

**PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLOMOUC**

**Faculty of Arts**

**Department of Political Science and European Studies**

**Turkey and NATO: rifting away or a pragmatic turbulence?**

**Bachelor's Thesis**

**Patrik Zvirinský**

**Thesis Promoter**

**Bacik Gökhan, prof. Dr.**

**OLOMOUC 2018**

I hereby declare that this Thesis is solely my own work and I have written it with the help of cited sources and literature.

Olomouc, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

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Patrik Zvirinský

I would like to thank Bacik Gökhan, prof. Dr., for his kindness and constructive feedback, which tremendously helped me progress with this Thesis. I would also like to thank my parents for their unconditional support throughout the years of my studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkey's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 was by many historians considered a crucial development for the alliance in the early years of its existence. Initially, NATO gained a capable and significant ally in the turbulent years of the Cold War, with the common aim of fighting against the Soviet expansionism. However, during the Cold War years, Turkey failed to follow essential principles, such as democracy, individual liberty or the rule of law, which NATO was founded upon. At the time, all these scarcities were overlooked due to Turkey's strategic and geopolitical importance. Eventually, with the end of the Cold War, came the change of NATO's strategy. It started to pursue the policy of a full integration of Turkey in the transatlantic community by all possible means, in order to stabilize and secure its future position in the alliance. In other words, NATO started to impose pressure on Turkey to expedite their democratization process.

While Turkey made significant progress in the 1990s, the beginning of the new millennium foreshadowed turbulent times for NATO and Turkey. NATO-Turkey relations began deteriorating with the occurrence of countless disagreements over clashes of interests in foreign policies, the peak of which was after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, when Turkey's behavior dramatically altered. Currently, the tensions between NATO and Turkey are obvious, and are of a great concern for the transatlantic community.

The discussion on the impact of these tensions is extremely relevant nowadays. The developments in Turkey's foreign and domestic policy tend to demonstrate uncertainty about the future and pose many challenges for NATO. Since its entry in 1952, Turkey has always been considered a strong ally and played a crucial role in the Cold War times. However, with growing authoritarian shift, the evolution of Turkey's foreign policy assertiveness and the challenges that Turkey faces in the Middle East, Turkey has transformed into a self-contained actor in international relations.

This Thesis focuses primarily on the origins of the deterioration of the NATO-Turkey relations, particularly after the year 2000, and the impact of many crucial developments on NATO-Turkey relations. The remainder of this Thesis introduces three scenarios for the future outlook in Turkey and its implications for NATO.

The aim of this Thesis is to seek to answer two main questions. The primary research question is: *"Is Turkey likely to rift from NATO while searching for other strategic partnerships?"* The secondary research question is: *"Is NATO capable of maintaining such an unpredictable relationship, and if so, under what conditions?"*

A descriptive method is used throughout this Thesis for the purpose of outlining the basic events leading up to the current situation in NATO-Turkey relations. The analytical method is then used to examine this information in order to answer stated research questions and also derive three possible future outlook scenarios for Turkey.

This Thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the first theory, neorealism, as a relevant theory in terms of searching for patterns in the behavior of Turkey and in its relations towards NATO, particularly concerning the change in foreign policies and the change of interests. The second theory, strategic culture, is appropriate mainly in terms of analyzing the relevance of the historical experiences, developments and cultural influences in Turkey, which might have had an effect on its today's behavior.

The second chapter is divided into two parts; the first one provides a descriptive analysis of the impact of NATO's membership for Turkey and the impact it has had on mutual relations. It also points out major developments from this time and their effect on NATO-Turkey relations and prospects. The second part of this chapter is also going to provide a descriptive analysis of emerging disputes in the early Post-Cold War times and will further be divided into sub sections dealing with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the contribution of Turkey in the Balkans and its assertive character. The main purpose of the division into sub sections is to not only demonstrate instances of the Turkish approach being hesitant and indecisive, but also to present cases where Turkey manifested its ability to act decisively and play a crucial role in its contribution towards a common goal of the alliance.

The third chapter is divided into three parts and mainly draws the attention to critical developments in the NATO-Turkey relations in the post 2000s, while foreshadowing their growing deterioration. It also introduces the new phase of a sensitive relationship between NATO and Turkey, particularly through pointing out structural and ideological reasons responsible for the creation of this new phase. It concludes by discussing the impact and the significance of all these crucial events on NATO and Turkey.

The fourth and last chapter is dedicated to the three potential future scenarios. Each scenario introduces possible future outcomes in terms of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy and provides their implications for NATO-Turkey relations. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce possible future outlooks for NATO-Turkey relations, based on the analysis of the relationship in the previous chapters.

One of the substantial sources was the recently published book *Turkey and the West: Fault line in a troubled alliance*, written by Kemal Kirişçi. This book has supplemented this

Thesis with a thorough descriptive analysis of the NATO-Turkey relations and the author has also prefigured the possible impact of the recent developments on this turbulent relationship.

Furthermore, Turkey's evolution of ideology and foreign policy is examined in the *Alone in Virtue: The New Turkish Ideology in Turkey's Foreign Policy* by Szymon Ananicz, where he points out the growing assertiveness of Turkey in the Middle East. The growing international isolation is deepening the gap between Turkey and NATO because Turkey's foreign policy is unanimously subordinated to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). However, due to this work being published in 2015, it does not take into consideration the failed coup attempt in 2016 which is considered one of the crucial developments affecting the NATO-Turkey relations.

Inspiration was drawn from Alastair Johnston's International Security article *Thinking about Strategic Culture*. In this article he points out many definitions of strategic culture and different conclusions about its explanatory power in terms of state behavior. It also introduces the short history of the research on strategic culture and its effect on state behavior and draws attention to the growing interest in this field.

An International Studies Review article *Realism versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?*, written by John Glenn, focuses on explaining the perception of neorealist and strategic cultural approaches, concerning the behavior of states. In this article, he also recalls the book *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz, which is narrowly associated with the theory of neorealism. This book contributed to creating a general framework for explaining patterns of behavior of states and their interactions within the international system. (Jakobsen 2013)

The article *China and the SCO: Turkey looks East for security cooperation alternatives* published by Jan Weidenfeld in the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), made a significant contribution to this Thesis by introducing the relationship of Turkey with the SCO and providing different points of view on a potential membership. This article mainly describes Turkey's endeavors of joining the SCO as a bargaining chip in dealing with NATO, therefore China's experts are doubtful of Turkey's commitment to join the SCO. This article also contributed by introducing a perspective where it is currently very unlikely for Turkey to join the SCO. In addition, it provided suggestions for NATO to change their strategies towards Turkey to prevent its rift from the alliance.

An article *Judy Asks: Is Turkey Damaging NATO?*, written by Judy Dempsey who is a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe, was a beneficial source. It provided this Thesis with interesting perspectives on the discussion of Turkey leaving NATO or the damage that Turkey

does to the alliance. The conclusion of this article is that Turkey poses damage to the alliance as whole; however, many of its contributors agree that it is only in terms of undermining the political cohesion and not interrupting military cooperation with its allies. With this article being published early in 2018, it does not consider the crucial developments since the Iraqi invasion in 2003, when Turkey significantly interrupted military cooperation with its allies.

Due to the topicality of this Thesis, its literature relies primarily on secondary sources coming from news articles combined with a few research papers or foreign policy papers on this topic. Many of these secondary sources were critical in terms of describing the relevance of recent developments and putting them into context. With this in consideration, it is important to note that further research into the field could only be of benefit and will provide valuable insight into this multifaceted area.

# 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1. 1. Turkey's Relations with NATO: the Relevance of Strategic Culture and Pragmatism

Recent developments in the Middle East have created many challenges and disagreements between NATO and its valued long-term member, Turkey. One of the crucial factors in the deterioration of the NATO-Turkey relationship was the coup attempt of July 2016, when a group of military officials initiated actions to take over the main government institutions. This event is viewed by many scholars as a rapid turn in Turkish domestic and foreign policies. (McTighe 2017) However, this attempt failed and created a very uncertain situation in Turkey, especially concerning its relationship towards the West.

Furthermore, the civil war in Syria has posed a serious source of disagreements between NATO and Turkey regarding the approach towards the Assad regime. The behavior of Turkey can be considered unpredictable by its NATO allies, especially in terms of its current military intervention in northern Syria fighting against the Kurds controlled enclaves. However, this intervention may not be limited only to northern Syria, but might sooner or later spread to northern Iraq, where the situation is similar. (Stansfield 2018) How can these actions be explained or predicted? Currently, the discussion is stressing two main perspectives on this issue.

Firstly, there is a neorealist approach which seeks to explain the behavior of Turkey by searching for patterns of action and trying to describe the mechanic nature of international relations. Neorealism is mainly about power or interest, which is why it is relevant since Turkey is presently going through an adaptation process. Secondly, there is a strategic culture perspective which states: *"....that different states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites."* (Johnston 1995: 34) This perspective is relevant because neorealist theory itself does not have the ability to explain changes in culture. Turkey's political culture has changed rapidly in recent years, particularly because its elites are changing from Kemalist ideology towards Islamic ideology. Therefore, it is relevant to use the strategic culture concept to explain these cultural changes.

Founded by Kenneth Waltz, neorealist theory is by many scholars seen as a key theory in international relations. It seeks to explain and provide evidence to determine why states behave the way they do and how they interact with each other in global politics. This theory

can be employed in the troubled NATO-Turkey relationship, which we can currently observe. If we were to name a few main aspects that are essential for the neorealist theory, we would mention war as such, power seeking, power balancing, the avoidance of war, security competition, armaments business and finally, alliance formation. (Jakobsen 2013) Concerning current Turkey, we are able to observe few of these aspects such as armaments business and war as such. The armament business aspect can be linked to Turkey's recent purchase of the Russian-made S-400 missile batteries system<sup>1</sup>, which is a non-NATO air defense standard weapon system. (Knight 2017) The war aspect in this theory can be linked to the ongoing military operation in northern Syria where Turkey seeks to eliminate the Kurds from along its border. However, some perceptions of the neorealist theory are not exactly accurate. The purpose of neorealist theory is neither to predict the behavior of state nor explain any actual policies adopted by a state; instead its purpose is to seek for different patterns of behavior to be expected from states on the international level of politics. (Glenn 2009: 523) The neorealist theory is crucial in this case because if we employ it when considering Turkey, we can observe its rift with NATO, particularly in terms of interests and foreign policy.

On the other hand, the definition of strategic culture is quite complicated. Various kinds of literature on strategic culture derive different conclusions on what it means. Some literature explains strategic culture in deterministic terms, while other concludes that it does not have a significant effect on state behavior at all. (Johnston 1995: 63) How can understanding strategic culture help in international relations? *"It should provide decision-makers with a uniquely ordered set of strategic choices from which we can derive predictions about behavior."* (Johnston 1995: 45) In history, the first record of conducted research on state behavior was during World War II by cultural anthropologists and sociologists. Their objective was to explain and try to predict the behavior of Germany and Japan. With the eruption of the Cold War, the research on strategic culture was pushed into the background while the preferred research at that time mainly focused on the nuclear armaments issue and the deterrence theory. (Al-Rodhan 2015)

The debate discussing the behavior of states emerged again in the late 1980s when many scholars tried to predict the behavior of the Soviet Union. With the ongoing research many more strived to explain the effect of strategic culture on state behavior, simultaneously creating new definitions such as the one from Jack L. Snyder: *"sum total of ideals, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community*

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<sup>1</sup> The S-400 consists of four missiles with varying ranges, which were successfully tested in Syria. (Brennan 2018)

*have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [...] strategy*".(Snyder 1977) However, the boom in research on strategic culture mainly occurred in the international system of the post-Cold War era while it disturbed the dominance of realist and neo-realist theories in international relations. (Al Rodhan 2015) When trying to explain and predict the behavior of states nowadays, it is important to take into account the historical sets of experiences, developments and cultural influences. In regard of explaining the behavior of Turkey today, it is important to be familiar with its historical background reaching far into the Ottoman Empire era.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Turkey, we can observe the emergence of a very pragmatic behavior in its decision-making process. This is clearly demonstrated in the NATO-Turkey relationship today. After the coup attempt, Erdogan felt that the shift towards the Western cultures had ended. Therefore, he initiated a search for alternatives that can be clearly observed in the recent purchase of the S-400 missile battery system from Russia. (Knight 2017) The symbolism of this action clearly demonstrates the pragmatic behavior of Turkey in today's politics. A long-term NATO member purchasing a highly developed missile system from Russia, NATO's archenemy, is a significant event describing the state of Turkey's relations with the West.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that using strategic culture in order to explain state behavior is comprised with the emotionality of states, such as national pride and the prestige of a state, and with the egoism of states while striving for national interests. (Al-Rodhan 2013) *"This approach brings a more holistic view to strategic culture because it accounts both for ideational variables and for the specific limitations encountered by states in the international system."* (Al-Rodhan 2015) Often argued by many scholars, it is important to understand strategic culture as a general approach to international politics, not as a single theory. Therefore, strategic culture and its importance for international politics can be found in supplementing neorealism, and thus competitively collaborating with each other. (Glenn 2009: 545)

Current tensions between NATO and Turkey are very serious, particularly after the failed coup attempt in July 2016. The relevance of strategic culture is fundamental in this context because there is an intense ongoing discussion on whether Turkey will leave NATO or not. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that despite all their issues, disagreements and changes of interests, Turkey's strategic culture remains pro-NATO, as it has not found any other alternative so far. (Ghitis 2017) Turkey's strategic culture is very distant from the Russian one,

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<sup>2</sup> It is an indisputable fact that the Ottoman nostalgia is on the rise in Turkey; it is hence extremely important to acknowledge Turkey's rich historical background concerning the Ottoman Empire. (Hussain 2017)

especially because of divergent historical experiences and different interests. These arguments foreshadow the answer to the primary research question in this Thesis.

## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2. 1. Turkey and NATO in the Cold War Era: 1947-1991**

The post-World War II developments were crucial for the Turkish government and its foreign policy. In 1945 the Turkish Straits crisis occurred, when Joseph Stalin demanded the northeastern provinces of Turkey as well as full access to the Turkish straits – the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles. These claims were part of the Soviet expansionism doctrine. This crisis had a significant impact on Turkey's behavior as a relatively young state, being established in 1923. It was only after the 1947 Truman Doctrine<sup>3</sup>, when the U.S. promised full support to Turkey and Greece against Soviet expansionism, that Moscow withdrew its demand. Turkey's fear of the USSR was a very powerful motive to convince the high politicians to act and make a decision: whether to side with the anti-Communist power, the U.S., or submit itself to the Communist influence. The necessity of deciding was new to the leaders of Turkey because until then, Turkey had been pursuing a policy of neutrality. (Kirişci 2018: 29) This began through the work of Kemal Atatürk, and later his successor İsmet İnönü, who strived to make Turkey viewed as a "respected member of the civilized world". All things considered, it is unclear whether this NATO-Turkey bond would occur if there were none of the political realities shaping this new partnership. (Kirişci 2018: 31)

In the times of a strongly polarized world after WWII, under a lot of pressure from both sides, Turkey decided to join NATO in 1952. At that time, the world faced an extreme rise in tensions between the anti-Communist West and the Soviet Union with all its satellite states. This polarization encouraged Turkey alongside Greece, with their anti-Communist governments, to immediately join NATO for security purposes. One of the founding members of NATO and de facto the leader of this organization was the U.S. Despite many flaws in this newly created partnership, Turkey's entry was mutually beneficial and vital for the security of the region. (Jordanova 2016) The reason why membership in the organization was important was Article 5<sup>4</sup> concerning the collective defense in the NATO charter, which stated that an attack on any member of the alliance would be considered as an attack on the entire alliance. This may have led to a possible joint retaliation against the offending party. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2016)

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<sup>3</sup> The declaration that the U.S. would provide economic and military aid to any country threatened by Soviet communism, which later also resulted in the adoption of the Marshall plan. (Brownell 2018)

<sup>4</sup> For the first time ever, Article 5 was invoked after the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2017)

Turkish NATO membership brought many important developments for their relationship throughout this period. Closer military cooperation and broad economic investment by NATO was evident in the 1950s and early 1960s. The military coup of May 1960 in Turkey demonstrated that the U.S. turned its blind eye towards anything in order to secure its own interests against the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, during the same time, the U.S. had its own domestic issues with segregation. (Özdemir 2018: 162)

During the Cold War Era, Turkey's democracy was evolving cautiously up until the late 1980s, where Turkey boosted their process of democratization. (Düzgit, Gürsoy 2008: 31) However, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 planted a big amount of skepticism and suspicion towards the U.S. in Turkey, when part of the de-escalation agreement between N. Khrushchev and J. F. Kennedy was the U.S. withdrawal of its Jupiter missiles from Turkey. (Kirişci 2018: 37) Another critical event took place in 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus and the U.S. imposed an arms embargo lasting until 1978<sup>5</sup>. In the 1980s, human rights violations spurred the tensions between the U.S. and Turkish administrations following the violent military coup of 1980 in Turkey. The Western community started applying a big amount of pressure on Turkey, particularly concerning the Kurdish minority issue. The Kurds were harshly persecuted by the Turkish security forces while the government refused to recognize the Kurdish identity at all. A major diplomatic crisis occurred in 1987 when the U.S. Congress contemplated recognizing the Armenian genocide. This crisis resulted in the withdrawal of a Turkish ambassador from Washington and the cancellation of the Turkish president's visit to the United States later that year. (Kirişci 2018: 43)

Turkey joining NATO was a very significant event for both sides. Turkey successfully protected its territorial integrity and received a huge amount of investment into their military. NATO found a strong partner sharing a common goal of containing Soviet expansionism in the World War II aftermath. However, growing skepticism in Turkey resulted in a search for alternatives within a decade of its membership. (Champion 2017) Despite many disagreements, Turkey remained in NATO and emerged on the winning side after the Cold War. However, it is important to understand what being a member of NATO meant during the Cold War compared to what it means today. During the Cold War time, it was necessary for Turkey to join NATO strategically, despite the fact that it had faced multiple domestic issues, namely human right violations. All of these problems were overlooked and tolerated by other members of NATO simply because of the strategic importance of Turkey siding with the West. However,

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<sup>5</sup> Until today, the Turkish-Cypriot dispute remains unresolved and is considered a crucial obstacle in Turkey's relations with the West. (Dağlı 2017)

as will be examined in the following sub-section, the post-Cold War developments brought many more challenges for the NATO-Turkey relationship, while the West started exerting pressure on Turkey to address its democratic shortcomings and its human rights violations. (Kirişci 2018: 46)

## **2. 2. NATO and Turkey in the post-Cold War Era**

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkey found itself on the winning side and subsequently played a crucial role as a modest mediator in the Middle Eastern conflicts and made a significant contribution to many peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan or Africa. (Kirişci 2018: 50) In the 1990s, the West had already begun to stress the need for democratic reforms, the recognition of freedoms and diversity in Turkey. Despite the fact that Turkey was sufficiently integrated into NATO by the end of the Cold War, new dimensions of political demands arose from the West towards Turkey. The post-Cold War era brought many positive developments of the Turkish membership in NATO, however it came along with countless disagreements and many escalated crises, such as the Iraq invasion into Kuwait in 1990, the Aegean Sea dispute with Greece or the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, to name a few. Political disputes were not the only type of disagreement that generated tensions between Turkey and the West. Other disputes emerged concerning the lack of initiatives in Turkey in strengthening democratic reforms such as freedom, diversity and cultural rights. For instance, cultural rights issues emerged especially after the year 1984 when the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) took up an armed struggle against the Turkish state. Its intentions were to create a Marxist-Leninist independent Kurdistan uniting all the Kurds in Turkey with the Kurds from other countries. (Tekdemir 2016) The necessity of democratic reforms in Turkey, in order to fully integrate into the West, resulted in an imposed pressure by NATO and also by the EU. Meanwhile, the latter played a crucial role in the whole reformation process because of Turkey's clear vision of joining the EU.

The EU played a significant role in Turkey's endeavors of democratization, fueling multiple reforms in its effort to join. Despite initial success concerning human rights practices, civil-military relations and harmonization of the judiciary system in Turkey, many issues and disagreements arose from the ongoing process. (Gordon, Taspinar 2006: 61)

A major problem arose from the Cypriot EU membership in 2004. Up until today, Turkey does not recognize Cyprus as a legitimate sovereign state and after Turkey raised an objection against Cyprus EU membership, negotiations were suspended. This dispute remains unresolved until today, posing a major obstacle in Turkey's likelihood of joining the

EU. (Kirişci 2018: 100) With the EU's increasing criticism throughout the years and its declined interest in Turkey's bid for a full membership, the EU has reversed the reform process. As noted by two Turkish experts on the matter, "*Many Turks felt that if the EU was not serious about the accession negotiations, there was no reason why they should be.*" (Hale, Ozbudun 2009: 157) Despite this fact and despite the deterioration of public opinion on the matter, the determination of Turkish officials remained the same.

Nowadays, since the occurrence of the coup attempt in July 2016 in Turkey, all access negotiations with the EU have been blocked, worsening the relationship entirely. The French president E. Macron expressed his concerns during a joint press conference with the Turkish president Erdogan: "*For relations with the European Union, it is clear that recent developments and choices allow no progress in the process.*" (Henry 2018)

### **2. 2. 1. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Turkish position (1990)**

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was significant in terms of showing the hesitant approach of Turkey as a political actor. This particular behavior predicted the attitude of Turkey when it came to making firm decisions – it followed the “middle of the road” policy. Turkey's response to the Iraqi invasion created a template for cooperating with the West in general, at least for the upcoming decade. (Kirişci 2018: 52) The president at the time, Turgut Özal, was fully prepared and decided to collaborate closely with the U.S. for Turkey's economic, strategic and political profit. However, his move was challenged by the chief of staff, who rejected the order to deploy Turkish troops to support the ejection of Iraq from Kuwait. (Zaman, Boudreaux 2003) Furthermore, the backlash came not only from the chief of staff but from the public as well.

Turkey ended up with no military contribution but instead it implemented UN sanctions by cutting the flow of oil through the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. However, it did allow the U.S. and its allies to use their facilities for military purposes. In the aftermath of this conflict, Turkey played a key role in adopting the UN Security Council Resolution 688, which created a “safe haven” for the displaced refugees of this conflict in northern Iraq and simultaneously launched Operation Provide Comfort with the objective of safely repatriating refugees to their homes. (Kirişci 2018:52) However, with the adoption of this resolution, PKK fighters took advantage of this “safe haven” and used it to attack targets inside Turkey. Allegations have been raised against the United States saying that they intended to weaken Turkey by supporting the PKK and the creation of a Kurdish state. (Kirişci 2018: 70) These disagreements and allegations

continued to fuel the anti-American atmosphere in the public opinion and other conspiracies consequently emerged.

### **2. 2. 2. The Peacekeeping mission in the Balkans**

Turkish foreign policy during the Bosnian War can be described as fully committed to the purpose of resolving the conflict while keeping Turkey out of direct involvement in the region. The Turkish government was under significant domestic pressure to act because of its affinity towards the Bosnian Muslims, who were fighting the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia. (Kirişçi 2018: 56) In this case, the Turkish government's admirable decision to disregard the cultural domestic pressure was met with high recognition from the West as a strong partner. After the signing of Dayton Accords<sup>6</sup> in December 1995, Turkey's role in the aftermath of this conflict was mainly focused on providing humanitarian assistance as well as providing military training for the newly created armed forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina. (Lampe 2018)

A slightly different approach was taken by the Turkish government in the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Despite the lack of authorization from the UN, Turkey fully supported NATO operations when it sent a large contingent of soldiers as part of the NATO-led Stabilization Force (KFOR). Turkey promoted stability in the Balkan region by all means; therefore it fully supported the EU and NATO enlargements in the region in the following years. Turkey had never been in a position to make such visible and concrete contributions to NATO before. (Güvenc 2012: 539)

In the early post-Cold War years, Turkey's activities and foreign policy of shared interests with the West resulted in it becoming one of the key members of NATO at that time. At the end of the 1990s, Turkey dedicated 3.8 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defense spending while the average spending of all NATO members at the time was 2.2 percent. Militarily speaking, Turkey had 594,000 soldiers in arms (477,000 in land forces, 63,000 in the air force, and 54,000 in marine forces). (Nation 2003: 280) This fact clearly demonstrates the vital role played by Turkey and its military capabilities in NATO.<sup>7</sup>

However, the post-Cold War era introduced a new wave of Western criticism towards Turkey, mainly concerning the issue of shared values such as human rights and democratic freedoms. *"Turkey joining Western institutions might have not occurred had it not been for the*

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<sup>6</sup> The peace agreement that officially ended the war in Bosnia, and simultaneously outlined a General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Borger 2015)

<sup>7</sup> In 2018, Turkey remains one of the strongest NATO members with over 700,000 soldiers in arms and with almost 2,500 combat tanks. (Global Firepower 2018)

*fear of Soviet expansionism and territorial demands made by Joseph Stalin on Turkey during the closing months of World War II.*” (Kirişci 2018: 3) The explanation lies simply within the fact that the West no longer faced a direct threat from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the understanding of the word “security” had changed. Since the fall of the Soviet Union the meaning of the word, as understood by the West, expanded to areas such as better governance, a concept closely associated with transparency, accountability, and the promotion of liberal democracy. (Kirişci 2018: 61) Last but not least, the West pressured Turkey to adopt democratic values, as it was a key factor in ensuring stability and promoting democratic values within its neighborhood.

The alarming situation of human rights violations in Turkey in the late 1990s raised many concerns at the Clinton administration in office. The U.S. president Bill Clinton delivered a memorable speech in the Turkish parliament in 1999 calling for democratic reforms and for the necessity of improving the human rights situation in Turkey. However, Clinton’s popularity in Turkey skyrocketed especially after the U.S. role in the apprehension of the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan and his return to Turkey, where he was considered a terrorist. Öcalan was later sentenced to death for treason. *“While the Clinton administration considered Turkey’s being anchored in the EU as a liberal democracy a strategic gain, the Bush administration seemed more focused on the potential benefits devolving to the United States from Turkey’s geographic location on the border of Iraq.”* (Kirişci 2018: 67) This demonstrates that the U.S. approach towards Turkey had shifted with the change of the U.S. administration, in this case Bush winning the presidential election in 2001.

### **2. 2. 3. The Iraq invasion in 2003 and its impact on Turkish relations with the West**

After the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, Turkey endeavored to stop the U.S. from invading Iraq in 2003. The Turkish government raised serious concerns about the possible consequences of an invasion to Iraq that might destabilize the region and threaten Turkish security; meanwhile, the public was also strongly opposed to the U.S. invasion. (Filkins 2003) Therefore, the interim Prime Minister Abdullah Gül strongly refused to support the U.S. intervention and simultaneously called for the resolution of this crisis through dialogue with S. Hussein. The main concern for Turkish officials was a big group of Kurds settled in northern Iraq and the possible outcome of Iraq’s destabilization. According to the Turkish government, a possible outcome of the U.S. invasion could be the Iraqi-Kurds unifying with the Turkish-Kurds and striving for an independent state, possibly combined with the Kurds from Syria. As has become evident from the recent events taking place in northern Syria, Turkish concerns

were legitimate. *“Not surprisingly after the invasion occurred in March 2003, the public opinion in the country towards the United States, which had improved during the Clinton years in office, now turned even more anti-American.”* (Kirişci 2018: 70)

The Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq was the first step of the deterioration of U.S.-Turkey relations and overall the Turkish relations with the West. The U.S. also urged Turkey to provide its logistical and military facilities for the use of the U.S. armed forces, however the Turkish parliament’s no vote clearly reflected the domestic resentment and condemnation of the U.S. policy in Iraq. *“The U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003 became a source of major conflict and instability that has since adversely affected Turkey’s interest.”* (Kirişci 2018: 77) This move created chaos in the region and created many more challenges, especially for Turkey, such as the PKK operating in northern Iraq against Turkey, the influx of refugees from the region and finally the loss of profitable export markets in Iraq. Therefore, Turkish diplomacy reacted quickly and began negotiations with the U.S. to be able to contribute to the post-war situation in Iraq, particularly concerning the Kurdish issue. *“The issue of defeating PKK remains a major fault line between Turkey and the United States today.”* (Kirişci 2018: 71) Taking into consideration recent developments in northern Syria, we can observe that a major problem is the U.S. support to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is using its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), to eliminate whatever is left from the Islamic State (ISIS). The reason of this dispute is that Turkey officially considers this group an extension of the PKK; for them, YPG is a terrorist organization. (Barnard, Hubbard 2018) The issue of the recent developments and the effects on the NATO-Turkey relationship will be discussed later.

### 3. ORIGINS OF THE TURKEY-NATO DISPUTES

In the post-Cold War times, Turkey faced a big challenge in its relationship towards the West. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West started to push for democratization in Turkey, raising concerns about the condition of its political system and calling for its full integration into NATO. In a bipolar world during the Cold War, it became necessary to side with one superpower, either with the U.S. and NATO, or with the communist Soviet Union. Turkey's policy of neutrality had to be terminated because of the Soviet threat from its southern border. Despite potential ideological disagreements, Soviet Union was considered the common enemy for NATO as well as for Turkey. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the loss of the common enemy, being a member of NATO was not so imperative in terms of maintaining the promotion of the same foreign policy. *"With the changes occurring after the Cold War, the Alliance has been transforming and relocating itself in the world politics accordingly."* (Gönül 2010) Here we can observe that NATO members, particularly Turkey, became more autonomous in terms of promoting their individual foreign policy different from that of NATO. Many new opportunities arose from Turkey being a flank country of NATO in the Middle East, thus increasing its strategic importance. A significant change can be observed especially in the early 2000s and with such diverging interests, more disagreement and tension were created, particularly in the approach towards the Middle East and other relevant aspects.

The origins of the deteriorating NATO-Turkey relations can be noted in the late 1990s and 2000s while Turkey was facing many regional challenges. For instance, Turkish relations with Syria were exacerbated and almost led to a war. Turkey was disappointed by NATO for not providing sufficient support during those critical times. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the biggest challenge for Turkish security policy was the threat coming from the PKK. Initial excitement in Turkey about Operation Provide Comfort backfired, as it resulted in an increased threat from Kurdish armed groups supporting the PKK fight against Turkey. The blame for these results was put mainly on the U.S., as well as its Western allies. *"This emphasis on the Kurds and the PKK continues to cause strain on Turkey's relationship with NATO and the United States, especially after the disintegration of Syria and the rise of "ISIS" left the U.S. and its European allies with few options besides the Kurdish Peshmerga as allies in Northern Iraq."* (Armbruster 2015) In 2003, the AKP government faced a challenge when the U.S. demanded to transit their troops through Turkey into Iraq. However, public opinion was strongly opposed to the war in Iraq. According to them, such a war would threaten regional

stability and particularly the security of Turkey. Based on the backlash coming from the public, the Turkish parliament rejected the U.S. demand to transit their troops through Turkey. (Armbruster 2015) The long history of disputes and disagreements between Turkey and NATO members clearly demonstrated the ability of NATO to resolve and overcome any obstacle in this turbulent partnership. However, in recent years, more serious disputes have led many observers and scholars to the conclusion that Turkey is rifted away from NATO and its future in this organization is uncertain.

### **3. 1. Ideological and structural reasons created new sensitive relations between Turkey and NATO**

The 2000s brought along yet further changes in the partnership between NATO and Turkey. Predominantly ideological and structural reasons can be observed during this time, which resulted in a new and more sensitive NATO-Turkey relationship. Despite Turkey being one of the vital NATO members nowadays, the dynamics of NATO-Turkey relations have changed dramatically in the past twenty years. Despite many disagreements, particularly during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974<sup>8</sup>, a strong strategic relationship was maintained throughout the Cold War times, with Turkey fully committed to the purpose of containing the Soviet influence. Concurrently, this orientation towards the West involved an integration of Turkey's institutions in the transatlantic community. *“When the Soviet Union collapsed, the central rationale for that framework disappeared. The United States and Europe continued to look on Turkey as an ally, but the raison d’être of the alliance became unclear as concerns about turmoil or Russian probing on NATO’s flanks diminished. Turkey proceeded on its march to integration with the West, but Europe felt less urgency—and considerable unease—in embracing what many on the continent saw as a not-quite European nation.”* (Flanagan, Brannen 2008: 2)

In the early 2000s, the domestic situation in Turkey changed, especially after the AKP won the election in 2002 with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Despite their agenda being perceived as “Islamist” and contradictory to the traditional elements of a Kemalist society, Turkey maintained a solid bilateral cooperation with the U.S. and a multilateral cooperation with NATO. Some scholars have observed that many of the Turkish government’s

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<sup>8</sup> This invasion was considered a peace operation by the Turks and resulted in the recognition of northern Cyprus, an area with a Turkish majority. Nowadays the issue persists, when the whole world recognizes northern Cyprus as a Cypriot territory and only Turkey recognizes it as its own territory. (Fitzgerald 2018)

decisions are proof of the growing connection to the Muslim world at the expense of its ties with the West. *“While Turkey is generally regarded as an important, moderating interlocutor, many worry that it may in fact be headed inexorably toward a more radical brand of Islam, with an inherently undemocratic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Western bent.”* (Flanagan, Brannen 2008: 6)

The new sensitive NATO-Turkey relation was highly affected by many structural factors. After the Cold War, a rapid shift from collective defense to collective security is evident within NATO, which weakened its initial purpose of being united against one common enemy. After a relatively calm relationship during the 1990s, NATO manifested its problems concerning its own direction and the uncertainty about future developments within the alliance’s interests. This problem was highlighted during the Iraq War in 2003, when three NATO members<sup>9</sup> refused to support the intervention in Iraq. This event pointed out the problem of the alliance’s cohesion. (Aybet 2012) Meanwhile, Turkey had gone through an internal transformation itself and that also negatively affected the dynamics with NATO. For instance, since 2002, it is argued that Turkey demonstrated a significant foreign policy shift, becoming more assertive in its regional politics. The gap between Turkey’s own security priorities and NATO’s priorities has since widened. Therefore, NATO acted accordingly when it relegated the role of Turkey in transatlantic relations to a less significant one. This held true until the U.S.-Turkey crisis in 2007 concerning the U.S. inaction against the PKK, operating in northern Iraq. (Migdalovitz 2007)

Ideological reasons played a noteworthy role in shaping the new NATO-Turkey relationship. Fundamental differences between these two can be dated back to the origins of European and Muslim civilizations. (Ananicz 2015: 17) Moreover, recent developments clearly demonstrate authoritarian tendencies from Erdogan, particularly after the coup attempt in July 2016 and the follow up constitutional referendum in April 2017. The referendum was proposed by the AKP party alongside the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which propounded 18 amendments. The consequences of this referendum, adopted by a tight majority of 51.41% votes will result, after their implementation in 2019, in the abolishment of the Prime Minister position and in the exchange of the parliamentary system to a presidential one. This referendum will also put a big amount of executive power in the hands of Erdogan. Alongside this fact, the Turkish president will no longer have to be politically neutral, enabling to express his support and be active within the domestic situation. In addition, if elected in the following

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<sup>9</sup> These countries were Belgium, France and lastly Germany, which later weakened its opposition. (BBC 2003)

two presidential elections, Erdogan could potentially stay in power up until 2029. (Shaheen 2017)

Erdogan has repeatedly and explicitly expressed his sympathy with the Islamist ideology, which symbolizes Turkey's self-identification with the Muslim community overall. These statements can be further demonstrated by Turkey's inaction against the outbreak of the so-called Islamic State when Turkey was very modest in terms of fighting against them. At that time, the spotlight issue for Turkey was the Kurdish separatism concern. Turkey was actively involved in bombing alleged Kurdish terrorists in Syria and Iraq in April 2017 while the Kurds were fighting against the last groups of ISIS. Turkey claimed that it targeted the PKK fighters; however, the Kurdish YPG militia and the Peshmerga forces<sup>10</sup> both expressed their concerns about being the targets of the Turkish airstrikes. (Sanchez 2017) If we were to look at these events and aspects more broadly from the Turkish perspective, we would determine that the hesitant approach towards ISIS and the prioritization of the Kurdish issue clarified that the Turkish policy is strongly based on a long-term outlook. (Ananicz 2015: 29)

In recent years, Erdogan's anti-Western rhetoric has been increasing with the peak being after the coup attempt, when the Western world was very hesitant and did not immediately express its solidarity towards Turkey. However, this was also caused by many conspiracies that emerged after the failed coup attempt. Some observers claimed that Erdogan initiated it to justify his consolidation of power in Turkey, decrease the role of the military in domestic politics and subsequently suppress any opposition. These conspiracies were boosted immediately by the later statement where Erdogan reportedly called the coup "a gift from Allah". (Lusher 2016) *"The attitude towards the West seems to have evolved most: the AKP is now much more skeptical about the West!"* (Ananicz 2015: 23) An anti-Western rhetoric could also be the result of pursuing and sharing the policies of the Millî Görüş movement founded in 1969 and inspired by Necmettin Erbakan, the first Islamist Turkish Prime Minister of Turkey, in office from 1996 to 1997.<sup>11</sup> (Arslanbenzer 2015) An essential characteristic of the Millî Görüş movement is the development of a closer relationship with the Islamic world. The anti-Western aspect of the movement states that the global order cannot be dominated by the U.S. Furthermore, Erdogan is a solid proponent of this movement and it is obvious that he is in the process of implementing Erbakan's party's policies. The AKP's third term is often

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<sup>10</sup> Forces operating in northern Iraq with origins of being border guards. After the fall of the Ottoman empire they were united and organized as a Kurdish fighting force. (BBC 2014)

<sup>11</sup> Necmettin Erbakan was later removed from office amidst accusations of trying to undermine Turkey's secular constitution. (Arslanbenzer 2015)

characterized by a strong link to the Millî Görüş tradition. (Ananicz 2015: 13) Implementing these conservative and religious practices can be expected from Erdogan in future years, especially with his potential to remain in power until 2029. *“The gap between the positions of the West and of Turkey widened further because Turkey strongly emphasized the moral superiority of its policy and the duplicity and opportunism of the European Union and the United States.”* (Ananicz 2015: 39)

After decades of secular dominance with the legacy of Kemal Atatürk, Erdogan’s idealistic plan is to combine Islamist ideology with the state and politics as well as with the educational system. *“Reviving Imam Hatip, or Imam and Preacher, schools is part of Erdogan’s drive to put religion at the heart of national life after decades of secular dominance...”* (Butler 2018) These changes are supported by a great increase in funding for schools accepting Imam Hatip’s concept; however, on the other hand they resulted in great discrimination of funding for schools opposed to this ideology.<sup>12</sup> This new ideology stresses a complex reconstruction of society despite its deep division in the discussion surrounding the role of Islam in education. (Butler 2018) Throughout these discussions, many Turkish supporters of Erdogan explain the importance of education throughout the ongoing changes in the country. One supporter stated: *“Our hope for 2023 is that we want to be educated, cultured, and Muslim. We are redefining Islam, and what it is today. It’s in our genes. The Islam that has been exported from Saudi Arabia and northern Africa failed to work, because of lack of education. We have Ottoman culture to be open and moderate.”* (Peterson 2017)

Turkish change in foreign policy is deeply rooted in the ideological shift commenced by Erdogan. In the initial paradigm in Turkey, neighboring countries were considered as threats and elements that could destabilize the region. However, with the ideological transformation and the Ottoman nostalgic conceptions held by Erdogan, Turkey views these regions as the space where it can project its expansionist ambitions. (Ananicz 2015: 25) The current military operation in northern Syria, with the goal of expelling and eliminating threats posed by the U.S.-supported Kurdish forces, can serve as an example of these expansionist ambitions.<sup>13</sup> A worthwhile question is whether Turkey is intending to leave the recently captured city of Afrin or not, despite the statements by government officials claiming that Turkey will certainly leave the city. The tensions rose with the statement of the Syrian government insisting on Turkey to leave Afrin while calling their control “illegitimate”. In addition, Erdogan

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<sup>12</sup> Discriminated schools barely received half of what religious schools received. (Butler 2018)

<sup>13</sup> The justification of this Syrian operation lies with preventing the Kurds from controlling a certain amount of territory in northern Syria. (Ananicz 2015: 25)

threatened to extend this military operation to northeast Syria, an event that could result in an extensive crisis within NATO because Turkey would essentially have to confront troops of its U.S. ally. (Toksabay, Caliskan 2018) This situation confirms Erdogan's intentions of becoming a global power and to a certain extent trying to create a neo-Ottoman empire. *"Foreign policy rooted in ideology is less flexible and less capable of adjusting to current international dynamics."* (Ananicz 2015: 6) Furthermore, the statements and speeches of dozens of Turkish government officials calling for resurrection of the Ottoman legacy are alarming for NATO and the international community. Religious conservatives in Turkey today make statements such as that Turks are the bearers of Islamic civilization, or that Turks will re-found the Ottoman state. (Peterson 2017)

In recent years, Turkey began to play a greater role in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which considers itself as a collective voice of the Muslim world. (OIC 2018) Erdogan uses this platform to promote his idealistic vision and find support within other Muslim countries. However, many of Turkey's Middle Eastern partners do not share the same exaggerated visions of the order in the Middle East as Erdogan. These visions are also supplemented by concepts described by a former Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu. His concept thoroughly describes the international dynamics changing into a phase in which traditions, historical heritage and culture will play a major role. (Ananicz 2015: 15)

Ideological rift and growing anti-Westernism is narrowly combined with various nationalist discourses in today's Turkey. All these discourses are used in Turkey to spread feelings of xenophobia or self-victimization, to establish an environment suitable for Erdogan's authoritarian tendencies supplemented by Islamist ideology and referring to the Ottoman legacy. Islamic-conservative ideology is crucial in this case, especially because it determines the interpretation of the past in the present by actors tightly involved in the diffusion and reconciliation of this ideology. This has proved to be a very successful tactic and resulted in completely undermining the credibility of the Western world, particularly the U.S. (Alaranta 2016) The NATO-Turkey relationship, de facto the West-Turkey relationship, was harshly affected by these developments, with an influential one being the wide purges of the military after the failed coup attempt.<sup>14</sup> The Turkish military was always destined to be the guardian of the state's secularity and pro-Western policy; however, with broad military purges carried out by Erdogan, the influence of the military has been diminished. (Ananicz 2015: 19)

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<sup>14</sup> Within three days after the coup, over 6,000 military personnel were detained alongside many generals and the members of the judiciary. Currently, these numbers are much higher and include thousands of detained students, journalists and teachers. (Weise 2016)

### **3. 2. Key developments in the post 2000s and the impact on Turkey-NATO relations**

It is important to mention the involvement of Turkey in Afghanistan through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since 2002. Article 5 of the NATO charter was for the first time activated after the 9/11 attacks and Turkey, along with other NATO members, contributed to war on terror. However, Turkey had a certain additional value compared to other countries involved. The Turkish military had gained plenty of experience with fighting against the PKK terrorists in the past and provided the know-how to its allies. (Yegehoglu 2005) Throughout the time of the war on terror in Afghanistan, Turkey took charge of the command twice in the ISAF operation. With ISAF being the first launched operation outside the Euro-Atlantic area, Turkey showed a great amount of leadership alongside significant commitment to the alliance's common purpose. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Turkey 2018)

Nevertheless, one of the biggest turning points in the NATO-Turkey relations was the Iraqi war of 2003. Turkish diplomacy conducted a great amount of effort to change the mind of the U.S.; however, it did not stop them from intervening in Iraq. Preceding the U.S. attack, the Turkish parliament decided to not allow any deployment of U.S. troops within its territory ahead of the war in Iraq, but after intense negotiations, Turkey allowed the U.S. to at least use its airspace.<sup>15</sup> When the invasion was carried out in the beginning of March 2003, Turkish public resentment towards the U.S. skyrocketed. (Kirişci 2018: 70, Cagaptay, Parris 2003) Looking back on this development, it planted deep roots of anti-Westernism not only throughout the society, but also amongst many government officials. Not long after the U.S. commenced this military invasion, Turkey faced an even worse threat: the PKK fighters were enabled to operate and attack Turkey from destabilized Iraq, particularly along its northern border. *“The issue of defeating the PKK remains a major fault line between Turkey and the United States today. This has become especially aggravated since the collapse of Turkey’s peace process with the Kurds.”* (Kirişci 2018: 71) The discussion surrounding the impact of the U.S. intervention in Iraq on bilateral U.S.-Turkey relations and multilateral NATO-Turkey relations is very lengthy. Many observers and experts raised their deepest concerns about the consequences of the U.S. invasion. According to them, it would destabilize Iraq and have a negative impact on the 50-year-old U.S.-Turkey strategic partnership. (Gordon, Taspinar 2006: 57) As we can see today, many of those concerns were confirmed and the region has been harshly destabilized along with the intensification of the Kurdish issue.

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<sup>15</sup> NATO also deployed many military defence systems to Turkey to secure Turkish airspace. (BBC 2003)

During the following years, Turkey worked hard in its endeavors to join the EU and these efforts resulted in the ban of the death penalty in all circumstances in January 2004. In October 2005, a major development occurred when the EU officially started accession negotiations with Turkey. However, in subsequent developments surrounding the issue of Turkish accession into the EU, in 2010 WikiLeaks provided evidence that Austria and France had been working hard to block these negotiations and thus, anti-Westernism was growing rapidly. (BBC 2017) Furthermore, domestic issues started to emerge within Turkey and caused many issues. In April 2007, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan announced his candidacy for president. Subsequently, tens of thousands of supporters and promoters of secularism angrily rallied in big Turkish cities, particularly Ankara, with the intention of expressing their dissatisfaction with Erdogan's Islamist background and pressuring him to withdraw his candidacy. These protests turned out to be a success in terms of forcing Erdogan not to candidate. However, the AKP nominated Abdullah Gül, who officially became the first Islamic candidate to run for office, won the election. The problem with this was that the president, as an institution, has always been considered one of the main guardians of secularism in Turkey, therefore this event prefigured the possible ideological shift. (New York Times 2007) With Abdullah Gül not being elected until the third round, AKP decided to pass a constitutional reform implementing a direct popular presidential election. Consequently, in August 2014, Erdogan won this election and became president. With the two last presidents being considered pro-Islamists, this posed many disputes in the already turbulent NATO-Turkey relationship. Alongside the ideological shift came the change of Turkey's interest, signaling the difficulty these two sides would face in this mutual relationship.

With Abdullah Gül being the president and Recep Tayyip Erdogan being the Prime Minister, their Islamist tendencies were reflected in the policies they both pursued, particularly in terms of limiting civil liberties and individual freedoms. The frustration of the public culminated in the 2013 Gezi Park protests, when hundreds of thousands of people gathered throughout big cities and expressed their dissent with the AKP's latest statements and practices.<sup>16</sup> (Kirişçi 2018: 124) According to many observers, the people that gathered were often secular and well-educated, coming from the middle-class society. The government's response was initially to discredit the motives of the protesters and condemn their behavior,

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<sup>16</sup> Some examples include Erdogan calling for women to have at least three children, the new ban on consuming and serving alcohol in public, or even the condemnation of decorating and illuminating Christmas trees by the director of religious affairs Mehmet Görmez. Furthermore, one of the biggest concerns for secularist protesters was the growing intolerance towards nonreligious ways of life in Turkey. (Kirişçi 2018: 128)

despite the Gezi Park protest being a peaceful assembly. The Turkish government went even further when it condemned these protests for being initiated by terrorist groups and simultaneously declared that they became a threat to democracy and needed to be terminated. (Amnesty International 2013: 12) The abusive use of force by the authorities against protesters was characterized as extreme and unnecessary, with dozens of casualties and thousands of injuries. (Amnesty International 2013: 15) Throughout these events, the Turkish authorities faced a strong condemnation from their European allies, particularly Germany, France or Belgium, who also pointed out that measures taken by the Turkish government directly clashed with the EU's main values, such as the right to assemble or freedom of expression. However, the U.S. chose a softer version of criticism due to their strategic interests in the Middle East, such as the U.S. missile defense shield, presence of the Incirlik air base or the normalization of Turkey-Israeli relations. (Pierini 2013) *“Washington’s selective approach is to safeguard its essentials and turn a blind eye to domestic issues while expressing some concern at the excessive use of force.”* (Pierini 2013)

Since the Gezi Park protests, anti-Western rhetoric was distinguishable in Erdogan's speeches and overall in the pro-government and social media. With the growing strategic NATO-Turkey partnership, the anti-Westernism was still rapidly increasing and deepening its roots in Turkey. Many observers sought to find answers in order to explain this dynamic. From the Turkish perspective, the West too often interfered and criticized their domestic affairs. However, the same thing occurred over a decade ago, but without Erdogan building the same negative view of the West into society as today. What has changed? According to many scholars, the answer to this question lies within the fact that, over a decade ago, Erdogan did not possess as much power as he does today.<sup>17</sup> (Akyol 2015)

Another significant event in the domestic situation in Turkey occurred during 2015. In the parliamentary elections in June, AKP lost its majority due to the entrance of pro-Kurdish leftwing People's Democratic Party (HDP). This was a significant obstacle in the AKP's intentions to strengthen the executive powers of Erdogan later that year. The following month, a ceasefire that had been established in 2013 between the Turkish government and the PKK came to an end. Many unbiased observers agree that the cause of this break is attributed to both sides. On one hand, the PKK was blamed by the AKP for many attacks within Turkey killing civilians and soldiers. On the other hand, the PKK blamed the Turkish government for its rapidly increasing military presence in the southeast border as well as for conducting airstrikes

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<sup>17</sup> Erdogan was under the strict watch of the Kemalist establishment and therefore limited in his behaviors compared to nowadays. (Akyol 2015)

against PKK fighters in combat against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. (MacDonald 2015) Subsequently, Turkey decided to target ISIS through air strike attacks but as mentioned above, ISIS fighters were not the only target. Despite the AKP regaining parliamentary majority in the snap elections of November 2015, it still did not obtain enough seats to be able to implement their plan for a referendum strengthening the executive powers of Erdogan. Authoritarian tendencies in Turkey put the West in a difficult position, where the ideological shift could not be overlooked on one side, and Turkey's geographical location in the Middle East and its significant military capabilities on the other. Moreover, diverging perceptions of the Kurdish issue persistently strained the NATO-Turkey relations. Despite further developments, such as the Turkish military operation Olive Branch, and growing hostility towards the Kurds fighting in northern Syria by Turkey, the U.S. continued to support Kurdish YPG fighters. (Gumrukcu, Nehme 2018)

The next most crucial event that shaped and changed the dynamics of NATO-Turkey relations was the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016. That being said, it was not the first time a group of military officials attempted a coup in Turkey. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, it has faced three military coups in the years 1960, 1971 and 1980, with the July 2016 coup being the fourth one. (Holodny 2016) The latter occurred in Istanbul and Ankara when a group of military officials and other military personnel intended to take over essential state institutions and possibly expel Erdogan from the country. *"Turkish Armed Forces have completely taken over the administration of the country to reinstate constitutional order, human rights and freedoms, the rule of law, and the general security that was damaged," a statement, published by a group calling itself the "Peace at Home Council" on TRT, Turkey's state-run broadcaster, read.*" (Holodny 2016) At first it seemed as a successful coup attempt because many of the key institutions in Turkey were captured. However, after Erdogan fled his hotel from an incoming missile, he called for all the citizens to rally in the streets and support him. Countless loyal supporters of Erdogan gathered in the streets and essentially defended Erdogan's power alongside most of the military, which also stayed loyal to him. Surprisingly, immediately after the coup, Russian president Vladimir Putin was the first to express his solidarity with Turkey and condemn the coup alongside other nations, with none of them being NATO member states. It was not until three days after the coup that the U.S. expressed its support to a democratically elected government in Turkey. It was a while later, on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2016, when NATO Secretary General strongly condemned the coup attempt and declared NATO's full support to Turkey. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2016)

After the coup attempt, Erdogan established a state of emergency in Turkey. Since then, the state of emergency has been extended for the sixth time on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2018 for another period of six months. (Hurriyet Daily News 2018) Throughout this time, Erdogan used the state of emergency as a tool to trace the main initiators of the coup attempt. The main suspect was the Gülen movement. Until July 2016, the Gülen movement was publicly known as a religiously motivated initiative promoting tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Fethullah Gülen, the leader of this movement, was once an ally of Erdogan. This alliance broke with the corruption allegations made in 2013 against both of them, and Erdogan immediately distanced himself from the whole situation. Tensions between the Gülenists and the government reached their peak in May 2016 when the government declared the Gülen movement a terrorist group. (Kirişci 2018: 129, 131) Within the process of searching for the main initiators of the coup, many conspiracy theories emerged. The biggest conspiracy about the failed coup attempt linked the blame to the U.S. because, despite Turkey being a strongly polarized country, most of the people were convinced that the U.S. were somehow wrapped up in the failed coup attempt. This conspiracy was fueled by the fact that Gülen was living on a farm in Pennsylvania and therefore provided a direct link to the U.S. (Arango, Yeginsu 2016) *“The theories have become so rampant that top American officials, including President Obama, have been forced to publicly deny trying to topple the government of a NATO ally.”* (Arango, Yeginsu 2016) The wide majority of Turks still believe that Gülen was the main plotter of this coup attempt. The decision of the U.S. not to extradite him to Turkey faced a strong backlash from the Turkish society and many Turks regarded it as clear evidence of the U.S. involvement in plotting the coup. (Arango, Yeginsu 2016)

Aside from these conspiracy theories, and with Erdogan’s strong Islamist views and recent statements, one of the possible reasons behind this coup attempt was to protect the longstanding tradition of secularism established during the times of Kemal Atatürk. In the years before the coup attempt, it was evident that Erdogan was trying to seize power and somehow establish an Islamist ideology narrowly combined with politics and society. Furthermore, Erdogan faced strong criticism from Turkey’s Western allies mainly because of broad persecutions that took place in Turkey immediately after the coup attempt. The state of emergency gave the government sweeping powers to re-establish order and detain enemies of the state. However, it turned out that Erdogan had used them not only for detaining the initiators of the coup, but also for eliminating his entire opposition. Tens of thousands of people were suspended or arrested during this purge. Many government officials, university teachers,

journalists, military personnel and even thousands of students were included in it. (Kenyon 2017)

The failed coup attempt laid out a suitable atmosphere for Erdogan's justification for consolidating his power. This development gave him the opportunity to finally propose a referendum to strengthen his executive powers. Many Turks viewed it positively because they believed that the U.S., along with their European allies supported the undermining of the Turkish government, thus weakening Turkey and not letting it become too influential. In April 2017, the constitutional referendum took place and with 51.41% of votes, Erdogan succeeded. (Shaheen 2017) The consequences of this referendum will not be apparent until the elections in November 2019, when Turkey is officially going to shift from a parliamentary to a presidential system with a great amount of power transferring to the hands of Erdogan and his AKP. (MERI 2017)

A significant event that demonstrates evidence of the existing NATO-Turkey tensions, is the recent purchase of the Russian S-400 military defense system by Turkey. Despite many of NATO's concerns and warnings, Turkey was adamant and to a certain extent possibly tried to provoke NATO. In effect, this development indicates Erdogan's search for new potential allies different from the ones in NATO. (Knight 2017) The problem with this newly purchased system is that it is technologically incompatible with the already existing systems in Turkey. Recently, after the first signs of Turkey's rift from NATO, Turkish specialists justified the purchase of the Russian missile system by stating their concerns that if everything was integrated with the NATO standards, NATO commanders would have excessive control over the Turkish military. (Knight 2017) This development has put a strain on mutual relations and has again raised many concerns in the West about Turkey's possible rift away from the alliance. According to many observers and experts, the decision to buy such an advanced military defense system can be explained by Erdogan's growing assertiveness and simultaneous search for alternatives to strengthen Turkey's position in the international system. The fact that Turkey has intensified its efforts to become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)<sup>18</sup> since 2013, underlines the latter argument that Turkey is in the process of searching for other security cooperation options. (Weidenfeld 2017)

However, it is not the first time that Turkey has conducted a purchase of a missile system from a non-NATO member. In 2013, the Turkish government decided to purchase a Chinese long-range missile defense system and raised many concerns about the intensity

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<sup>18</sup> The SCO was created in 2001 as an intergovernmental international organization, striving for better cooperation within their economy, security or research, to name a few. (SCO 2018)

of its commitment to NATO. In this case, NATO declared its strong condemnation of this decision and under a great amount of pressure, Turkey decided to invest into its own project to develop ballistic missiles. (Kirişci 2018: 75)

The most recent issue that puts NATO-Turkey relations at risk is the military operation Olive Branch conducted by the Turkish forces in northern Syria. In January 2018, along with the Syrian Free Army, Turkey decided to conduct a military operation in the area. According to Turkey, the attack was aimed against the Kurdish-led PYD, its armed wing YPG, and SDF. The threat for Turkey was that while the Kurds were defeating ISIS, they were also gaining big territories throughout northern Syria; therefore, Turkey decided to intervene and prevent the future establishment of an autonomous Kurdish state. (Cunningham, Zakaria 2018) The goal was to expel these forces by reaching the northwestern Afrin district. In March 2018, the Turkish military entered the city of Afrin and gained complete control. Turkey's operation in northern Syria is part of a wider dispute between the Kurds and Turkey. The potential hazard for the NATO-Turkey relationship lies within the fact that the U.S. strongly supports the YPG fighters with arms, while Turkey claims that YPG is connected to the PKK, and therefore labels them as a terrorist organization. (Barnard, Hubbard 2018) The U.S.-YPG alliance was formed during the Obama administration for defeating ISIS. This decision faced profound criticism from its NATO allies and the international community. *"The United States has played into the hands of all its critics and opponents by deciding to form an alliance with terrorists despite its own values and its 66-year-old alliance with one of their primary targets, Turkey."* (Cavusoglu 2018) The question to ask is, what could be the possible outcomes of this operation and what impact is it going to have on the NATO-Turkey relationship in the future?

The presence of a direct confrontation risk is alarming to everyone involved. However, it is not the first time that Turkish troops are risking a direct confrontation with other NATO forces present in northern Syria. In 2016, during the Operation Euphrates Shield<sup>19</sup>, the U.S. boldly demonstrated their support to the YPG units by deploying their armed forces to the city of Manbij in order to discourage Turkish forces from capturing it. (Ross 2018) In April 2017, Turkey commenced airstrikes against U.S. allied YPG forces. These attacks completely lacked cooperation with the U.S. until shortly before the events took place. The situation escalated with a conducted airstrike only a few kilometers away from the U.S. troops, killing approximately 20 YPG fighters. However, what would happen if Turkey accidentally killed

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<sup>19</sup> The purpose of this operation was to clear the ISIS fighters from along its border as well as stopping the Kurdish YPG from crossing the Euphrates. The main concern for Turkey was the possibility of creating autonomous regions in northern Syria. (Osborne 2017)

NATO troops in northern Syria? The current situation in 2018 is alarming for many observers for the same reasons. When Turkish forces gained control over the city of Afrin, many wondered what their next move would be. Erdogan proclaimed his plans to continue in the military operation to the east, in order to expel or “neutralize” all Turkish enemies, in his words. (Uslu 2018) Despite these powerful proclamations, the U.S. remain firm in their commitment to their Kurdish allies. This event may negatively affect NATO-Turkey relations and undermine the alliance’s solidarity and cohesion. The clash of interests is evident when the U.S. continues to support the YPG and Syrian Arab militias, currently known as the SDF, in its endeavors in defeating ISIS, while Turkey considers YPG a terrorist organization and a direct threat to their national security. (Kahl 2017)

When considering all the above-mentioned events, the disturbance within the NATO-Turkey cooperation easily becomes evident. While some challenges can be overcome, many new ones immediately emerge, creating a general state of instability and uncertainty. In consequence, the future course of this relationship is difficult to anticipate, and three possible prospective scenarios are introduced and analyzed in the following chapter.

#### 4. FUTURE SCENARIOS

Turkey's position in the transatlantic community is filled with some uncertainties. Crucial developments occurred in Turkey in recent years and significantly influenced its prospects for the future. In parallel with this uncertainty, it is also worthwhile asking the question of whether the Western administrations will continue to protect the founding pillars of international liberal order, such as respect for territorial integrity, free trade or the promotion of democratic values, which in Turkey's case is a critical aspect. (Kirişci 2018: 181) Many experts agree that Turkey is currently in a state where it harms NATO, therefore according to them, further action should be taken to solve this problem once and for all. Turkey's drift away from democratic values and the rule of law fundamentally damages the alliance. Growing authoritarianism in Turkey, combined with increasing suspicion towards its NATO allies, is currently undermining the alliance's cohesion and unity. As the second strongest member of NATO militarily, Turkey's rift would have a strong negative impact on the future of the alliance, particularly with the fact that once Turkey decided to leave NATO, it would never be accepted back. At the time of Turkish accession to NATO in 1952, the situation was different. Turkey was considered a strong strategic partner against Soviet expansionism; therefore many of its flaws were overlooked by its allies. *"During the Cold War, NATO held its nose and tolerated authoritarian regimes in allied countries (including Turkey). These days, shared democratic values glue NATO together. Turkey's behavior puts that unity at risk."* (Dempsey 2018) On the other hand, Turkey leaving NATO would eliminate the threat of direct confrontation in the Middle East with Russia, Iran or others, due to Turkey's military interventions in Syria or Iraq.

In terms of future predictions for the state of NATO-Turkey relations, it is nearly impossible to predict their course. Having a closer look at Erdogan's behavior, it is undeniable that he is very pragmatic. *"Signs of pragmatism in the efforts of reconciliation with Russia, Israel, and to some degree Iraq are evident. Turkey has also revealed a discreet willingness to work with the United States and the EU, despite the virulent anti-Western rhetoric of Erdogan."* (Kirişci 2018: 186) Alongside these signs of pragmatism, Turkish foreign policy is strongly influenced by Erdogan's new ideological aspects, particularly promoting political Islam and emphasizing the importance of nationalism within Turkey. Three scenarios for future NATO-Turkey relations present themselves in this context.

#### **4. 1. The First Scenario**

In the first scenario, Erdogan will stop pursuing authoritarianism, and cease drifting away from democracy and the rule of law. This shift would result in the reinstating of the rule of law and would end wide persecutions in the country, especially the ones that took place after the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Tensions in the Turkish society, which arose dramatically after the close referendum result, would be eliminated. In order to supplement these democracy-friendly developments, peaceful transition of power through free parliamentary and presidential elections would become the key element in order to save Turkey from falling into a strong authoritarian regime. The transfer of power to a secular leader and the return to the tradition of secular Kemalists would bring back Turkish prestige in its neighborhood and simultaneously stabilize its foreign policy. (Kirişci 2018: 190)

Following this, implications for NATO-Turkey relations would be very positive. The developments stated above would help reconstitute mutual trust and Turkey would be again considered a fully trustworthy ally with similar interests in its foreign and security policies. *“The improving climate for democracy would help narrow the fault lines in Turkey’s relations with its transatlantic allies and move the country to a more important position in the liberal international order.”* (Piccone 2016: 186-187) These changes would be welcomed not only by NATO but also by the EU, particularly for the reason of reactivating Turkish membership endeavors and for improving the EU’s perception of Turkey. Another important implication for NATO-Turkey relations would be the termination of Turkish search for partnership alternatives. With many positive democratic developments, NATO would ensure that Turkey became fully integrated in the transatlantic community to divert Turkish interest from finding new partnerships, particularly with Russia or the SCO. (Kirişci 2018: 187)

However, this scenario is the least likely one out of all three. Despite Erdogan’s long record of pragmatist decisions in recent years, it seems very unrealistic for him to withdraw from pursuing authoritarianism and consolidating his power as the president. Particularly, the changes that Turkey is going to witness in 2019 because of the 2017 constitutional referendum will confirm Turkey’s drift away from democracy. (Aydıntaşbaş 2017) Erdogan is in the process of remodeling secular Turkey into a state that stresses the importance of religion within the society and deeply roots it in politics. Alongside Turkey’s growing anti-Westernism and particularly merciless anti-Western rhetoric from Erdogan, Turkey is nowhere near stopping this radical shift and returning to the old system and its status quo. When further noticing the Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East, Turkey has transformed to a more assertive player in international relations. The latter argument can be confirmed with the recently launched

Operation Olive Branch in northern Syria, directly clashing with NATO interests in the region, particularly concerning the U.S. support to YPG fighters. Turkey is also in the process of searching for different partnership alternatives, such as with Russia (S-400 missile purchase) or with the SCO, where Turkey is striving for full membership. (Gaspers, Huotari 2017) These arguments demonstrate, unfortunately, how unrealistic it is for Turkey to undergo these positive developments.

#### **4. 2. The Second Scenario**

In this scenario, Turkey increases the distance with NATO and the West due to rising authoritarianism and anti-Westernism. Wide persecutions would persist and the rule of law would be de facto abandoned, with Erdogan seizing all the power for himself. The state of emergency would be extended for another period of time in order to justify wide persecutions of the opposition. NATO would continue to condemn all of these actions while imposing pressure on Turkey to reinstate the rule of law and protect civil liberties. In this case, a rapid turn could be expected in Turkish foreign and security policy. Due to Turkey's strong economic partnership with Russia, Turkey would successfully seal a military cooperation deal with the Russians. (Chulkovskaya 2018) This possibility can be accurately demonstrated by the recent purchase of the Russian S-400 defense missile system by Turkey, which is incompatible with any NATO standards and strongly condemned by NATO. *"Turkey's warming ties with Russia, however, are beset with contradictions that cede diplomatic leverage to Moscow. The burgeoning Turkish-Russian relationship now threatens to damage Ankara's relationship with Washington and Brussels, an outcome in Russia's longer-term interests."* (Stein 2017)

Nonetheless, in this scenario, if Turkey failed to find closer ties with Russia, it would probably focus on creating ties with the SCO, dominated by China. Turkey initiated the dialogue with the SCO as far back as 2012 in search for closer cooperation, however, was met with many doubts from China and Russia. In November 2016, Erdogan made his first statement on the proposal of full membership in the SCO. *"During the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in mid-May 2017, Erdogan told delegates that the world's economic center of gravity was shifting to the East and said that he would like Turkey's planned infrastructure expansion to be linked with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)."* (Weidenfeld 2017) These statements and actions demonstrate Turkey's clear determination to seek for alternatives different from NATO.

In this scenario, Turkey would either find a strong strategic partnership with Russia alone or in a few years join the SCO, where Russia also plays a crucial role as a founding

member. What would these developments mean? Joining the SCO would theoretically not require leaving NATO however, practically it would drastically alter mutual relations resulting in Turkey irretrievably shifting towards the East and abandoning its long tradition of multilateral cooperation with the transatlantic community. (Bo 2016) Consequently, NATO would be left weakened due to Turkey's broad military capabilities and its strategic geographical position when connecting the Middle East with Europe. NATO would become less active in the Middle East because of difficulty with logistics in the region. Finally, further demonstrating the issues brought up by Turkey leaving NATO is the uncertainty surrounding the future of the NATO Land Forces Command located in Izmir, the NATO Rapid Deployable Core in Istanbul or the big contingent of U.S. military forces and nuclear weapons in the Incirlik Air Base.

There is a possibility that some of these developments will occur in the near future. However, one must be reserved when considering this scenario. Turkey's accession to the SCO is currently highly unlikely because China, as a leading force in the SCO, remains very skeptical and cautious about Turkey's commitment and prospects for full SCO membership. The SCO is convinced that Erdogan is using the interest of joining the SCO mainly for gaining leverage in talks with NATO. (Weidenfeld 2017) On the other hand, establishing further cooperation and strategic partnership with Russia is likely, but from Russia's perspective, it would only be for the purpose of putting a wedge between Turkey and NATO, which has always been part of its long-term policy.

#### **4. 3. The Third Scenario**

In the third and most likely scenario, Erdogan continues to dismantle every part of Turkish society that used to be democratic or secular and achieves remodeling Turkey into a political system similar to Putinist autocracy or Iranian theocracy. (Weiss 2017) Another change that is crucial in the long run is the replacement of secular schools with religious alternatives, the so called Imam Hatip schools. It is known that any school not willing to transform into this religion-based school can count on minimal annual funding. When comparing secular schools with religious schools, a huge gap in funding is evident in recent years. Secular schools were very underfunded by the government and with the budget plan for 2018, it does not seem that this is going to change. (Butler 2018) Under Erdogan, there will be no place for the liberal democracy that the AKP pursued in the beginning. Turkey is currently in the process of transformation from a quintessential parliamentary system to a presidential system. This

change is included in the constitutional reforms passed in the 2017 referendum, which are going to be fully implemented in 2019. In this scenario, Turkey would be run by an oppressive leader that is able to enjoy a significant amount of electoral support by keeping the country in constant tension as well as in a state of emergency. (Kirişci 2018: 190) It is very likely for Erdogan to extend the state of emergency in order to continue purging any opposition including teachers, journalists or students.

The NATO-Turkey implications in this scenario are relatively positive. The geopolitical importance of Turkey is profound, and despite many clashes of interests between NATO and Turkey, Turkey still has a significant pro-NATO status. However, NATO is founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, of which Turkey does not follow any. It is almost certain that if Turkey was trying to join NATO nowadays, it would be rejected. Some experts argue that it would be useful to establish clear criteria for banishment from NATO. (Totten 2016) Furthermore, with Turkey disregarding all of the principles, many observers agree that it is causing damage to the alliance as a whole. NATO is no longer only perceived as a military alliance, but also as a political one. That is the reason why following the fundamental principles is relevant in this case. *“Unfortunately, Turkey is not a NATO outlier in this regard but is part of a growing trend. Poland, Hungary, and Romania are also actively diminishing judicial independence, institutional transparency, and the ability to express political opposition; the very essence of democracy. These countries also damage the credibility of this crucial political alliance.”*(Dempsey 2018)

Concerning Turkey's search for alternatives, in this scenario, Turkey has not found any possible alternatives for future partnerships. Turkish potential membership in the SCO is currently unrealistic due to Turkey's big transformation and uncertainty about its future. China, as a leader of the SCO, remains skeptical about Turkey's commitment in pursuing full membership. It is important to keep in mind that Russia is also one of the founding members of the SCO; therefore, Chinese experts view Turkey's SCO endeavors as a rapprochement with Russia. (Weidenfeld 2017) Russia as an independent strategic partner for Turkey also seems to be unrealistic, due to the diverging strategic culture of both countries and distinctive interests. If such a partnership was established, it would only be a result of the Russian long-term policy to put a wedge between any NATO members within the alliance. Despite Erdogan's strong anti-Western rhetoric, currently it is still in Turkey's best interest to stick with NATO to be protected from outer threats, such as Russia or the fight with terrorism. With ongoing changes in Turkey, a type of new sensitive relationship between NATO and Turkey is being created. Concerning this new relationship, NATO will adopt a more sensitive approach towards Turkey's national

security concerns. For instance, the decision of the U.S. to closely cooperate with the YPG fighters in order to fight ISIS in Syria was not well received in Turkey. (Kirişci 2018: 194) Turkish military interventions in Syria and Iraq put NATO at risk of broader conflict in the region, particularly with Russia or Iran. A significant event that demonstrates this risk was Turkey shooting down a Russian jet after it entered Turkey's airspace for a couple of seconds in 2015. (BBC 2015)

The survival of the current new bargain is crucial in this case. Western powers would not be pleased if Turkey partnered up with Russia. This scenario presents the new sensitive relationship between NATO and Turkey, where Erdogan completely remodels Turkey into an assertive presidential system. Despite the rapid deterioration of Turkish democracy, NATO will adopt a more sensitive approach towards Turkey but still will be actively engaged in the issue of abandoning democratic principles. The current discussion about Turkey leaving NATO is becoming more and more relevant these days. Despite all of the positive consequences it would bring, it is important to be aware of all the predominantly negative consequences that would be brought along with Turkey leaving NATO. *"We can argue all we want – and I have – that keeping Turkey in NATO is better than kicking Turkey out of NATO because it's better to deal with a troublesome country inside ostensibly friendly framework than outside one."* (Totten 2018) All things considered and due to the factors discussed in this Thesis, this scenario seems to be the most reasonable one to anticipate in the upcoming years.

## CONCLUSION

This Thesis has focused primarily on the origins and potential implications of the deterioration of NATO's relationship with Turkey. The theories of neorealism and strategic culture were used as the foundational framework for the analysis of the significant historical events. The historical background was examined, specifically the events of the Cold War and post-Cold War years. The origins of the rift were subsequently explored and found to date back to the early 2000s, particularly following the Turkish opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Further developments contributing to the growing separation between NATO and Turkey were then evaluated, and the fundamental structural and ideological reasons for their new delicate relationship were presented. Finally, the collected information was combined and analyzed in context, in order to arrive at three possible scenarios as to the potential evolution of the NATO-Turkey partnership in the foreseeable future.

The analysis of these events was done in the context of providing the answers to the two research questions that were outlined in the introduction. The answer to the primary research question on the likelihood of Turkey's rift from NATO is illustrated in the fourth chapter, where the third suggested scenario is found to be the most likely to occur, with information from the earlier chapters being used to support the statement. Despite Turkey's drift away from the foundational principles of NATO, a complete estrangement is unlikely to occur. Turkey is unlikely to obtain a better alternative to its membership within NATO. Meanwhile, when considered beside Turkey's significance as an ally and its geopolitical importance for NATO, we can derive that the separation of Turkey from NATO is highly improbable.

The third chapter, in combination with the third future scenario, as detailed above, outlines the answer to the second research question analyzed in this thesis, namely whether NATO has the capability to preserve such an erratic relationship, as well as the conditions under which this would be able to occur. NATO can maintain this partnership by becoming more aware of Turkish security concerns, however, still will be engaged in promoting fundamental values of the alliance within the country. Despite various disagreements between the two parties, it remains overall beneficial for both to be engaged in a mutual partnership, and Turkey will remain a member of the alliance. Thus, both will have to work to achieve a consensus, while becoming more accommodating to each other's preferences and commitments.

The topicality of this issue made it challenging to identify suitable sources. There is a lack of literature published on the topic, as a result of the continually developing dynamics in this field. Most of the sources used were in the form of journal publications and news articles,

leaving it up to the individual authors to interpret the events through their own expertise. Therefore, it was made more difficult to obtain sources that reflected the issue from a holistic point of view.

Furthermore, throughout the time of writing, the situation continued to evolve as the NATO-Turkey dispute is an ongoing issue. The current events all made an impact on the analysis of this Thesis, and it was difficult to integrate their influence on the issue into the writing, as well as identifying the developments that were suitable to include. In addition, an unpredicted event can occur at any point, and consequently alter the course of the discussion on the issue, potentially in a completely different manner.

Finally, further research into the field is imperative, as the issue will undergo many developments in the future. The implications of the constitutional referendum of 2017 will not go into full effect until 2019, making the future developments in terms of NATO-Turkey relations potentially unpredictable. The scheduled snap elections in Turkey on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2018 may also have an impact on the relations, by changing the dynamics within Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Overall, the fluidity of the topic necessitates further examination and the passage of time will reveal the subsequent course of events in the field.

## **ABSTRACT**

This Thesis aims to employ the theories of neorealism and strategic culture to examine the origins and major events in the deterioration of the NATO-Turkey relationship. It introduces the relevant historical background and analyzes the major developments leading up to the current turbulence existing between NATO and Turkey. Its purpose is also to determine the answers to two research questions, concerning the possibility of Turkey's rift from NATO, as well as the conditions under which this uncertain relationship could persist, if at all possible. Three potential future scenarios are then presented, derived from the preceding analysis. Finally, the most likely scenario is chosen and supported using relevant arguments. While turbulent, the partnership between NATO and Turkey is likely to persist through mutual compromise and the creation of a new sensitive relationship.

## **Keywords:**

Turkey, NATO, rift, strategic culture, neorealism, Middle East, United States, Erdogan, democratization, alliance.

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