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The Role of the Middle East in the EU-Turkey Security Relationship: Key Drivers and Future Scenarios

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Abstract

This paper analyses the effects of developments in the Middle East since 1999 on the security relationship between the European Union (EU) and Turkey. The chronological outlook allows us to identify three main drivers in the relationship. The first is 'conflictual multipolarity,' i.e. the conventional and non-conventional competition between different state actors in the Middle East. A cause and effect of this is regional instability and power vacuums, which create environments conducive for armed non-state actors to flourish. Second, transnational terrorism and radicalization which presents major threats to both parties and serves as potential drivers for cooperation if Ankara and EU states can agree on the risks and definitions posed by armed non-state actors. Third and perhaps most salient, is the Kurdish issue, which has seen a transformation from a primarily domestic issue for Turkey into an issue of regional and international magnitude, pitting the EU and Turkey in opposing camps.

Özet

Bu makalede 1999'dan beri Orta Doğu bölgesinde yaşanan gelişmelerin Avrupa Birliği ve Türkiye arasındaki güvenlik ilişkilerine etkisi incelenmektedir. Kronolojik gözlemler sonucunda ilişkiyi belirleyen üç ana unsur tanımlanmıştır. Bunlardan ilki çatışmaya dayalı çok kutupluluk olarak adlandırdığımız, Orta Doğu'daki farklı devletlerin birbirleriyle konvansiyonel ve konvansiyonel-dışı yöntemlerle yürüttüğü rekabettir. Bunun hem nedeni hem de sonucu olarak bölgede görünen istikrarsızlık ve devlet gücünün nüfuz edemediği alanlar, devlet-dışı silahlı aktörlerin etki alanlarını genişletmesine imkân tanımıştır. Buna bağlı olarak uluslararası terörizm ve radikalleşme iki taraf için de büyük tehditler doğurmaktadır ve dolayısıyla iş birliği için büyük fırsatlar sunmaktadır – tabii tarafların devlet-dışı silahlı aktörlerin yarattığı riskler konusunda hemfikir oldukları durumlarda. Son olarak ve belki de ilişki için en önemli olan boyut Kürt meselesidir; Türkiye için temelde milli bir mesele olan bu sorun zamanla bölgesel ve uluslararası bir boyut kazanmıştır ve Türkiye ile AB'yi karşıt kamplara itmiştir.

Content

1. Introduction[1]

At least since the end of the Cold War, developments in the Middle East have had a profound impact on the question of alignments in Turkey's and the EU's threat perceptions and security interests. This has been the case particularly since the upheavals set in motion by the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. As the joint war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq draws to a close, events in the Middle East will again mesh with evolving threat perceptions and security interests to affect relations between Turkey and the EU. These raise new sets of challenges, prompting conflict in EU-Turkey relations, as well as offering new opportunities that prompt cooperation and/or convergence on specific security approaches to the region.

In line with the FEUTURE research framework, this paper will assess which of the three possible scenarios of EU-Turkey relations— conflict, cooperation or convergence — is the most likely to ensue in the 2023 timeframe. The paper will also analyze how developments in the Middle East impact Ankara's and EU member states' threat perceptions and security interests in the Middle East.

To substantiate assessments of the most likely scenario in 2023, this paper will:

1. Examine recent developments in the Middle East that have directly or indirectly affected EU-Turkey security relations.

2. Identify key drivers which underpin Turkish and European responses to these developments with a view to discern which have led Turkey and the EU to converge, cooperate, or conflict (3C scenarios) on vital security.

3. Assess which drivers are the most salient at present and in the 2023 timeframe to discern which of the 3C-scenarios is most likely.

All sorts of caveats apply. Growing unpredictability in the ever-unpredictable Middle East leave open the possibility that wild cards will see developments take an unforeseen turn. To some extent, the paper will bracket such wild cards. What it will do is make an attempt at laying bare underlying motivations and interests that drive the EU and Turkey today in order to explain how they are likely respond to such wild card eventualities, should they occur, and how this might affect their security relations in the 2023 timeframe.

The paper will hedge its bets and refer to the assessment of the most likely scenario for the EU-Turkey security relations on the Middle East in 2023 as one of "conflictual cooperation". The EU and Turkey will have a continued interest in cooperating either within multilateral ad hoc alliances such as the anti-ISIL Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) or within the NATO security architecture to overcome direct security challenges, such as countering terrorism and managing

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spill overs from regional conflicts, while also complementing these efforts by trying to promote lasting stability in the Middle East. Though they may disagree in the right mixture of policies, such as on the Iranian nuclear file, the sides are also in some alignment on counterbalancing the potentially heavy-handed US policy under President Donald J. Trump, including on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

However, a full convergence scenario – in which both Turkey and the EU consistently coordinate respective security approaches in a holistic and multidimensional manner – is unlikely because ever more salient, durable and impactful conflictual drivers on both sides are likely to materialize. Turkey's increasingly fluid security partnerships in the region and its frustration with its transatlantic partners, will likely limit prospects for cooperation. Recent years have seen conflicting outlooks emerge on armed non-state actors (ANSAs) in the region such as the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria, certain Syrian Sunni groups such as Tahrir al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham, Hamas in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the Shiite Hashd al-Shaabi militias in Iraq. The EU—especially member states militarily engaged in the region through OIR—hardly see eye-to-eye with Turkey on the latter's recent re-alignments with Russia and Iran, either. Finally, former pro-active and joint engagements in the region, often through the invocation of soft-power tools, have taken a back seat to more reactive national (or EU-specific) security interests in both Turkey and the EU with a stronger focus on building unilateral hard-power capabilities. In this context, EU-Turkey alignments on the Middle East are at best going to be ad hoc and characterized by conflictual cooperation.

In line with the four-step approach, the paper proceeds as follows. In chapter one, we identify the key drivers of EU-Turkish relations through an analysis of the most pertinent developments in the Middle East as well as the EU and Turkish responses to these developments since 1999. In chapter two, we will first take stock and rank the drivers deemed to be the most salient and enjoy the highest impact on EU-Turkey relations at present (December 2017), and which will prove to be the most durable in the near future. Mindful of how similar salient drivers have affected the EU-Turkey security relationship on the Middle East in the recent past, the paper will argue for the assessment that conflictual cooperation — in which cooperation in some areas coexist with instances of disagreement and even conflict in others — is the most likely scenario for EU-Turkey security engagements on the Middle East in the 2023 timeframe.[2]

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[2] This study was conducted by six authors from different institutional and academic backgrounds, each bringing in their expertise to complement the analysis over a vast range of security dynamics in the Middle East. Therefore, we would like to iterate that the views expressed and the analyses made in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of individual authors, but rather represent a collection of our ideas.

2. The main drivers, their post-1999 development, and their ranking

2.1. Background in Brief: The Cold War and the transitional 1990's

European security alignments with Turkey, especially through NATO, date back to the early Cold War. The 1947 Truman Doctrine embraced Turkey as a bulwark against Soviet expansion, an embrace that also helped lead to the introduction of democracy in Turkey in 1950, Turkey's NATO membership in 1952, and the 1963 Ankara agreement between Turkey and the European Economic Community. Keeping Soviet expansion at bay, as German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel made clear in April 2017, kept EU-Turkey relations on track in spite of Turkey's Cold War stints of military dictatorship (Gabriel, 2017).

The end of the Cold War and the shifting geopolitical dynamics of the 1990s pulled this rug of mutual security dependency away from under the EU-Turkey security partnership. Following some cooperation and disagreement on how to handle the civil wars in the Balkans, the Middle East rose to prominence as a main source of security concern and cooperation between Turkey and the EU. EU-Turkey relations were positively affected by shared support for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the Oslo accords of 1993, developments that complemented the Turkish desire to establish closer political and military ties with Israel, (Bengio, 2004) including to counterbalance its worsening relations with Syria (Tocci, 2011: 133-35), and marked the beginnings of Turkey's potential to act as a mediator between Israel and the Arab States.

Yet, developments in Iraq following the first Gulf War of 1991 foreshadowed how the Middle East would complicate EU-Turkey security relations. Turkey struck a difficult balance on its primary concern, Kurdish separatism. On the one hand, it provided logistical and technical support to the Coalition against Saddam Hussein in 1991, officially supported the establishment of a no-fly zone over the majority Kurdish provinces in Northern Iraq, and helped provide humanitarian aid to the Kurds (Natali, 2010: 35). On the other hand, Turkey's counterterrorism operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Iraq were criticized for its excesses and for impeding relief operations (Natali, 2010: 36). In turn, Turkish officials criticized Europe for not doing enough to share the burden of Kurdish refugees fleeing into Turkey (The New York Times, 1991).

Turkey and the EU also had a complicated relationship regarding Turkey's own Kurdish issue and the PKK during the 1990s. Human rights violations committed by Turkey as part of its counterterrorism campaign against the PKK, coupled with Europe's large Kurdish diaspora and indications of political ties between certain EU member states and the PKK (Gunter, 1991) added a political dimension to the disputes. EU member states Italy and Greece briefly harboured PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, complicating the relationship with Turkey (The New York Times, 1999).

In sum, the 1990s witnessed a transition from convergence to still constructive cooperation, but more importantly, the primary alignment against the Soviet Union was replaced by the manifold complications of the Middle East.

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2.2. Phase 1 – 1999-2010: War on terror, EU enlargement and the Justice and Development Party

By 1999, the Balkan wars had thoroughly reminded Europe that the end of the Cold War did not entail Fukuyama's "end of history". To Turkey, 1999 marked the seeming end of almost two decades of bloody conflict with the PKK, claiming over 30.000 lives, as the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured. The uncertainty of what came next took a back seat to new hopes of forging further security alignments as the EU Helsinki summit granted Turkey candidacy status to the union.

9/11, the global *war on terror*, and the Middle East

Turkey-EU security alignments were heavily impacted in 2001 by the 9/11 attacks on the United States that not only triggered the first invocation of NATO's article V "all for one" commitments, but also set jihadist terrorism as the overriding security concern in years to come. The attacks displayed the disruptive capacity of individuals and armed non-state actors. The rising transnational nature of jihadist terrorism meant that what mainly used to be distant threats in foreign lands now became homeland security concerns, necessitating international cooperation in military, law enforcement, border security, and intelligence.

Turkey and the EU both condemned the attack and joined forces in supporting the US in Afghanistan, as well as in the broader war on terror. Turkey supplied important intelligence and logistical support as well as up to 1800 deployed personnel to the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan (Doğan, 2010). As noted by a 2012 US diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks, "Turkey was one of the first countries to contribute forces to ISAF and assumed the leadership role [in Afghanistan] in June 2002" (The Guardian, 2011). The arrest of prominent Al-Qaeda operatives in Turkey in 2002 further served to demonstrate Turkey's active commitment to assist the US and its European and NATO allies in the war against terrorism. On a popular level, US President George W. Bush referred to Turkey as a "model country" of peaceful Muslims (Bush, 2002) to illustrate that his war on terror was not an all-out war on Islam.[3]

Both Turkey and the EU developed their security policies in the wake of 9/11, not only to meet this newfound threat, but also to emphasize the need for multilateral cooperation. Ankara was already engaged in reorganizing its security structure and policies to align it with the EU, including civilian oversight of the military[4], civilian presence in the historically powerful National Security Council (MGK), suspending the emergency laws imposed in the southeast since the 1980s, and joining the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) (Barbak, 2015; Turkish National Security Council, 2013). In turn, the EU listed the PKK as a terrorist organization in May 2002 (Council of the European Union, 2002). Hence, the PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization not only in Turkey but also in the EU and the US. The EU quickly worked out a security policy to match corresponding security challenges associated with this new

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[3] And to try and sway Turkey to let the US gain access to Iraq through Turkey in the 2003 invasion.
[4] See for instance (Akay, 2010)

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designation. The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) "A Secure Europe in a Better World" clearly identifies terrorism as a "key threat" confronting Europe (European Council, 2003:3). It emphasizes how:

> our traditional concept of self-defence – up to and including the Cold War – was based on the threat of invasion. With the new threats, the first line of defence will often be abroad. […] In contrast to the massive visible threat in the Cold War, none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means. […] Dealing with terrorism may require a mixture of intelligence, police, judicial, military and other means. (European Council, 2003; 7).

The ESS's emphasis on multilateralism as an effective means to counter security related challenges, including the threat of terrorism, combined with the emphasis on self-defence beginning far from the EU's borders, gave added impetus to enhanced intelligence and security cooperation with Turkey.

The shared threat perceptions were validated as Al-Qaeda hit a synagogue, the HSBC bank, and the British Consulate in Istanbul in 2003, three trains in Madrid in 2004, and the metro system and a bus in London in 2005. Joint responses followed suit. In 2004 the Turkish National Police and EUROPOL signed a cooperation agreement, including the "exchange of strategic and technical information of mutual interest" (Europol, 2004). In 2005, the EU issued its formal Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CTS), laying the groundwork for increased intelligence and training with third countries, including Turkey (Council of the European Union, 2005).

As the end of this first phase neared, tensions and disagreements gathered on the horizon. With the Justice and Development Party (AKP or AK Party) at the helm in Ankara, a historic outreach was made to the PKK to defuse age-old conflicts — a move welcomed by the EU (Kutschera, 2012; Hess, 2013). On the other hand, the US and, less so, the EU, found the AKP's embrace of the Palestinian group Hamas—which won the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections— problematic due to Hamas' refusal to embrace the so-called 'Quartet Principles' (United Nations, 2006). The EU had moved to blacklist Hamas as a terror group in its entirety in 2003,[5] and following Hamas's electoral victory, moved to economically boycott the group in cooperation with the US, UN and Russia, which together with the EU are members of the Middle East Quartet. From the standpoint of Ankara, boycotting Hamas and isolating it from the Palestinian body politic would not result in moderating the group's policies. Rather it would likely empower the more rejectionist and radical elements within the movement. The US and Europe, however, insisted on coercion as the preferred policy approach to seek to moderate Hamas, thereby setting the stage for disagreements on strategy between Brussels and Ankara.

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[5] In a 2011 interview with PBS Prime Minister Erdoğan announced: "Let me give you a very clear message. I don't see Hamas as a terror organization. Hamas is a political party. And it is an organization. It is a resistance movement trying to protect its country under occupation." See Jerusalem Post (2011).

The 2003 Iraq war, EU-Turkey alignment, and Iraqi Kurds

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq at first saw Turkey align with continental Europe's scepticism against the operation, but also added further complications to the relationship. Turkey and certain EU member states were worried that the joint UK-US push to depose Saddam Hussein over suspicions of a clandestine weapons of mass destruction program would be counterproductive to the EU and Turkey's shared interest in multilateral, diplomatic solutions to major crises. On 11 February 2003, Turkey became the first NATO country to formally invoke Article 4 of the Treaty, seeking protection against Saddam's possible retaliation as the US prepared for War (Economist, 2015).

Following a three-week argument within NATO, France, Germany and Belgium refused a series of defensive measures for Turkey, giving priority to fears that the employment of such measures would signal that war was inevitable (Economist, 2003). Splitting Europe in two groups and opening a gap between continental Europe and the US, the Iraq war made the divisive potential of the war on terror manifest. Meanwhile, the Turkish Parliament could not secure the required number of votes to allow American troops to enter Iraq through Turkey—a move that would complicate US-Turkey relations in the years to come.

Turkey also had a number of concerns in Iraq distinct from those of the EU, including worries about the status of the Sunni groups, the wellbeing of the Iraqi Turkmen, the status of cities of historical significance for Turkey such as Kirkuk and, above all, the regional proliferation of its Kurdish problem (Altunişik, 2006: 185). Until 2003, Turkey looked at Kurdish self-rule in Iraq as a temporary phenomenon, expecting the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to be reintegrated into the Iraqi state (Cenefe, 2008: 394). The PKK seized the 2003 moment to proliferate in the region with the establishment of PYD in Syria (in 2003), the PJAK in Iran (in 2004) and the umbrella group KKK in 2005 (changed to KCK in 2007). Having been evicted from Syria following the extradition of PKK leader Öcalan in 1998, the 1991 no-fly zone and subsequent 2003 Iraq War and weakening of the state that allowed the PKK to regroup and expand. The PKK, thus, halted its unilateral ceasefire against Turkey in 2004 and resumed violence, adding to Turkish worries about post-invasion developments in Iraq becoming a national security threat (Park, 2005: 16).

Turkey ended up utilizing its army and air force to pursue the PKK in Iraq in 2007-8. Worrying about the potential for destabilization, the US, EU and European countries (Reuters, 2008b; Deutsche Welle, 2008) pressured Turkey to withdraw 8 days after the opening of the land incursion. Tensions remained however. On 15 September 2006, these boiled over when a controversial map of the "New Middle East" was displayed at the NATO Defence College in Rome, Italy, leading to a diplomatic protests from Turkey, whose borders were modified on the map to allow for a new state: "Free Kurdistan", while the remainder of modern Iraq was effectively partitioned into a "Sunni Iraq" and an "Arab Shia State".[6] While NATO and a number

6 See Peters (2006) and Nazemroaya (2006).

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of member states quickly assured Turkey that the map did not reflect official policy, the incident served to heighten mistrust and would come back to haunt the EU-Turkey relationship in the future.

The AKP-government's moves to de-securitize the Kurdish issue, initially through covert talks (in Oslo) with the PKK, was then supplemented with the public announcement in 2009 of the so-called 'Kurdish Opening (Carnegie Europe, 2009). The "zero problems with neighbours" policy also opened Turkey to a rapprochement with the KRG. In line with Turkey's "zero problems" foreign policy doctrine, a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSC) was established between Turkey and Iraq in 2009, resulting in the signing of almost 50 individual memoranda of understanding covering a range of issues, including security (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).[7] The EU's 2009 Progress Report on Turkey highlighted the country's "alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy. […] Turkey has continued to develop a positive role contributing to stabilisation in regions such as the South Caucasus and the Middle East. Turkey has strengthened its diplomatic relations with Iraq, including contacts with the Kurdish regional government." (Commission of the European Communities, 2009:87).

Turkey's support for Hamas and tensions with Israel

Turkey's engagements with Hamas and expanding activism in the Middle East would lead to growing tensions with Israel, whose treatment of the Palestinians was repeatedly criticized by Turkey. Already in 2004, Prime Minister Erdoğan had publicly labelled Israel as a "terrorist state" (Arbell, 2014:10), a far cry from the 1998 joint Israeli-Turkish effort to pressure Hafez al-Assad in Syria to extradite Öcalan. Yet, independently from these early tensions, relations continued, with reciprocal visits by Turkish and Israeli prime ministers and presidents in 2005 and 2006. Indeed, the 2000s saw Turkey try its hand at mediating between Israel, on the one hand, and groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, on the other. During the 2006 Lebanon war, Turkey, like other major European states (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2006; European Commission, 2006), condemned the 2006 abduction of Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah fighters, but also harshly criticised the Israeli government's disproportionate use of force (CNN Türk, 2006). In line with Turkish efforts to polish its credentials as a responsible security actor and potential mediator in Middle East conflicts, Ankara took active part in the UNIFIL peacekeeping operations in south Lebanon following the 2006 war, cooperating closely with EU states such as Italy, France, and Spain.

Turkey-Israel relations received another hit in the wake of the 2008-9 Israeli military assault on Gaza (Operation Cast Lead), which only increased Ankara's criticism of Israeli policy. Tensions reached a breaking point in May 2010, when Israeli troops raided the Mavi Marmara flotilla bound for Gaza, killing eight Turkish nationals and a dual American-Turkish citizen.[8] The incident led to a complete breakdown of ties, a halt to military cooperation and the withdrawal of ambassadors. Israel was subsequently listed among threats to Turkey for the first time in the

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[7] Also see Tocci (2011).
[8] A tenth Turkish citizen subsequently died of his wounds in 2014.

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2010 iteration of Turkey's National Security Policy Document dubbed the Red Book according to
the Turkish media (Hurriyet, 2010).

That said, Europe was also growing increasingly divided on Israel, and the fall-out between
Turkey and Israel only had an indirect bearing on the broader issue of EU-Turkey security
relations, primarily in the realm of European perceptions of Turkey's changing priorities and
ambitions towards the Middle East.

Iran's nuclear program, another source of alignment … with caveats

Revelations about Iran's nuclear program in 2002 were another key event that immediately
raised red flags in both Ankara and EU member state capitals. In 2005, the Turkish Red Book
referred to Iran's nuclear program, coupled with its expanding ballistic missile capabilities, as the
biggest security threat according to some Turkish media reports (Aydıntaşbaş, 2010). When
Brussels formulated the ESS in 2003, the Iranian nuclear program and the wider threat of WMD
proliferation also figured as a prominent threat. The revelation set in motion a cat-and-mouse
game with Iran repeatedly trying to avoid inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency
(IAEA) (Ülgen & Ergun, 2012) and to circumvent subsequent sanctions by the US, EU and UN. In
addition, Turkey worried that if Iran were to be emboldened by nuclear weapons, it would alter
the balance of power in the Middle East in its favour. Indeed, some analysts have speculated
that Turkey, too, would be pressured to obtain its own nuclear deterrent in response to Iran's
proliferation (Dobbins et al., 2011) – a sentiment that has found a sizable audience among the
Turkish public (EDAM, 2012).

Beyond concerns over Iran's nuclear program, Turkey was also irked by Iran's rising influence in
post-Saddam Iraq. Yet these concerns did not prevent Ankara from seeking a rapprochement
with Tehran in an attempt to further Davutoglu's zero problems vision and efforts to improve its
standing with regional actors. Turkey's increasing political and energy ties with Iran caused some
friction between Turkey and the West, tensions that were reflected in Ankara's reluctance to
impose new sanctions on Iran in 2010. This culminated in Turkey's decision to broker an
unwelcomed agreement with Iran ahead of a UN Security Council session to expand sanctions
against Iran, which drew sharp criticism from the US and its allies in Europe (United Nations,
2010). When coupled with the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations, reports in Turkish media that Iran
was no longer listed among security threats to Turkey in the Red Book (while Israel was)
exacerbated perceptions across Europe that Turkey's axis was shifting away from the West.

2.3. Phase 2 – 2011-2015: Arab Spring, U.S. retrenchment, and the Iraqi-Syrian debacle

On the whole, security relations between Turkey and the EU in the 1999-2010 period can be
characterized as cooperation with caveats, where Turkish and European agendas on how to deal
with security issues in the Middle East (such as the Iran nuclear program) largely overlapped,
with some differences on the methods and political priorities (such as engagement with Hamas).
With the Arab Spring however, the period of 'cooperation with caveats' took a turn for more

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conflict in EU-Turkey relations. Turkey was initially invoked by Europe and the US as a 'role model' for the dawning of democracy in the region, a role that Turkey's Foreign Minister at the time Ahmet Davutoğlu was eager to uphold (Davutoğlu, 2012:5). On the other hand, early complications over how to address Muammar Qaddafi in Libya and Bashar al-Assad in Syria meshed with a deepening divergence on ideology, threat priorities, and a willingness to engage militarily, adding significant conflictual elements to the relationship.

Power Vacuums and Conflictual Multipolarity: The Arab Spring, Iraq withdrawal, Iran's nuclear program and changing regional dynamics

Beginning in late 2010, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was engulfed by a wave of popular protests, demanding political reform and increased socio-economic rights. Both Turkey and the EU were caught off guard by the protests and fears of widespread instability characterized the initial reaction of both actors, notwithstanding their shared support for democratic accountability in the region. With the US about to pull out of Iraq in 2011, Turkey could prove an important ally for the EU in helping to maintain regional stability and the promotion of increased economic growth and integration.[9]

Turkey's reputation as a secular, Western-oriented Muslim democracy led Europe to initially welcome Turkey's post-Arab Spring regional activism, hoping it could complement the EU's declining leverage, influence and credibility in the region.[10] Yet, many European capitals did not have a direct stake in the region as Ankara did, and viewed developments in the Middle East through a neighbourhood policy lens, which tended to prioritize stabilization over deep and proactive reform. Therefore, when compared to Turkey, the EU adopted a more cautious approach during and after the Arab Spring. European reluctance to engage with Turkey in the Middle East, along with differing strategic priorities, including a European outreach to the Arab Gulf monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, became a source of tension in EU-Turkey relations.

Nonetheless, as noted by the 2012 Regular Progress Report, Turkey's "political dialogue with the EU on foreign and security policy intensified significantly, also given Turkey's influential regional role in supporting reforms, including with regard to recent developments in North Africa" (European Commission, 2012).

Turkey's active support for various Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties and groups across the MENA clashed with the Saudi-led counterrevolutions, which actively moved to restore the pre-revolutionary status quo. The 2013 military coup in Egypt, supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, led to significant protests in Turkey and a degree of tensions in EU-Turkey

[9] In 2010, Turkey was indeed involved in opening new communication and infrastructure channels across the region, seeking to increase interdependence among regional states as a recipe for stability and dispute settlement. New train links were opened with Syria and border crossing modernized to prepare for increased regional trade and investments. With some inspiration from the EU's own experience in trade and interdependence such actions were considered positively in Europe, as potential drivers for regional stabilization and peace.

[10] Fore an in-depth analysis of the 'Turkish model' and its reoccurring appearance in Turkish, Middle Eastern and Western debates see Ülgen (2011); Also see Kirisçi (2013).

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relations, particularly since the EU's refusal to formally label the event a coup contrasted with Turkey's vocal condemnation of the Egyptian military and its regional supporters.[11]

Other disagreements would also contribute to this slow fraying of the EU-Turkish relationship. Turkey's active and vocal support for the protesters in Egypt contrasted with Ankara's rather lukewarm reaction to protests in Bahrain and Libya, where Turkey held commercial and energy interests and did not want to overtly irk the Arab Gulf monarchies.[12] In these settings, Turkey's reaction was defined more by realpolitik than by its professed adherence to reform, a stance similar to that displayed by certain European actors, as with France towards Egypt and Tunisia or Italy with regard to Libya.

As events progressed in Libya, Turkey, like Italy, ended up participating in the naval blockade and arms embargo as well as enforcing the NATO no-fly zone over Libya (Yackley, 2011; Head, 2011). Also divided on Libya, the EU was more puzzled than troubled over Turkey's early indecision on Libya. What truly troubled Europe was Turkey's subsequent support for various political Islamist leaning groups in Libya, particularly in the run up to the 2012 elections and in the subsequent period of violent clashes that followed the 2014 elections in Libya.

Overall, while the Arab Spring was initially a political driver,[13] it accelerated the tide of instability, power vacuums and conflictual multipolarity in the region that soon produced security drivers, serving as both a source of cooperation and conflict in the EU-Turkey relationship.

Beyond the Arab Spring, the period from 2011-2015 also saw two significant developments in Turkey's relations to the Middle East, both of which helped keep cooperation with the EU on track in spite of the mounting differences: Turkey's increased criticism and distancing from Iran, and a hesitant, incomplete, rapprochement with Israel.

Whereas Turkey was opposed to international pressure on Iran in 2010, it agreed to host the X-band radar and early warning system under NATO's missile defence system in September 2011. While Turkey insisted that NATO would not explicitly refer to Iran as the reason for the deployment, the move drew a harsh rebuke from Iranian authorities. Ankara's decision signalled a return to the traditional Turkish security perception towards Iran, namely as a regional rival, but one with which a positive-sum game should be sought where possible. It also reflected a growing divide between Iran and Turkey over the trajectory of the Syrian civil war. As Turkey subsequently asked NATO to deploy a Patriot missile defense system in Turkey in 2012, an Iranian army chief warned that this could "ignite a third world war" (Reuters, 2012).

Turkey turned in the opposite direction on Israel, however, following a telephone apology by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pushed for by U.S. President Barack Obama during a visit to Israel in March 2013. The apology allowed Turkey to announce the beginning of

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[11] See for instance Rettman (2013) and Akyol (2013).
[12] See Işıksal & Göksel (Eds.) (2017:106-7) and Tocci et al. (2011:3-7).
[13] For more, please see Feuture Online Paper No.11 "Politics and Turkey-EU Relations: Drivers from the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods" by Bennett Clifford, Dustin Gilbreath, and Justine Louis.

negotiations to resolve diplomatic tensions emanating from Israel's raid on the Mavi Marmara, setting the stage for a drawn out process of normalization. Ambassadors returned to Tel Aviv and Ankara only in late 2016, but Turkey-Israel ties benefited from shared interests in the energy sector, particularly following the discovery of gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ratner, 2016). Turkey wished to position itself as a potential gas corridor to Europe, while also seeking to diversify its supplies away from Russia.[14] Talk of Turkey serving as a potential energy hub for Europe helped improve EU-Turkey relations and led the EU to welcome the tentative Israeli-Turkish rapprochement, not least in light of European efforts to differentiate their energy supplies from Russia.[15]

Conflict, Instability and Civil War in Syria and Iraq and the rise of ISIL

EU member states that had deployed militarily in Iraq enjoyed a sigh of relief as they joined in on the US withdrawal in 2011. The power vacuum that ensued was filled by the upheavals of the Arab Spring, rising trends of conflictual multipolarity and clampdowns on Sunni opposition groups by both Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

This left the EU with two dilemmas: an unwillingness to reengage in the region, and a reluctance to support the Sunni insurgency out of fear of supporting violent jihadists, both complicated by an acknowledged need to stem further Sunni marginalization. These two dilemmas were to add complications to the Turkey-EU relationship.

In 2011, Turkey soon emerged as the most vocal actor calling for a military intervention in Syria, initially as a humanitarian act to provide safe zones for civilians, but subsequently as a means to force Assad to step down (Stein, 2014). By November 2011, Turkey began cooperating closely with Qatar to support the exiled Syrian opposition and provide training and political support, officially calling for an intervention to establish buffer zones in Syria. By 2012, Turkey was openly calling for a much larger military intervention, also including a no-fly zone, and US-led strikes in Syria, a policy that continued well into 2015 (The New York Times, 2015.). The Turkish reaction stemmed from both defensive interests, such as limiting spill-overs and regional instability, and revisionist aims, such as the replacement of Assad with a political entity more lenient to Turkish interests.

The EU was both internally divided on intervention—with France and the UK in favour, and Germany, Italy and others against—and reluctant to reengage in the region. When Turkey again evoked NATO's Article 4 following Assad's June 2012 downing of a Turkish F-4 Phantom jet, Germany and the Netherlands (and subsequently Spain) did deploy Patriot missile batteries in Turkey under the NATO umbrella. Aside from that, and as disagreements between Turkey and the US mounted over Assad's August 2013 chemical attack in Ghouta, Syria, European military and diplomatic involvement remained marginal (Pierini, 2016:11-12). In the meantime, Turkey was increasingly exposed to spill overs from the war, including the Reyhanlı terror attack in

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[14] For more on the Eastern Mediterranean energy discoveries see FEUTURE Energy papers.
[15] See for instance Karbuz (2014) and Fischer (2016).

2013, dangerous escalations with Syrian regime forces, as well as the flow of refugees fleeing the conflicts. Failing to find any of its traditional partners willing to take stronger action against the Assad regime, Turkey forged alliances of convenience with Qatar, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the context of support to various Syrian opposition groups.

Disagreements between Turkey and the EU grew in the post-2014 period, in the wake of ISIL's lightning advance in Iraq. While Europe and the US quickly moved to prioritize the war against ISIL and support for Baghdad and Erbil on the front lines, Turkey continued to argue that Syria and the Assad regime—as well as the sectarian policies implemented by Iraq's PM Maliki that discriminated against Iraq's Sunni population—represented the real cause of ISIL. Thus, any attempt to defeat the group without also dealing with Assad would amount to a simple curing of the symptom while overlooking the disease (Pierini, 2016:4-14). These divergences, while largely political and strategic, also carried over to the foreign policy and security realm and played a fundamental role in widening the wedge between Ankara and Brussels in the ensuing period.

As ISIL burst into prominence in 2014, European states began providing intelligence and military support to the KRG and other Kurdish groups in Sinjar (The Guardian, 2014) in Iraq and then in support of the YPG groups under siege in Kobanê (European Commission, 2014), a Syrian town bordering Turkey. In September 2014, President Erdoğan tellingly responded to this: "The world is trying to bring a coalition together to cooperate against the threat of IS[IL]. While the IS[IL] terror organization is causing turmoil in the Middle East, there has been ongoing PKK terror in my country for the last 32 years and yet the world was never troubled by it. Why? […] When you look at its [PKK] branches, you see that they are all fed from Europe. All financial support is coming from there—arms, too. Why didn't this terror organization ever trouble these European friends? Because this terror organization did not carry the name 'Islam.'" (Daloğlu, 2014).

This statement was made at a time when the Peace Process was still on track[16]—to end formally in July 2015—and Turkey ended up supporting the YPG's fight against ISIL in Kobanê through the deployment of Ankara's one regional Kurdish ally, the KRG's Peshmerga forces in the city. But the conflict over European support for the Kurdish PYD/YPG in Syria would only escalate further.

Conversely, the EU not only criticized Turkey for not doing more to help the YPG-led Kurds in Kobanê (European Parliament, 2014), it was also openly concerned about Turkey's (as well as Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's) support of a number of ANSAs in Syria, some of which held violent Jihadist leanings. As scores of disgruntled European citizens left Europe to join ISIL and other jihadist organizations (The Soufan Group, 2015), the EU grew increasingly worried about Turkey's lax border controls with Syria. In response, on several occasions Turkey publicly noted that it had warned EU states about one of the Charlie Hebdo attackers in January 2015 (Daily

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[16] PYD leader Salih Muslim visited Turkey on a number of occasions, with officials in Ankara arguing that if the PYD constrains its territorial expansion and distances itself from the Assad regime, "it could become a rational actor and have a say in Syria's future." Turkey also coordinated with the PYD on February 2015 to relocate the Tomb of Suleiman Shah, a Turkish exclave that was surrounded by ISIS at the time. (Ozer, 2016); (Selvi, 2015).

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Sabah, 2015) and one of the 13 November 2015 Paris attackers without having heard back from
France (Uras, 2015).

2.4. Phase 3 – 2015-2018: The refugee crisis, ISIL, the PKK and its affiliates, and conflictual multipolarity now with Russia in the mix

The challenges posed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, along with the increasing gap between
Turkish and European actions and interests in the region – in part propagated by Turkey's
increasing revisionist tendencies – ushered a switch from "cooperation with caveats" into a
mixture of cooperation and conflict. Since mid-2015, the Middle East has added more conflict
than cooperation to EU-Turkey relations, resulting in what we call a period of "conflictual
cooperation". Arguably, however, the March 2016 refugee "statement" and ISIL's targeting of
Turkish and European capitals kept certain alignments favouring cooperation alive.

The reignited conflict with the PKK in 2015 compelled Turkey to put further pressure on its
affiliate PYD/YPG in Syria, as the Kurdish issue gained further salience as a source of conflict
between Turkey and the EU. For the EU, this period saw ISIL become the number one security
challenge following the November 2015 Paris and the March 2016 Brussels terror attacks.
Worries over the infiltration of ISIL members into the refugee stream in 2015, issuing further
travel warnings for tourists visiting Turkey, and, as a final development, the feared return of
European foreign fighters from Syria dominated European security discussions during the period.
Often heralded in Europe as a success, the Turkey-EU migration statement is an example of the
ad hoc transactional approach that could predominate in the near future.

Finally, Turkey's turn, first against Russia over Moscow's targeting of Turkmen groups in Syria,
and then towards Russia during the tumultuous summer of 2016, added further complications
with the EU.

Securitization of the Kurdish issue vs. increasing European support

The resumption of the conflict between the PKK and Turkey in 2015 and European support to
the PYD/YPG became a major source of friction in EU-Turkey relations (European Commission,
2016). Meanwhile, Turkey saw the territorial expansion of the PYD/YPG with the tacit support of
the US and some EU member states as problematic for its national security—one of the reasons
for Turkey's intervention in Syria under Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) and later Operation
Olive Branch (OOB).

Europe's reaction to OES was mostly positive, albeit with a reservation that it not evolve into an
open conflict between OES groups and the EU- and US-supported YPG in Syria. The European
position is summed up by the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee member Elmar
Brok:

> It is much too complicated. Let's see that: First of all, we welcome that Turkey takes
> measures against ISIS, as it is a common interest. Secondly, we welcome that the
> Syrian Kurds fight against ISIS. Thirdly - perhaps it is not good in this situation - we
> have been concerned that, you might be by one side, or the other side, they [Syrian

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Kurds] may increase their region of influence outside the traditional zone of influence. And fourthly, that the Turkish government tries to make the connection between one and three. (Hurriyet, 2016).

The European reaction towards OOB, in turn, far less enthusiastic. Whereas some European leaders highlighted Turkey's right to self-defense initially, criticism towards the Turkish operations rose after the UNSC Resolution 2401 on a temporary ceasefire in Syria, more recently culminating in a non-binding resolution by the European Parliament calling for Turkey to withdraw its military personnel in Syria – much to the dismay of Ankara.[17]

Ankara's staunch opposition to Kurdish independence over worries that it would exacerbate its domestic Kurdish seperatist movement, especially in a context where the PKK (which draws support from this movement) and its affiliates have gained unprecedented international recognition and support, also drove Turkey's recent decision to turn its back on Masoud Barzani in Erbil, and enhance cooperation with Iran and Baghdad instead. Yet Turkey's position also reflected an alignment with Europe and calls for respecting territorial integrity of Iraq.

ISIL terrorism in Europe and Turkey, İncirlik, and joint efforts

ISIL also expanded its terrorist campaign against Turkey in 2015-2016, targeting Turkish border towns through rocket attacks, and conducting major terror attacks against political rallies, tourist sites and infrastructure. Fear that ISIL militants could cross into Europe and Turkey disguised as migrants to mount attacks were compounded by reports that traced at least four such incidents of ISIL militants reaching Europe to carry out attacks via the Eastern Mediterranean route.[18] The 2016 EU-Turkey migration statement was accompanied by further cooperation on securing the Turkish-Greek coasts and Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq. These events led to an increased targeting of ISIL cells in Turkey, as exemplified by the spike in arrests of ISIL suspects after 2016 (Independent, 2017). In Istanbul alone, Turkish law enforcement detained 968 ISIL suspects in 136 operations from August 2016-September 2017, and deported an additional 940 people over suspected ties to ISIL (Anadolu Agency, 2017). Turkey also expanded its border control measures, including beginning construction of a wall that would span the entirety of Turkey's borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Turkey's increasing cooperation with other states, including with the EU, on tracing suspected jihadists also boosted the capacity of authorities to intercept the transit of foreign fighters. By mid-2017, Turkish authorities "had recorded the names of 53,781 individuals from 146 countries whose State of residence feared they might attempt to join the fight in Syria and Iraq" (Barrett, 2017:16).

The threat was no less visible in Europe, as France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden suffered terror attacks perpetrated by ISIL militants or those inspired by the organization. Pushing the ISIL threat back from European borders is of key interest to European officials, as is the prospect of making it more difficult for jihadist FTF's to get in and

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[17] See for instance, (Hurriyet, 2018 January), (Hurriyet, 2018 February), (Anadolu Agency, 2018), (Euronews 2018), (Reuters, 2018 January) and (Reuters, 2018 March).
[18] See Faiola & Mekhennet (2016) and Rotella et al. (2016). Also see (Reuters, 2016).

out of ISIL-held territories. This is even truer as ISIL loses its territorial hold in the Levant, and as fears of returning foreign fighters intensify. Recent estimates suggest that 5,718 Western European citizens had joined ISIL (Barrett, 2017), 30 percent of which had already returned to their countries of origin (RAN, 2017). Beyond returning foreign fighters, ISIL also expanded its terror campaign in Europe—for example, French authorities foiled 12 plots in January-September 2017 (Barrett, 2017).

Turkey's operations against ISIL notably through OES, therefore, were welcomed by European authorities. However, they would come at the expense of tactical concerns relating to disagreements surrounding the PYD/YPG and strategic concerns over expanding relations between Russia and Turkey. On the bilateral realm, whereas intelligence cooperation between the EU and Turkey has improved over time, mutual accusations of not taking sufficient action against the flow of ISIL militants has continued to plague the relationship (The Guardian, 2016).

Turkey's bilateral back and forth on *Russia* in *Syria* – another double-edged sword for the EU

On 25 November 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet on the Turkish-Syrian border after a series of Russian violations of Turkish airspace. Whereas NATO supported Turkey rhetorically, little practical support was offered—with the sides instead focusing on de-escalating tensions. Russia hit Turkey with sanctions on trade, energy and—most visibly—on the tourism sector. It also took measures to curtail the freedom of action of Turkey and NATO in Syria by installing advanced anti-access/area denial systems.

This was a blow to Turkey's two primary concerns, security and the economy, and led in June 2016 to President Erdoğan issuing a rare apology to President Putin (BBC, 2016). Already strained relations between Turkey and its Western allies in the EU, NATO and the US were exacerbated following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, after which the Turkish-Russian reconciliation was accelerated. Facing increasing threats from both ISIL and PYD's expansionism and finding no support from its Western or regional partners for a military operation in Syria, Turkey instead chose to launch Operation Euphrates Shield. The Turkish operation became possible after the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, which allowed Turkey to conduct OES free of harassment from Russian air defences, and to some extent insulated from escalations with Syrian regime forces. Turkey's military cooperation with Russia soon trickled down to political cooperation in determining Syria's future, beyond the auspices of the EU and US, and created a Turkish dependency on Moscow. As the fight against ISIL comes to a close, Turkey will need to continue collaborating with Russia in order to safeguard its core interests in Syria or otherwise risk having no say over what could very well be the worst-case scenario for Turkey's Syria policy—a country where the Assad regime stays in power, Russia establishes a permanent military presence, Iran greatly expands its political and military influence, and PKK affiliates controls a significant amount of Syrian territory with various degrees of autonomy— ironically many of which are eventualities that Russia's presence in Syria facilitated. More

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recently, the cooperation with Russia also yielded Ankara the leverage to conduct OOB in north-western Syria.

Russia capitalized on this opportunity to further cement Turkish dependencies on the energy, economy, and political fronts by adding the field of security—including through the potential sales of S-400 missile defence systems. Therefore, while the Western security architecture remains indispensable for Turkey, Moscow has been able to capitalize on the mix of Turkish threat perceptions and isolation in Syria to sow dependencies that it can exploit to undermine the security cooperation between EU/NATO and Turkey. Indeed, the isolation that Turkey currently finds itself in its internal and regional threat perceptions represents a potential source of conflict for EU-Turkey relations, regardless of the partnerships that Turkey establishes beyond the Western architecture.

Reorientation of Turkey's policy towards regional powers – both good and bad for the EU

Growing intra-Arab and Turkish tensions on the future of the regional order in the Middle East have contributed to a further reorientation of Turkey's priorities. Turkish attempts to find regional partners over the Syrian issue resulted in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Yet Turkey's partnership with Qatar was deemed as more critical by Ankara, as put to test by the diplomatic and economic isolation of Qatar imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in June 2017.[19] Turkey quickly announced its support for Doha, sending troops to Turkey's first overseas military base, officially opened in 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2017). Conversely, closer relations with Qatar would further strain Ankara's ties with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Al-Sisi's Egypt.

In Iraq, the independence referendum that the KRG held on 25 September 2017 pushed Ankara to align with Baghdad and Tehran. After the results were announced, military commanders from Turkey and Iran met in September 2017 to emphasize their mutual cross-border cooperation and openly oppose the KRG referendum results. With these renewed commitments in place, the possibility for joint military action against the PKK and its affiliates in Shingal and Qandil mountains has soared.

Despite the previous warming of relations between Ankara and Erbil, Ankara reaffirmed its century-old policies of preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq and preventing future KRI independence. On these, the EU and Turkey's interests were aligned, but each for their own separate reasons. The EU support for Iraq's territorial integrity stemmed from fears among major EU member states that KRI's independence would weaken Iraq and disrupt focus on fighting ISIL—as well as potentially put European troops in the country in harm's way—whereas Ankara fears that KRI independence would not only encourage its own Kurdish population to follow suit but also trigger an era of regional instability.

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[19] For more, please see Feuture Online Paper No.11 "Politics and Turkey-EU Relations: Drivers from the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods" by Bennett Clifford, Dustin Gilbreath, and Justine Louis.

Interestingly, Turkey, for its part, chose to merely observe Iran and Iraq mobilising the Iraqi paramilitary units (Hashd Al-Shabi) to control the KRG-controlled disputed territories of Iraq. Turkey did not take part in any cross-border military action, reducing the severity of the incident's damage to Turkey-KRG relations. However, without Turkey's acquiescence, the pro-Iranian Hashd Al-Shabi would have hesitated to take over Kirkuk or other disputed territories.

Normalization talks with Israel, meanwhile, proceeded at a slow but steady pace, resulting in the return of ambassadors in late 2016 and lofty plans to enhance economic cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet, a resumption of full Turkey-Israel cooperation would clash with Turkey's ambition to emerge as a regional leader in the Middle East, leading Turkish authorities to repeatedly criticise Israel in public, particularly in the wake of Israel's support for the KRG referendum and reports of growing covert ties between Israel, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Palestinian demonstrations at Jerusalem's holy sites in July 2017 and the US's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017 were two events that led Turkey to resume its harsh criticism of Israel (and the US) with potentially adverse effects on the Turkey-Israel reconciliation process. A further regional fault line has taken shape around Turkey and Qatar against the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt (as well as Israel and the US). In this equation, Ankara's short-term interests, especially in Syria, drove it into a hesitant cooperation with the Iran-Russia axis on the one hand and Qatar on the other. Whereas this has so far not affected EU-Turkey security relations, the risk for the relationship is the potential path dependency that Turkey may experience, where short-term tactical choices may jeopardize long-term strategic interests – notably over defence cooperation with the West.

The status of the relationship as of March 2018

Turkey and the EU's security agenda overlap in several regards, including in Turkey's greater role in the anti-ISIL coalition, increased Turkish border security, Turkey's expanding domestic counterterrorism campaign against ISIL, and direct EU-Turkey cooperation in the Aegean over the human security aspect of the refugee and migrant flows. Although the position of the two sides differ in some areas, they do indeed continue to converge on such issues as fighting ISIL, preserving the Iran nuclear deal, safeguarding Iraqi territorial integrity, and refuting the US's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Meanwhile, areas of divergence, such as Turkey's expanded cooperation with Russia and Iran, have not produced a conflictual dynamic in the EU-Turkey security relationship for the time being—though this may come to jeopardize Turkey-EU security relationship over the long term as exemplified by the increasing military cooperation between Turkey and Russia. The biggest source of conflict between the EU and Turkey is over the Kurdish issue in Turkey and Syria, where Ankara has come under fire from Brussels and EU member states over the scope of its counterterrorism operations against PKK in south-eastern Turkey, whereas Ankara in turn has severely condemned the continued backing of the PYD by its Western allies. The recent OOB has further exacerbated this divide.

Indeed, while short-term security challenges represent continued areas of cooperation and overlap between the EU and Turkey, these have assumed more of an ad hoc or transactional

dimension as a result of the deep political polarization between the two actors since the failed July coup.[20]

Furthermore, from the standpoint of the EU, increasing geopolitical competition in Middle East and North Africa to define a 'new regional order' presents numerous risks and challenges. While EU actors have thus far sought to maintain a degree of impartiality in the context of both Saudi-Iran and intra-Arab/Turkish tensions, not least as a means to preserve a potential mediating role and to protect commercial relations with both sides, maintaining such balance is likely to be a challenge in future.

3. Key drivers and conflictual cooperation on the Middle East through 2023

3.1. Terrorism and Radicalization

Since the end of the Cold War, international terrorism has emerged as among the most prominent security threats for both Europe and Turkey and is likely to remain a key driver for EU-Turkey security relations well into the future. The broader Middle Eastern region appears set to retain its position as the main locus of this concern, yet broader trends of political and even religious or ideological radicalization are present at the global level as well. Leaving the issue of Kurdish ANSAs such as the PKK and PYD/YPG to the following section, transnational terrorism and radicalization has impacted EU-Turkey relations in different ways, at times resulting in cooperation, and in other instances, disagreement and conflict.

9/11 displayed the disruptive capacity of ANSA's, leading to shifts in security doctrines and perceptions. Major security concerns moved from the eventuality of conventional intra-state conflicts to the threat of transnational terrorism and ANSA's. Turkey and the EU collaborated on these emerging threats, particularly in assisting US authorities in the fight against Al-Qaeda, against the Taliban in Afghanistan and in broader intelligence sharing and the tracing of radicalized individuals. The shared threat of terrorism and the joint participation of EU and Turkish troops in various multilateral security efforts initially brought EU-Turkey cooperation close to outright convergence, a dynamic also facilitated by the EU's decision to recognize the PKK as a terror group in 2002.

But it also meant that the EU added Hamas to its list of recognized terror groups in 2003. This was the first foray into the conflictual potential various political Islamist ANSA's held out for EU-Turkey relations. As the AKP assumed power in Ankara in 2002, Hamas became a point of contention. While Europe, the US and Israel moved to boycott Hamas following its electoral victory in 2006, Turkey's government welcomed Hamas leaders to Turkey and refused to cut ties

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with the group, arguing that engagement represented the best means to moderate the group's positions. Fuel was added to this fire as the AKP government displayed strong support not merely for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya but also various political Islamist ANSA's in Syria and Libya following the 2011 Arab uprisings. This became a source of conflict as Ankara rallied for intervention against the Assad regime and the West hesitated due to fears that this would entail support for radical Islamist groups that could later constitute threats to Europe.

As Turkey strengthened its anti-ISIL policy in Syria, and enhanced efforts aimed at border control and anti-smuggling operations, cooperation resumed with Europe. This threat, which includes potential wild card scenarios such as the use of WMD in terrorist attacks, necessitates the sides to develop strong cooperation on intelligence sharing, border security, targeting smuggling networks, and exchange of best practices over the long-term. Yet, terrorism and radicalization retain their potential to see Europe and Turkey vacillate back and forth between conflict and cooperation in the years to come as deep-seated differences on how to deal with such ANSA groups remain in place. Disagreements are most pronounced in terms of prioritization and the hierarchy of threats, definitions of terrorism and ANSA's and understandings as to the root causes for radicalization and terrorism in the region. Indeed, the return to cooperation on ISIL has come in concert with European concerns that Turkey has cooperated with the Al Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idlib (Lister, 2017; Hussein, November 2017), or other controversial ANSAs such as Ahrar al-Sham and, in particular, highly conflictual differences on the Kurdish ANSAs PKK and PYD/PYD, to which we now turn. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the challenges that foreign fighters and radicalization pose over the long term create an impetus for cooperation between the EU and Turkey.

3.2. The Kurdish Issue

The Kurdish issue has been an almost constant source of security related conflict between Turkey and the EU. Though trumped by anti-Soviet Cold War concerns in the 80's, Europe became increasingly concerned with the human rights violations in Turkey. European countries were also critical of the cross border operations launched by Turkey in response to the attacks staged by the PKK against Turkey out of Syria and Iraq since 1984. (Kirişci, Winrow, 1997). Conversely, Europe has long been perceived by Turkey—even after the recognition of the PKK as a terror group in 2002—as a supporter of the PKK, e.g. through Greece and Italy briefly harbouring Öcalan after he was evicted from Syria in 1998, or through the debates surrounding PKK affiliated political offices and media outlets in Europe.

Enjoying a significant proportion of the religiously conservative Kurdish vote and initially siding with the Kurds against the guardians of the old 'deep state', the AKP made a number of attempts at outreach to the Kurds and the PKK, as the so-called Oslo talks from around 2008, the Kurdish opening of 2009, and the 2012-2015 peace process exemplify. As the PKK reorganized itself regionally after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and resumed its violent campaign against Turkey in 2004, Turkey decided to pursue the PKK in Iraqi Qandil mountain hideouts. As Turkish

forces continued their military campaign, pressure from European and other Western partners increased, due to worries that these would further destabilize Iraq.

But it has been the Syrian conflict, especially since the fall 2014 ISIL siege of Kobanê, that pushed Turkey and EU further apart on the Kurdish issue. To EU members engaged in OIR, the PYD/YPG leadership of the Kurdish controlled areas—under the umbrella of SDF since October 2015—has been the most Western in orientation, and the most capable in the pursuit of Europe's security priority, defeat of ISIL. Especially after the collapse of the Kurdish peace process in Turkey as a result of political and security factors in 2015, the securitization of the Kurdish issue once again has exacerbated divisions between the EU and Turkey over the PYD/YPG. Turkey's recent OOB against PYD/YPG has deepened these divides. Against the limited support offered to the Turkish position at the outset of the operation by European leaders,[21] the European Parliament has recently adopted a non-binding resolution calling for Turkey to withdraw its troops in Syria, drawing a strong rebuke from Ankara. (Euronews, 2018).

As Syria slowly enters the very difficult stage of picking up the tatters of its devastating civil war, the Kurdish issue is likely to retain salience, impact and durability as a source of conflict between the EU and Turkey. This is the case especially since President Erdoğan today—and even more so since the failed coup attempt in July 2016—is able to retain his political power through the co-opting of the Turkish nationalist narrative and party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). With no less than three elections approaching before the end of 2019, it is unlikely that President Erdoğan will do much to accommodate the European wish to de-securitize the issue. On the contrary, this is likely to remain a prominent conflictual driver for EU-Turkey relations in the years ahead.[22]

3.3. Power Vacuums and Conflictual Multipolarity

The present instability, conflict and civil wars gripping the broader Middle Eastern region hold important security implications for both Ankara and European capitals and will continue to do so well into the future. Interested primarily in maintaining regional stability, the EU has played a rather distant role, whereas Turkey has been more proactive in seeking to shape regional developments and power struggles.

In the midst of mounting political tensions and overlapping geopolitical ruptures among major regional and international actors, both the EU and Turkey have nonetheless cooperated in the security domain, demonstrating the existence of important structural drivers of cooperation

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[21] See for instance, (Hurriyet, 2018 January) and (Hurriyet, 2018 February).

[22] As always, a number of wild cards are possible here. Concerns with regional stability and being one step ahead of returning jihadists could see EU countries accommodate Turkey on the Kurdish issue. Also, Erdoğan has been the one Turkish leader to go the furthest when it comes to outreach and attempts at a peaceful political settlement with the Kurds in Turkey, having enjoyed significant electoral support by religiously conservative Kurds. It is not entirely out of the question that he could meet the EU concerns and make some accommodations on the Kurdish issue in order to muster Kurdish support at the polls, and possibly to ensure the would-be highly popular visa liberalization to Europe, now blocked by Europe's disapproval of Turkey's broad—and perceived anti-Kurdish—anti-terror laws.

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underpinning the EU-Turkey relationship. Indeed, and perhaps paradoxically, instability and conflict in the MENA since 2011 have actually presented drivers for enhanced ad hoc cooperation between the two countries, instances that would not have necessarily been there, or have the same weight over the broader bilateral relationship, in the absence of such channels of cooperation on urgent security matters emanating from the Middle East. Yet this cooperation has been limited due to a divergence on perceptions and prioritizations.

Both Turkey and the EU share an interest in promoting stability, conflict resolution and sustainable development in the region (2015 ENP; 2016 EUGS; 2011 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs), both are united in supporting the territorial integrity of states in the broader Middle East, cooperate in anti-terrorism and oppose the spread of WMD. Intelligence cooperation, particularly in the fight against ISIL and Al-Qaeda, military-to-military contacts under NATO in Afghanistan and elsewhere, all represent areas of cooperation in the security interests of the two actors when it comes to the Middle East. For both Ankara and Brussels, promoting regional stability remains one of the first lines of preventing homeland security challenges, as exemplified by the emergence of ISIL in through the instability in Iraq and Syria.

Beyond traditional terrorist attacks, non-state actors have shown a willingness to obtain and utilize WMDs. ISIL has already conducted chemical attacks in Syria[23] and Iraq.[24] Moreover, the organization has drawn a large pool of foreign and local fighters with critical competencies, as exemplified by one of the Saddam regime's chemical engineers, Abu Malik, who was killed among the ISIL ranks according to US CENTCOM.[25] As such, one key area of cooperation for the EU and Turkey is on reducing the threat of ANSAs from obtaining WMD material and expertise, and utilizing these in terrorist attacks against the two sides. As this would necessitate strong cooperation on intelligence sharing, border security, and targeting smuggling networks, it may also emerge as a driver of cooperation for the EU and Turkey.

The EU and Turkey are also likely to see cooperation enhanced by their mutual interest in preserving the Iranian nuclear deal, particularly in light of the uncertainty surrounding US policy. If the deal collapses, the EU and Turkey may seek to salvage the agreement, seek out alternative means of preventing proliferation or cooperate in de-escalating tensions in order to prevent military escalations, likely leading to a cooperation scenario. In the long run, if Iran again becomes a proliferation risk, the two sides will be compelled to minimize the threats posed by a nuclear Iran, with cooperation scenario becoming more likely. Iran may indeed emerge as a important area of cooperation between Turkey and the EU, as both tend to approach the issue through similar prisms, prioritizing multilateralism, diplomacy and economic-political engagement over isolation and military threats, notwithstanding the internal divisions on the issue among EU member states. However, the sides may diverge on the exact approach to take

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[23] United Nations (2016, August 30) "INTERVIEW: The Syrian forces and ISIL used toxic chemicals as weapons – report" https://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54795#.We8eR2iCxnI.
[24] O'Connor, T (2017, April 17) "ISIS Militants Launch Multiple Chemical Weapons Attacks On Iraqi Troops" http://www.newsweek.com/isis-militants-chemical-weapons-attack-soldiers-iraq-585174.
[25] BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31070249, Accessed on: October 16, 2017.

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towards Iran, especially given reservations about Iran's role and position on Syria, Iraq, Israel and the region in general.

There is little doubt that the conflicts and civil wars in Syria and Iraq represent the most pressing security drivers on EU-Turkey relations linked to regional instability and state crisis in the Middle East. Looking to the future, the shared EU and Turkish stance on the KRG's referendum and the need to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq represent areas of political cooperation between the EU and Turkey. Still, the relative convergence manifested in their shared opposition to the Iraqi Kurdistan referendum has not produced cooperation dynamics, with the EU refraining from playing a central role in mediating tensions, and Turkey opting to cooperate with Baghdad and Tehran instead. In Syria, Turkey's continued cooperation with Russia and Iran, combined with Ankara's official support for the UN-led Geneva process, may create trouble in the EU-Turkey relationship, depending on the results of the Astana and Sochi process and Turkish medium-to-long term objectives in Syria. If Turkey is shown to resist calls to withdraw from northern or north-western Syria or seek to expand its presence into Northern Iraq, such action is likely to cause considerable tensions with European capitals.

Turkey's support for Qatar against the Saudi-UAE-Egyptian axis has not had major effects on Turkey-EU relations so far. However, the axis led by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt (and Israel), is also aimed at curbing Iranian influence in the region and enjoys support from the US Trump administration. Therefore, the issue may serve as a complicating factor for Turkey's relations with the 'West', however it is unlikely to produce salient results for EU-Turkey relationship unless EU member states move to assume a stronger position on the issue.

If peace prevails in Syria, reconstruction will also be on the agenda of the international community. Turkey already stands as one of the main hubs of emergency and development assistance into Syria and a major player in the international response to the Syrian crisis. Currently, Turkey also stands as the backer of numerous (primarily Sunni Arab) non-state actors, utilizing its ties with these groups for conflict management and stabilization purposes as part of its joint initiative with Russia and Iran. Ankara also performs humanitarian and development functions, exercises some oversight in areas under Operation Euphrates Shield control, and has access to the rebel bastion in Idlib. Therefore, Turkey can facilitate the access of

EU Member States and civil society to promote reconstruction efforts in rebel held areas in Syria or more closely coordinate its efforts with the Union. This could act as a source of cooperation.

Given the inherent unpredictability of the Middle East—a fact exemplified by the shifting US position as well as Russia's resurgence—it is difficult to foresee how EU and Turkey relations will be affected. Potential scenarios of cooperation include:

   a) The potential for the Turkish position to increasingly become defensive in nature which would push Turkey to align more closely with NATO;
   b) The (re)alignment of EU-Turkish interests to restore stability in the region through peacekeeping, reconstruction and mediation efforts;

c) Isolationism of the United States, which may push the EU and Turkey to fill the vacuum or pacify/manage the results of US retrenchment;

d) New sources of instability and conflict in the region which push the EU and Turkey to play complementary roles in conflict prevention, managing spillovers or reconstruction.

On the other hand, conflict scenarios are likely to arise if:

a) The EU perceives Turkish engagement in the Middle East as detrimental to regional stability and its security interests;

b) If Ankara's position aligns more closely with that of its "frenemies" in Moscow and Tehran and;

c) Turkey and the EU find themselves backing different factions (different states or different non-state actors) in a given crisis;

d) The political positions of the two sides diverge significantly in a given crisis, such as vis-à-vis Israel.

In any case, as this paper has unfolded, a balancing act between cooperation and conflict is the most likely to prevail, also as a result of the driver of the conflicting multipolarity and power vacuums that is likely to continue.

4. Conclusion

The Middle East has undergone many tribulations over the past two decades, with the region presenting a host of security challenges that have affected the European Union, Turkey as well as their bilateral security relationship.

Looking at the developments chronologically, this paper has identified three interlinked drivers of Turkey-EU relations. The first is the general instability and trends of conflictual multipolarity brought forth by the decline of state authority, the shifting role of external powers (notably US and Russia), growing pro-activism of regional states and the deepening of intra-regional fault lines. These developments gave rise to armed non-state actors (as enemies or allies) and the spread of civil and proxy warfare. In this equation, Turkey and the EU have sometimes been at odds, with Ankara seeking to play a more direct role in shaping regional affairs compared to the EU's hesitance and reluctance to become heavily involved in the region. The flow of weapons and militants to conflicts in the region has internationalized and accelerated the challenges posed by such actors.

Secondly, and tied to the former, is the rise of transnational terrorism as a direct threat to European and Turkish security, and the exacerbation of domestic terrorism threats by transnational networks and regional developments. In time, the threat posed initially by al-Qaeda has been overshadowed by a much more prominent actor, ISIL, which has transformed the transnational jihadist cause and broadened the threats posed by international terrorism. The third driver also relates to armed non-state actors, namely the rising significance of different Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria in affecting regional developments. Turkey has been irked by the prospect of Kurdish independence in Iraq while perceiving major threats emanating from the

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PKK affiliate PYD/YPG in Syria, whereas many of its Western partners have actively collaborated with the latter to fight against ISIL. This is likely to continue as a source of conflict.

The summary of trends and events provided above points to the conclusion that the EU and Turkey security relationship has expressed hints of all three idealized scenarios, convergence, cooperation and conflict. When the challenges emanate from hard security issues, that have a direct impact on both parties, such as terrorism and WMD, we see an imperative to converge or at least cooperate between the two sides. When instead there are soft security challenges that affect one or both parties indirectly, we see lesser imperative to cooperate, with the sides oscillating between muted conflict or cooperation depending on the political positioning of both sides – such as on the Israel file. The biggest sources of conflict come in cases where one side perceives hard security threats whereas the other does not necessarily share this perception or its immediacy – such as the PYD and initially ISIL. Indeed, such issues have the most direct bearing on the bilateral EU-Turkey relations beyond security.

Also complicated by political drivers, the EU-Turkey security relationship at the time shows aspects of a conflictual cooperation, which we predict is likely to persist over the next few years. The EU-Turkey security relationship is far from a zero-sum game, which is hard to say for many other shifting partnerships one can find in the Middle East, and the benefits of cooperation mostly outweigh the costs. However, one should also note the key areas of divergence between European capitals and Ankara on the nature of the security challenges (or opportunities) in the region, their prioritization, and the necessary course of action (or inaction) that should be taken in face of them. Such items create room for conflict, while also downgrading potential areas of convergence into cooperation. With one of the most critical drivers of tension between the EU and Turkey, the Kurdish issue, entering a new phase after the expansion of PYD/YPG's role as a military and political actor, the funnelling of weapons to YPG by NATO Member States, and subsequent Turkish decision to take military action against PYD/YPG beginning with OOB. The Turkey-EU security partnership is experiencing one of its most fundamental crises. This is further complicated by a growing isolation that has pushed Turkey to seek more flexible partnerships to address its core security interests, mainly with Russia and to some extent with Iran, both of which are also rivals of the EU and Turkey.

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ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighbourhood.

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