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## Turkey-US Relations (2016-2020): Transformation of the Asymmetrical Alliance

The dramatic transformation in international politics is progressing both very quickly and very comprehensively. Since the 2016, relations between Turkey and the United States have deteriorated noticeably. Relations were negatively affected by the differentiation over time of the general goals that brought the United States and Turkey closer during the Cold War era, and Turkey's regional interests beginning to outweigh the ever-declining common threats and interests between the two sides. This article focuses on the crises that tested Turkey-US relations between 2016-2020, how these crises and differentiated interests shook ties and the reasons for the transformation that occurred in relations. In doing so, it aims to discuss whether the asymmetrical alliance, which was constructed during the cold war and post-cold war period, has evolved into a different understanding of alliance. This article lays out the argument for the fragility of the alliance that emerged in the Trump era. As a result, a clear definition of new goals and new expectations has been reached beyond conceptual toolkits such as asymmetric alliance, strategic alliance, or model partnership to describe the relationship between the parties.

**Keywords:** International Politics, Trump Era, US-Turkey Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy, Asymmetric Alliance.

## Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri (2016-2020): Asimetrik İttifakın Dönüşümü

Uluslararası siyasetteki dramatik dönüşüm hem çok hızlı hem de çok kapsamlı ilerlemektedir. 2016'dan bu yana Türkiye ile ABD arasındaki ilişkiler gözle görülür şekilde kötüleşmiştir. Soğuk Savaş döneminde Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Türkiye'yi yakınlaştıran genel hedeflerin zaman içinde farklılaşması, ilişkileri olumsuz yönde etkilemiş ve Türkiye'nin bölgesel çıkarları, iki taraf arasında giderek azalan ortak tehdit ve çıkarlardan daha ağır basmaya başlamıştır. Bu makale, 2016- 2020 arasında Türkiye-ABD ilişkilerini sınavan krizlere, bu krizlerin ve farklılaşan çıkarların ilişkileri nasıl sarstığına ve ilişkilerde meydana gelen dönüşümün nedenlerine odaklanmaktadır. Bunu yaparken, Soğuk Savaş ve Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde inşa edilen asimetrik ittifakın, özellikle Trump döneminde farklı bir ittifak anlayışına evrilip evrilmediğini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, taraflar arasındaki ilişkiyi tanımlamak için asimetrik ittifak, stratejik ittifak veya model ortaklık gibi kavramsal araç setlerinin ötesinde yeni hedeflerin ve yeni beklentilerin net bir tanımına ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri, Trump Dönemi, Uluslararası Güvenlik, Türk Dış Politikası, Asimetrik İttifak.

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# Turkey-US Relations (2016-2020): Transformation of the Asymmetrical Alliance

## 1. Introduction

The alliances which have long been recognized, are usually understood as a way for states to aggregate military capabilities in the face of a common threat. Following the end of the Second World War, Turkey - US relations, which advanced under the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and the Marshall Plan of 1948, basically began as a security partnership in the atmosphere of the Cold War and Soviet threat; and was institutionalized with NATO membership in 1952. An asymmetric alliance has emerged between the two countries, the general nature of which is security concerns, where cooperation on economic, trade, and military issues has evolved over time.

Through the lens of asymmetrical allies, the purpose of this article is to try to analyze the evolution of bilateral relations between the US and Turkey. In this article, which focuses on the latest period (2016-2020) of Turkey-US relations which has a history dating back almost to the foundation of the Republic, the historical course of the relations was first examined within the conceptual framework of the asymmetric alliance. In doing so, the foreign policy orientations of the Justice and Development Party, which has been in power in Turkey for almost 20 years, were utilized. In this context, crises and changes, particularly those arising following the election of Trump, in Turkish-American relations were addressed, and inferences were made regarding the reasons for the erosion of relations and how the parties acted in the current conditions.

## 2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

Alliances are conceptualized as commitments to deter military attacks from enemies (Morrow 1991; Smith 1998). The alliance is defined as “the state of being allied,” or “a bond or connection between families” (Merriam-Webster). International relations literature has in fact drawn attention to the importance of alliances in world politics. Alliance theories are traditionally dominated by the realist and neorealist schools in the scholarly literature. Indeed, several studies come aimed at explaining why states form alliances, when states ally and which alliance—given certain conditions—can we expect to come about. For instance, Walt (1990) thought that states seek allies not to balance power but, rather, to balance threats. According to Martin Wight, the function of an alliance is to “reinforce the security of the allies or to promote their interests in the external world” (Wight, 1978). Glenn Snyder (2007) states that alliance management “involves pursuing both common interests and competitive interests”.

“Asymmetric alliances” usually consist of parties that derive their benefits from different interests in accost-benefit analysis. Asymmetric alliances are defined as alliances between states with dissimilar powers, often between great powers and weak states. In his 1991 study, James Morrow famously argues that asymmetric alliances are more likely than symmetrical alliances to continue to provide net benefits to its members as the capabilities and interests of both sides vary over time. According to him asymmetric alliances provide security to weak states and autonomy to strong states. (Morrow, 1991). For bilateral or multilateral alliance partners with equal capabilities, control is usually negotiated through some form of mutual accommodation. For asymmetric alliances if the smaller ally depends on the stronger member to provide certain benefits (e.g., security and prestige), then the stronger one enjoys a great leverage (Cha, 2009-2010). In asymmetric alliances, the boss is unlikely to “need” any of its allies in the way that great powers in symmetric alliances do, simply due to the power disparity between the parties (Waltz, 1979; Snyder, 1997). However, some allies will have “specific assets” that the boss has the hard time finding elsewhere (Lake, 1999) such as its geostrategic location or the economic and military resources it brings to the alliance. Based on this, Turkey is an ally that stands out for the United States with its geopolitical position.

This article aims to analyse how the bilateral relations between the two different sized countries (Turkey and US) have changed based on an asymmetric alliance. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the United States has been a major power country, while Turkey is considered a regional power with a deep-rooted imperial heritage from its past. When the relationship between countries is considered particularly in terms of power, the parties are asymmetrical. During the Cold War, this asymmetric relationship worked smoothly in line with “common interests”. In this regard, the relationship between the two countries has developed as an instrumental and pragmatic relationship under real political conditions (Doğan, 2019). The general benefits that brought the US and Turkey closer together during the Cold War have weakened since the new world order following the Cold War. In this context, it was felt that while common interests and goals decreased, Turkey’s interests in its region began to outweigh them. This inevitably led to changes in Turkey’s relations with the US. In this new world order, the US, trying to maintain its position as a superpower on one side, was followed by a Turkey, on the other, which had difficulty aligning its regional interests with those of the United States. Sander describes this period as a “global-regional conflict of interest ” for the parties (Sander, 2006).

### **3. Development of Turkey-US Relations and Asymmetrical Alliance**

Considering the historical course of Turkey-US relations, it is first necessary to define the places of the parties in the international arena. Oral Sander (2006) emphasized the importance of continuity and change between the parties for a better understanding of the nature of Turkish-American relations. In this respect, the Republic of Turkey can be defined as a NATO member established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and following the steps of its predecessor, giving priority to Westernized modernization policies. During the Cold War, Turkey became an integral part of the Western security system. The United States, on the other hand, is described as a “superpower” from a cultural, military, and economic point of view, which plays an important role in the spread of liberal democracy around the world with its own values and methods (Lefebvre, 2005). Another determination in the identification of the parties belongs to Ramazan Gözen:

“One is a superpower playing a leading role in world politics, the other is a medium-sized state trying to be influential in its own region; one is the protagonist of the world economy, the other is a developing country dependent on this economic order; one is a permanent member who shapes international policy with the power of veto in organizations such as the UN, and the other is a member who has no influence in this status in almost any international organization; one is the founder and patron of the NATO alliance, the other a member who has taken refuge in this alliance to provide security; one is a periodic idealist which prides itself on being the representative of democracy within itself and in the world, and from time to time tries to spread these values, the other is a developing country stuck between the Middle East and the EU/West, which has not yet fully established its democracy; one is a hegemon that has influence all over the world, from Europe to Asia, from the Balkans to the Middle East, and the other is a candidate for developing its presence in the regions around it” (Gözen, 2017).

The general foreign policy orientation of the Republic of Turkey has been towards Westernism until the end of World War II (Oran 2001). During this period, the representation of Turkey in different European institutions was seen by the elite as an engagement of the Western identity of the country, and the close partnerships established with Europe were seen as a mission of civilization above all else (Eralp 1994). The main factor that led Turkey-US relations during the Cold War was the factor of stability. During the Cold War, Turkey played an important role in the American containment policy as the largest contributors to NATO and as a buffer state against the Soviet Union. For instance, it hosted a substantial number of U.S. forces. According to Gözen, this alliance is based on the continuity and predictability of Turkey’s role in the West, its function in NATO and other organizations, and its political system that will ensure this (Gözen, 2017).

After the disappearance of the Soviet threat that motivated and maintained the Turkish-American alliance, it was thought that the stability factor was damaged, which would accelerate the end of the alliance (Reynolds, 2018). After the first Gulf War of 1991, the fact that European members of NATO did not treat Turkey as warmly as expected reinforced the idea that relations with the West were eroding. As Özel (2019) point out Turkey's search for a defensive missile system goes back to the Gulf War. After this, Turkey's security policy has been to increase its own military capacity to reduce dependence on allies. Again, during this period, Turkey has aimed to become a profitable transit country for transporting oil and natural gas from the newly independent central Asian republics to world markets, using its geopolitics. Ankara supported Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Crude Oil pipeline project, inaugurated in 2005, and Turkey as a only NATO member state in the region has a significant advantage in an environment of economic competition (Özel, 2019). In 1998, Foreign Minister Ismail Cem stated that the foundation of Turkey's ability to be a transit country is in NATO, and that NATO's security guarantee will also include BTC, despite the clear advantages of the Iranian route (Güvenç and Özel, 2012). Michael Reynolds (2018) claims that during this period, America's impasse with Iraq and Iran and its desire to expand NATO, rather than disband it, led Washington to attribute value to Turkey throughout the 1990s. During this period, Turkey has been promoted to the forefront from being a member of the wing for Washington due to its location at a critical crossroads in the middle of the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, all of which are unstable and unsafe regions (Özel, 2019). Unlike the US, Europeans viewed Turkey's proximity to all these regions as a potential problem, rather than as an advantage. This strategic approach of the EU also explains the fact that Turkey was not granted candidate country status at the 1997 Luxembourg summit. This situation was only improved two years later thanks to intensive lobbying by Washington (Tocci, 2011). As Uzgel noted, the United States supported Turkey's EU membership in the 1990s, raising this issue in negotiations at both the level of foreign ministers and the level of American presidents. (Uzgel 2001). Behind the increasing support for Turkey's EU membership in these years is the idea that EU candidacy will bind Turkey more tightly to the West. This, in turn, is important for a reliable alliance. In the post-Cold War era, despite some initial confusion as to what its mid- to long-term role might be, Muftuler-Bac (2005-2006) states that Turkey has become a valuable partner for the United States.

By the 2000s, the economic crisis experienced by Turkey was dragging Turkish-American relations into a different direction, while the 9/11 created negatives in the US approach to the Islamic world from the point of view of domestic and foreign policy. According to Gözen, the September 11 attacks led to radical revisions in the US's view of Turkish democracy and political Islam, especially in relations with Turkey (Gözen, 2017). The strategic partnership gained new momentum following 9/11 (Müftüler-Bac, 2005-2006). In its struggle to get out of the crisis, Turkey has found significant support from both the United States and the EU, in addition to the provision of an IMF loan. The EU has shown this support more clearly with its decision at the 2002 Copenhagen summit to commence membership negotiations. This summit, held on the eve of the 2003 Iraq War, took place just after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey power with a major electoral victory. AKP which emerged from the hereditary anti-Western Islamist movement, has shown that Turkey has shed its Islamist past, aimed at economic, political, and administrative reforms, and that its aim was EU membership, with an astonishing determination and discipline in the first years of rule. (Özel, 2019).

Worried about being left alone by its allies after the 9/11, Turkey's strategic importance has gained new dimensions, especially following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although the March 1st resolution brought Turkey-US relations into a significant crisis, the destabilization of the Middle East in this period made it possible to establish a new environment. Reynolds (2018) argues that this environment provides Turkey with an unprecedented scope of activity and even allows it to act in some areas according to new regional goals. Tarık Oğuzlu (2011) defines this new foreign policy orientation as "Turkey-centric Westernization". Oğuzlu claims that because of the changes in the nature of the international global order since the end of the Cold War, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, medium-sized countries such as Turkey have been allowed to play more effective and independent roles in their own regions (Oğuzlu, 2011). In fact, the stripping of

US from its traditional role in mediating these conflicts can be considered as an opportunity for regional actors, a space to establish their own will.

In addition to its geopolitics, Turkey's domestic order has also become a globally valued asset during this period. Despite all its shortcomings, as a secular democracy, Turkey's ability to integrate a Muslim-majority community into the global economy, its membership in NATO, its membership negotiations with the EU, made Turkey a very attractive profile at a time when terrorism was an important security threat with the 09/11 attacks (Özel, 2019). So much so that the country's rising profile and growing popularity globally have been rewarded with its election to the United Nations Security Council as one of the provisional members of the European contingent. This period also allowed the AKP to achieve unprecedented economic growth between 2002 and 2010. Therefore, these years have been recorded as a period when Turkey has shown extraordinary success economically. With its growing economic strength, Turkey has also increased its material contribution to NATO. According to 2012 data, Turkey is considered among the 10 highest contributors to the NATO budget (Güvenç, 2015). With this behavior, Turkey has once again demonstrated its commitment to its traditional allies, the United States and NATO, for defense cooperation. During the same period, it focused on relations with the West and carried out broad political reforms and economic transformation moves in pursuit of full membership in the European Union. Reforms related to the transformation of civil-military relations, the rule of law and civil liberties are of great value.

Despite all this transformation, several negative attitudes emerged in the Union regarding Turkey's full membership in the EU at that time. For example, although Turkey's efforts to mediate conflicts in the Middle East and its position in foreign policy are almost in line with the EU's policies, two influential members of the Union, Germany, and France, have clearly expressed their reluctance towards Turkey's full membership. After all, the rejection of the European Constitution in a referendum in 2005 in the Netherlands and France, and the subsequent reaction to immigrants, have sealed the fate of further expansion for some time. The subsequent refugee crisis froze relations, Turkey's chances of membership significantly decreased, and even when looking at the latest period, relations have reached an impasse (Özel, 2019).

#### **4. From Asymmetrical Alliance to Model Partnership: Turkey-US Relations in Obama Era**

A new dynamism has developed in Turkey-US relations since the second half of the 2000s. During this period, bilateral relations evolved from an asymmetric alliance to an alliance based on the "Model Partnership". According to Nuh Yılmaz (2011) this concept is premised on the recognition that Turkish-American relations are very valuable and that the old framework, which threatens the bilateral relationship itself, needs to change. After Obama took over the presidency in 2009, his first foreign visit to Ankara and his historic speech in Parliament gave impetus to this partnership. While helping to bolster bilateral U.S.-Turkish relations, Obama's speech has a positive message of Turkey's unique role as a member of the Western community of nations as well as of the Muslim world. Obama embraced Turkey as a much-needed role model during the so-called "Arab Spring" that broke out in 2010-11 as an example of a Muslim-majority country with a well-functioning market economy and secular democracy (Özel, et al, 2017). The vision of a model partnership takes the Turkish- American relationship a step further than ever before. In this direction in 2009-10, an outstanding performance in relations was observed, and intense communication traffic and constant contact between leaders attracted attention.

In this new era, the assumptions of realistic theory, such as hard security and hard power, have lost their old weight in Turkey's Security Policy and have been replaced by a security understanding that weighs on the soft power that the AKP uses for conflict resolution. In addition, during this period, Turkish foreign policy, based on the doctrine of "strategic depth" with the principle of "zero problems with neighbours", aimed at changing the regional and global perception of Turkey, garnered great attention around the world (Özel, 2019). In his 2017 article, Ramazan Gözen argued that the first steps of the "Model Partnership" were the appointment of

Ahmet Davutoğlu to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009. In this way, the architect of the era, who was popular in Turkish foreign policy in the form of a “zero problem policy with neighbors” based on developing and restructuring relations with Middle Eastern countries, also took responsibility for foreign policy.

A closer look at the US-Turkey alliance management demonstrates that the divergence of threat perceptions between the allies have increased since 2009. The reshaping of relations between the parties in 2009, the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the subsequent Syrian war combined with the internal dynamics of Turkey, created a fertile environment for nationalist and militaristic policies. In fact, Davutoğlu’s approach has been replaced by a security-oriented vision (Buhari-Gülmez, 2020). Although democratization reforms on the road to the EU slowed during this period, the Arab Spring has made Turkey a potential “model” country for the transformation of Arab countries. The first political consequence of the turbulence of this period is the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in various countries, with which the AKP has historically had close relations. Relations deepened with the coming to power of the Muslim brothers, and a historical peak took place in a short time (Yeşilyurt, 2020). During this period, the drifting of Syria into a civil war also encouraged Ankara’s desire to establish regional hegemony on the way to shaping the region. Turkey’s desire to become a regional power has found a suitable environment after the failures of the United States in the region, immediately after the Arab uprisings (Özel, 2019).

Meanwhile, the financial and economic crisis in 2008 weakened both Europe and the United States and caused them to lose their attractiveness. While this relative decline in US power, the end of the unipolar world and the gradual formation of a multipolar international system allowed Turkey to redefine its national interests despite the US. (Özel, 2019). This new situation strengthened the tendency and thinking of acting independently of the United States, breaking away from the alliance that became evident in the post-Cold War era, but continued to be suppressed. During this period, it is observed that Turkey’s interests and actions are sometimes compatible with those of the United States, and sometimes do not coincide. An example of the different interests and actions of the allies is their policy towards Iran. While Trump administration policy is to isolate the country from the international community, Turkey prefers to integrate Iran into the global system (Turan, 2018). As a result, differences in interests and threats have led to the erosion of mutual trust in the alliance. Buhari-Gülmez (2020) argue that the difference in threat perceptions between the allies has increased since 2009. Turkey’s creation of its own foreign policy priorities and the conflict of these priorities with US interests in the Middle East, has plunged Turkey-US relations into a deep depression.

## **5. Tensions in Turkey-US Relations Post 2016**

As mentioned above, the basis of Turkey-US relations as an allies is a commitment to common threat and benefits. However, the recent conflicts between the parties regarding these interests and values are pushing them to different poles. Especially after the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016, with the America-First mindset there have been various crises within the traditional alliances.

With the Trump administration in charge, Israel’s security concerns have begun to occupy a broader place on the U.S. agenda. Despite this, Trump has sought to withdraw from Syria, avoiding direct military intervention in the Middle East. He continued Obama’s policies of eliminating DAESH which were his primary agenda. (Sarı Ertem and Karadeniz, 2019). This, in turn, was one of the important reasons that increased distrust and tension between the parties of the alliance. The lack of overlapping interests in the Middle East is one of the reasons that put Turkey-US relations in turbulence. Because the Central Command (CENTCOM) supports and cooperates with the People’s Protection Units (YPG) the Syrian extension of the PKK, its arch-enemy, which Turkey has fought since 1984, and which the United States and the EU recognize as a terrorist organization. The Central Command relies on the YPG as a fighting force, and the United States does not recognize the YPG as a terrorist organization. This attitude of the United States,

the determination and arming of the YPG, an arm of the PKK, which Turkey has fought for many years, as a local ally, albeit at a tactical level, is an important element that has led to a stalemate in relations between the parties.

Another important issue that has not been overcome between the parties is the failure to extradite Fethullah Gülen, the alleged mastermind of the July 15 coup attempt, to Turkey. On the one hand, the attitude towards the coup attempt and on the other hand, the YPG crisis between two countries has opened the door to a new rapprochement with Turkey, and a deep sense of distrust between the parties. The rapprochement was embodied by the agreement between Turkey and Russia on the purchase of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system.

Against the background of the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, the AKP government, which aimed for EU membership in the early years of its power and acted very carefully in its relations with the West, is reminiscent of the position that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union. This position, Eurasianism, has been seen in Turkish foreign policy from time to time in secret and from time to time openly. The Eurasian approach advocates the point of isolation with the West, beyond Oğuzlu's Turkey-based Westernism. As Toni Alaranta noted "The Eurasian approach has many variables in Turkey, but three main characteristics can be defined: First, the post-Cold War bipolar system significantly changed Turkey's position in world politics, second, the claim that 'Anglo-Saxon civilization' is in deep crisis, and finally, Turkey's traditional Western orientation becoming dysfunctional and 'Eurasia' created a meaningful strategic alternative" (Alaranta, 2018).

This recollection of the Eurasian approach was mainly due to the instrumentalization of anti-Western rhetoric within the country after resentment towards the West and frustration with the EU. The recent increase in nationalist and strong anti-Western sentiment in Turkish domestic politics has had a significant impact on Turkey's security policies. In this context, at a time when the USA sees China as an important competitor and relations with Russia are becoming more turbulent, the Eurasian approach of the Turkish government is also an indication that the United States and Ankara evaluate international issues in different ways. (Dalay, 2021) Turkey is thought to be moving towards a strategic partnership with Russia and Iran to diversify its logistics and military arms purchases and to diversify its dependence beyond NATO (Düzgüt et al, 2020). A visible step in this alliance, which will also trigger a deterioration in Turkey-US relations, is Ankara's shift towards making its defense choices in favour of Russia rather than NATO. Turkey's signing of an agreement with Russia for the purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system in September 2017 is considered an unprecedented move by a NATO country. The purchase of the S-400, which cannot be integrated with NATO air defense systems, is still on the agenda as a significant political problem in terms of Turkey-US relations. Politically, Ankara turning to a non-NATO option as part of such a costly defence project also calls into question Turkey's credibility as a NATO member. Senem Aydın Düzgüt et al (2020) claims that the decision to purchase the S-400 triggered Turkey's withdrawal from F-35 program, which produces the fifth-generation fighter jet, and reduced Turkey's ability to counter Russian air power.

When approached militarily, Turkey needs an advanced air defense system. In fact, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stressed that NATO protects only 30 percent of Turkish airspace and that Turkey needs additional air defense systems to protect its national security (Hurriyetdailynews). According to a 2018 report by The Economist, Turkey will take delivery of 116 stealth fighter jets that will form the mainstay of NATO's air power capacity over the next 30 years as part of the F-35 program (Economist, 2018). Kasapoğlu and Ülgen (2018) states at the EDAM report that air attacks deep in enemy territory, network-centric operations and enemy airspace penetration capabilities will become increasingly important as A2/AD sites around Turkey grow. As part of Turkey's defense needs, the F-35 system has a very important executive role, especially in air-to-air combat with advanced features. In fact, it is believed that Turkey will be in a unique position if it has the S-400 and F-35 at the same time, and Russia can profit from this information. This, in turn, means that Russia is finding ground to make more use of the declining Turkish-US relations. In addition, it is estimated that the combined operation of the F-35 and S-400 systems will technically pose significant risks not only to Turkey, but also to

all current and future aircraft operators.

In addition, Kasapoglu and Ülgen (2018) have revealed that following the S-400 agreement, Ankara is interested in the joint production of future S-500 systems. The authors believe that the procurement of tactical Pantsyr-S1 systems (SA-22 in NATO terminology) or recently developed variants of this initiative could bring Turkey's relations with NATO and even the United States to a standstill. In fact, considering these developments, there are also thoughts that Turkey has given up its determination to remain in NATO (Beyoglu, 2020). Steven Cook (2018) of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) openly stated that "Turkey is no longer an ally or a partner", revealing that the two allies are bound by common interests, but relations are full of uncertainty and insecurity.

During the S-400 debate between the parties, statements were made in the Press that Ankara would cooperate with EUROSAM, a Franco-Italian consortium, based on the joint production to develop long-range air and missile defence systems. According to the BBC's report, the consortium, which includes Italy-France-Turkey, has announced that air defence systems will be produced and developed in the mid-2020s. This agreement emerges to strengthen mutual trust and solidarity between the parties. These negotiations demonstrate Turkey's commitment to NATO (Sarı Ertem and Karadeniz, 2019). Compatible with the NATO missile shield system, this project will harmonize Turkey's air and missile defence with a higher network and will be able to integrate it into a multi-layered structure that can correspond to each stage (Kasapoğlu, 2017). While the global epidemic has not allowed the development of this project.

In this tense atmosphere, the most concrete crisis among the allies is the matter of the trial of the American Pastor Andrew Brunson. The detention of Pastor Brunson for allegedly "engaging in activities that threaten national security" has caused increased tensions in Turkish-US relations. In addition to President Trump's angry tweets and the imposing of economic sanctions on Turkey, the US Treasury's measures against the two ministers has caused the value of the Turkish lira to fall (Özel, 2019). Relations between the allies have been exacerbated by the depreciation of the Turkish lira by almost 40 % against the US dollar as of November 2020 (Sarı Ertem and Karadeniz, 2019).

Another important development in Turkey-US relations during the same period is the negative attitude of the US Congress towards Turkey on the Armenian issue. The passing of a bill by overwhelming majority in the US House of Representatives, recognizing the 1915 Armenian deportation as genocide is the embodiment of this attitude (Doğan, 2019). Although not legally binding, the adoption of Armenian bills, especially on this issue, in which the Turkish nation is sensitive, has added a new issue to the problems between the parties.

In fact, the influence of the US in the Middle East has begun to decline because of the polarization within itself. In fact, according to the 2020 Munich Security Report, which supports this judgment, there is a rapid decline in the ability and willingness of the United States to shape events in the Middle East. In fact, this leaves a vacuum in the region that can be filled by other powers such as Russia, Iran, and Turkey. In this context, Turkey is organizing cross-border military operations against terrorist organizations such as YPG/DAESH to ensure its border security and the territorial integrity in the region. The first of these was the operation named Euphrates Shield in August 2016. This was followed by Operation Olive Branch in January 2018. Finally, "Operation Peace Spring", which was the main agenda item of Turkey-US relations in October 2019 was initiated by the Turkish Armed Forces in northern Syria and supported by the Syrian National Army (SNA) soldiers to destroy the terror corridor that is being attempted to be created on the southern border of Turkey and to bring peace and tranquillity to the region (Çopur, 2019). Turkey, as a NATO member, has carried out all three operations with its own means and capabilities. But then Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from the region before the start of Operation "Spring Peace" paved the way for Ankara during the operation. Although this initiative has been interpreted positively in terms of relations, the White House's decision to sanction Turkey in response to the operation, consisting of several articles, has brought relations to a standstill. As a result, in response to this language of sanctions and US support for the YPG in the



region, Turkey has also distanced its strategic interests from the West.

## 6. Conclusion

The Republic of Turkey has shown a tendency towards Westernization since the final years of the Ottoman Empire, and its socio-political and strategic identities are designed to be Western. Although Turkey's pursuit of socio-political Westernization has weakened over time, its Western strategic identity has not been fundamentally questioned. However, the asymmetrical feature of the historical structure of the Turkish-US alliance, which also forms the main framework of the study, the imbalance of forces in relations, or the difference between a superpower and a medium-sized power, did not appear as a problem during the Cold War. Despite the asymmetry in their size, population, and military prowess, US-Turkey relations were driven by common security interests; the sense of security towards the common enemy maintained the asymmetry of the alliance. Cooperation for security is analysed as a motivation for the sides. The right question to ask is whether there are common security threats and interests between the two countries, despite this strategic partnership undergoing a significant transformation today.

Numerous issues, from the PKK/YPG problem, to the failure of Gülen's extradition request, to the sanctions packages that in succession implemented by Congress, to the arrest of Pastor Brunson, from the S-400 / F-35 crises to the disagreements on Operation Peace Spring, have created serious cracks in Turkish-American relations since 2016. These developments, and the gap that Russia has created between Turkey and its Western partners, have also led to the erosion of the NATO alliance. Economic sanctions imposed on Turkey and the consequent depreciation of the Turkish lira against the exchange rate have widened the relationship between the United States and Turkey more than ever. The result is the formation of an image of Turkey, which is constantly moving away from the West.

Differentiation of common interests in the region, the deterioration of Turkish-US relations intensified the search for autonomous space, creating a foundation for turning towards various "non-Western" or "anti-Western" alliances. Although Turkey is part of the Transatlantic Security System, it has not only rejected the West's dominant position in the world order, but also advocated that developing countries such as Turkey be seen as players who should participate in the first league of power games. (Özel, 2019). Turkey's westernization is an important characteristic in the context of its foreign policy. However, it is not true to say that the Europeanization and Westernization of Turkish foreign policy stems from Turkey's desire to prove its European/Western identity. Oğuzlu claims that this plays a decisive role because of real political concerns (Oğuzlu, 2011). However, the climate of distrust that Turkey is experiencing today in its relations with its Western partners has been clearly revealed. The frustration with the EU and the US response following the July 15, 2016 coup attempt partly explains this situation. In any case, Turkey's EU membership also seems to be on hold now. Even the tension between France and Turkey, an important member of the EU, has risen to a higher level through a war of words between leaders.

Although the Trump-Erdoğan personal relationship has a positive impact on Turkish-American relations, it is impossible to say that there has been a complete normalization. Deep and rooted problems between the parties still stand out today. With Biden winning the 2020 election, one wonders towards which direction relations will evolve. It is a well-known fact that Biden will inherit a weakened U.S.-Turkey relationship that has been steadily declining with growing tensions for almost 10 years. One of the most important issues that will determine the course of relations for the coming period is still the S-400 missile defense system that Turkey procured from Russia. The corona virus can be considered to have created a time that could repair Turkey-US relations. In this direction, increasing diplomatic efforts to solve structural problems between the United States and Turkey should be one of the priority issues for Turkey. İlder Turan (2018) offers several recommendations to ensure that relations between the United States and Turkey are not allowed to deteriorate beyond repair. At the beginning of these recommendations are the methods

of senior leaders. As we often encounter, leaders should allow relevant government agencies to work to develop policy alternatives and implement policies, rather than conduct policy at the highest level with Twitter posts. However, it is especially important that economic tools are not used to address political problems to regulate relations. Finally, Turan believes that encouraging non-governmental organizations such as think tanks and business associations to do more work to help the public of the parties to be aware of not only the problems between them but also the common interests will be beneficial in terms of reviving the relations (Turan, 2018).

After 2020, which has gone down in history as a difficult year for the world, the new process may be an opportunity to reconsider relations with the epidemic. In particular, the United States should take the opportunity to revive U.S.-Turkey relations under the presidency of Joe Biden following the November 2020 elections. Turkey, on the other hand, should re-visit its options and reorganize its orientation while questioning its understanding of strategic Westernism. In contrast to the post-Cold War era, Western strategic identity with the return of geopolitics no longer sets high democratic standards as a prerequisite. Therefore, Turkey should try to find solutions to its differences with the EU as well as with the United States, to achieve better communication and to produce more realistic solutions to security and strategic interests.

Turkey needs alliance connections to manage its security interests properly. Oğuzlu (2011) considers the solution of the Arab - Israeli conflict as important for Turkey as cooperation with Russia for regional stability as defeating radical religious terrorism. However, despite Turkey's efforts to conduct strategic cooperation with Russia, this does not mean a break from the West. According to the results of the 2017 report prepared by the EU for the FEUTURE (Future of EU-Turkey Relations) project sees Turkey as an important partner in the EU's proactive projection of European values, or at least a bulwark against the ultimate identity-related threat to radical Islamist terror for European citizens (Özel et al, 2017). During the post-epidemic recovery period, Turkey can also find cooperation that will restore its economy in trade with European countries. Therefore, as a group of academics led by Arısan-Eralp pointed out, Turkey-EU relations need to be reorganized on a consistent, sustainable, and realistic basis (Arısan-Eralp et al, 2020). There is interdependence between the parties. Turkey depends on the EU mainly for economic and commercial reasons and, above all, for international economic credibility. On the other hand, the EU needs increased cooperation with Turkey to ensure security and stability in its immediate vicinity. It is obvious that new definitions are needed that will stop relations with the EU from being in a state of constant crisis.

Domestic and regional realities in the transatlantic partnership and changing global system led Turkey to repair its relations with the West compared to other alternatives and offer the option of closer ties to Transatlantic ties. In this, the most effective way is to strengthen its position within NATO. NATO membership and Turkey's continued Western orientation are important both in terms of rhetoric and in terms of specific policy measures. A strong partnership is important for the national interests of both Turkey and the United States. Turkey is a key U.S. ally in the war on terror, especially given its geostrategic position in one of the world's most unstable corners. For all these reasons, it is assumed that the parties will have to "reset" in their relationship. If a reset is to be mentioned, from Turkey's point of view, the United States will need to show more sensitivity to Turkey's concerns and somehow understand its desire to act more autonomously. In this context, if Turkey retains its strategic Western identity, it can assume critical and constructive roles under appropriate circumstances. All these preferences will also have meaningful consequences for each actor. However, at this point, to define the relationship, it is necessary to go beyond conceptual tool sets such as an asymmetric alliance, strategic relationship, or model partnership, and define goals and expectations in a new and clear way.

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