to expand its sphere of influence which is particularly challenging for states classified as middle powers.

However, assuming comparable responsibilities to those of a great power poses a particularly daunting challenge for states categorized as middle powers. The article proposed three key foreign policy strategies to overcome the challenges for Türkiye as a middle power with aspirations for great power status. Thus,

- (i) Türkiye should exercise caution in surpassing the limits of its material capabilities as it seeks to shoulder great power responsibilities or achieve great power status.
- (ii) Türkiye should be careful when choosing the areas of responsibility it undertakes as it is essential for a middle power to monitor changes in global politics closely and work towards exerting influence strategically in areas where it has a competitive edge over other nations.

(iii) Türkiye should tread carefully in its efforts to enhance its material capabilities as it should also prioritize enhancing its reputation. Without legitimacy and plausibility within the international order, having significant power does not automatically guarantee effective utilization of that power in foreign policy.

In our assessment, the third strategy emerges as a challenging and hazardous endeavor for Türkiye as a middle power when considering the long-term implications. This is because, turning to Morgenthau's terminology, the desire for power and control is a prevalent human trait, yet it often leads individuals to a position of subordination under others.⁴¹ The effort to suppress this undesirable truth becomes evident as the individuals exercising power effectively employ justifications and legitimacy to assist them in this pursuit. In other words, individuals exercising power effectively must constantly persuade the individuals obligated to comply that the power exercises are in the best interests of the broader community.⁴² In this manner, according to Morgenthau, the key to mastering international politics lies in the wisdom and moral strength of a statesman.⁴³ The conduct of Turkish foreign policy under Fidan should thus be sensitive to balance its aspirations for regional and global influence with the need to legitimize its actions and garner cooperation from other actors in the international arena.

Endnotes

- 1 While we classify the views on the definition of middle power in two categories as the realist strand and liberal strand, Chapnick proposes three separate models for categorization: functional, hierarchical, and behavioral models. For more information about Chapnick's three models, see Adam Chapnick, "The Middle Power," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1999), p. 73. In addition, Yalçın identifies different definitions of middle power as realist and liberal, see Hasan Basri Yalçın, "The Concept of Middle Power and the Recent Turkish Foreign Policy Activism," *Afro Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), p. 199.
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