

MANAGING THE US-TURKEY SECURITY RELATIONSHIP: STRUCTURED TRANSACTIONALISM WITHIN A DUAL FRAMEWORK

This article identifies key elements of a potential new strategic framework to manage the security relationship between Turkey and the United States. Despite both being NATO members, their relationship is increasingly transactional, with shared interests on some issues, potential for convergence on others, and substantial disagreement on quite a few. Four problems breed their widening strategic divergence: an obsolete framework for governing the relationship, a trust deficit, weakened institutional ownership, and weakened popular support. The main challenge facing Turkey and the United States is to find a new modus operandi between the old strategic partnership framework and pure transactionalism. To this end, this article proposes “structured transactionalism” as a flexible yet institutionalized form of bilateral engagement to supplement the NATO core of the US-Turkish security relationship.

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The security relationship between Turkey and the United States has never had a golden age. Since its inception in the 1950s following the Truman Doctrine's promise of support against authoritarianism and Turkey joining NATO in 1952, the partnership has been important for both countries due to their shared interests on a significant number of issues. Yet, it has also been strained due to their differences in strategic culture and perceptions. More often than not, the relationship has been in crisis-management mode. Crises were somewhat easier to manage during the Cold War. There was a shared threat perception and Turkey conducted a foreign policy that accepted the inherent power asymmetry in its relationship with the United States in return for reassurance against Soviet expansionism. The end of the Cold War changed the dynamics of the relationship fundamentally. Despite the two countries being members of NATO, their relationship today is increasingly transactional, based on shared interests on some issues, potential for convergence on others, and significant divergence on quite a few.

Four problems stand out at the heart of the current crises bedeviling the US-Turkey security relationship.

First, the framework for cooperation based on the strategic partnership within NATO formed during the Cold War no longer fits the complexity of the relationship today.

Second, the divergence of policies has created a trust deficit. This has been particularly aggravated by the perceptions each country has about the other. Although Ankara's suspicions toward the United States are many, three appear to be more prevalent. First, Washington's partnership with the Democratic Union Party-People's Protection Units (PYD-YPG) in Syria, which Turkey treats as an offshoot of the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), is driving Ankara's perception that Washington could be hostile to Turkey's vital interests. Second, The perception of US interference in Turkish politics is another source of suspicion, which was worsened by the US failure to comply with Turkey's demands to extradite members of the Gülenist network charged for their involvement in the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. Unlike Turkey, the United States has not designated this group as a terror organization, and rejected Ankara's extradition demands on grounds of lack of sufficient evidence. Third, Turkey harbors deep suspicions about the reliability of the United States as a security partner, which is directly related to Washington's perceived disregard of Turkish priorities on issues of vital interest. In that respect, the imposition of sanctions over Turkey's purchase of Russian missile systems and other defense industry conflicts, in which Congress has played a role, is breeding suspicions in Turkey.

There is no shortage of suspicions about Turkey in the United States either. The most deep-rooted one concerns its reliability as an ally. Turkey's independent stance

and reluctance to assist the United States in the Gulf War in 1990, the Iraq War in 2003, and the global coalition against DAESH in 2014 raised questions as to whether Turkey could be counted on. Moreover, Turkey's regional policies, including its rapprochement with Russia, raise suspicions that it could act in ways contrary to US priorities. Another suspicion stems from perceptions that Turkey pursues an ideological foreign policy, which would create security challenges for the United States and its allies such as Israel and the Gulf monarchies.

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Of all these contested issues, arms-procurement has been one of the main drivers of divergence and mistrust. While the United States questions Turkey's recent acquisition of S-400 missile system from Russia, Turkey raises concerns that the United States has always been a difficult and reluctant defense supplier, including in the case of air-defense systems.

The perceptions behind their mutual mistrust may not necessarily be based on reality, but they nevertheless shape policies on both sides.

Third, with the erosion of institutional ownership there is weaker elite support for the relationship today. Under the Cold War strategic partnership framework, the relationship was mainly managed by the two countries' security-military establishments as well as some political constituencies. However, the new strategic reality has changed that. The weakening of the institutional ownership has also led to the erosion of elite support for the relationship. In its better days, there was a network of individuals in the United States and in Turkey who would stand up for the relationship during crises. Today, Turkey has few friends in Washington, the United States has few friends in Turkey, and those who still value the relationship are in a spiral of silence.

Fourth, popular support for the relationship in both countries is waning as well. The relationship with the United States has been gradually losing its natural constituencies in Turkey as the public sees itself surrounded by enemies.¹ Meanwhile, there

¹A recent survey conducted by The German Marshall Fund of the United States and İstanbul Bilgi University Center for Migration Research showed that only 4 percent of Turks said they regard the United States as Turkey's most important partner and 48 percent as the biggest threat to Turkey. See: Strategies and Tools for Mitigating Polarization in Turkey Project (TurkuazLab), “Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey 2020,” <https://www.turkuazlab.org/en/dimensions-of-polarization-in-turkey-2020/>

has been a gradual increase in criticism of Turkey in the US domestic context; for example, during his election campaign Joe Biden made comments about President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and assisting the country's opposition.² The negative public image of Turkey has contributed to Congress taking an overtly adversarial position toward Ankara in recent years.

New Strategic Framework Needed

The nature of the Turkey-US security relationship today could hardly be captured by its Cold War framework, as shown by how the two countries have expended a great deal of energy on managing their crises. The debate on sanctions epitomizes the poor state of the relationship. Several attempts to reset ties and restructure the relationship on a new foundation, such as the “model partnership” envisaged during the Obama administration, have failed. Today, experts and policymakers still look for a new definition and beginning for the relationship.

Domestic and systemic transformations for Turkey and the United States have forged a new normal, which breeds strategic divergence. They no longer view their engagement as a deliberate grand strategic choice, embedded in a shared normative fabric and multilateral institutions. Rather, the major impetus to sustain the relationship comes from convergence on certain issues directly related to Turkey's need for security reassurance on the one hand and its geopolitical value to the United States on the other. In many instances, managing crises or avoiding further deterioration of the relationship could only be achieved with reference to supposedly overlapping interests on some issues, such as countering the threat posed by Russia, Iran, or China. However, the rationale behind the Cold War era strategic relationship remains relevant—the geostrategic value of Turkey for the United States' security interests justifying US security reassurance to Turkey. Despite all the challenges, both seem willing to sustain cooperation at the heart of the relationship based on collective territorial defense, as encapsulated in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, and the issues that fall within the wider remit of NATO, while maintaining bilateral engagement on issues that fall outside of the remit of NATO.

The Way Forward

There has been an unfolding debate as to how to address the strategic divergence between Turkey and the United States. Some have suggested that the start of a new US administration is a good moment for a reset based on a grand bargain to resolve all the disputes between the two countries. However, this is unrealistic because their

² Jonathan Spicer, “Turkey Slams Biden's Past Call for U.S. to Back Erdogan Opponents,” *Reuters*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-biden-turkey-idUSKCN25B0XS>

disagreements on different issues is the symptom rather than the cause of the widening strategic divergence. Moreover, the purely transactional approach that has emerged and been recommended recently cannot provide a sustainable framework either.

“Despite its skepticism about the United States and lingering anti-Americanism, the Turkish public wants to see the continuation of extended security ties.”

Others argue that maybe it is time for Turkey and the United States to decouple. While this sounds easy and attractive to some, it would have sustained consequences for both countries as it would be highly difficult for either to find a substitute for their current security relationship. The United States does not have any other partner in Turkey’s neighborhood with the same capacity to shape developments there, let alone with the same geopolitical significance. While the United States could reach most of its foreign policy goals in the region without Turkey’s support, this would prove much more costly. As for Turkey, while it has enjoyed forging new relationships with Russia and other partners at the expense of ties to the United States, they will hardly be a substitute as they have neither the capacity for nor the interest in such a role.

Persisting with the old strategic partnership framework as the sole one for the security relationship is impossible while a purely transactional approach cannot provide a sustainable framework either. The challenge is to agree on a new framework within which Turkey and United States will be able to develop ways to manage their convergence and divergence on specific issues. This paper lays out a dual framework in which the strategic partnership within NATO is supplemented by structured transactionalism, as a flexible yet institutionalized form of bilateral engagement, on certain issues. Combined with fresh thinking about specific policy issues, such a framework can offer a viable way forward to manage strategic engagement between the two countries.

The Blueprint for a Dual Framework

The need for a new modus operandi between the old strategic partnership framework and pure transactionalism is grounded in two interrelated trends in Turkey-US security relationship: the erosion of the strategic partnership framework, and a move toward transactional relations.

New Strategic Landscape

The most important factors that have rendered the strategic partnership framework obsolete are systemic power shifts and the deep transformation that has taken place in Turkey's domestic scene and regional policies. Together, these have forged a new normal of strategic divergence. The current reality speaks against trying to recreate the strategic partnership framework inherited from the Cold War as the sole one for the Turkey-US security relationship. This would require that both countries agree on a shared, long-term strategic vision, and certain role definitions. Such an ambitious reset would be transformationalist and interventionist. This would assume Turkey's performance of a specific role such as acting as a moderate Islamic country or as a "bridge between East and West." If Turkey does not fit its role, the United States would try to make it fit, either by re-anchoring it in the West, reinstating it as a role model in its neighborhood, or reengaging with its domestic politics. In the past such actions have failed and only added to tensions.

As much as the Biden administration is willing to bring US leadership back, the United States possesses limited ability to influence the trajectories of other countries. Reasserting a new world order centered on its leadership will hardly be easy and may not be possible. Recent polling suggests the US public remains committed to a policy of engagement in the world, though it is resistant to getting involved in "endless" wars.³ However, international support for US global leadership has been declining in recent years as well.⁴ In any case, the United States' role in the world remains highly contested.⁵ Amid its arguments about retrenchment, rebalancing, offshore balancing, decline of primacy, liberal internationalism, or patriotism, what allies such as Turkey see is deep structural uncertainty about the US grand strategy and an inability to make credible commitments. Washington so far has been unwilling or unable to revive a US-centered order in Turkey's neighborhood, so that it could entrench the latter into a new normative multilateral framework.

Turkey's domestic and international realities have also weakened the fundamentals of the security relationship. Harboring a regionally driven understanding of international relations, it has opted to base its external conduct on the quest for strategic autonomy. A desire to readjust to global power transitions has also lurked in the background. Moreover, the worldview of Turkey's leadership drives a deliberate

³ Dina Smeltz, Ivo H. Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, Craig Kafura, and Brendan Helm, "2020 Chicago Council Survey," *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 17 September 2020, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/2020-chicago-council-survey>

⁴ Sintia Radu, "The World Continues to Disapprove of America's Leadership," *US News and World Report*, 28 February 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2019-02-28/the-world-continues-to-disapprove-of-americas-leadership>.

⁵ Ronald O'Rourke, "U.S. Role in the World: Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, 19 January 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44891.pdf>

attempt to challenge the power asymmetry with the United States. Furthermore, the cycle of insecurity following the Arab Spring overwhelmed Turkey's strategic thinking to such a degree that concerns for state and regime survival came to the forefront. Meanwhile, the country's domestic trajectory has been characterized by such wide-ranging social and political transformations that its strategic elite no longer sees the country's future as being fully embedded within a Western ideational order. Especially with the end of the Cold War-era common strategic cause and shared threat perception, Turkey's domestic trajectory and the course of its democracy has emerged as a further point of contention in the relationship.

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Without a functional strategic framework, relations can, and have, moved toward one-off, tit-for-tat deal making.

The Problems with Transactionalism

Downscaling the Turkey-US security relationship to nothing more than transactionalism is not an option either. Many objections can be raised against transactionalism—fundamentally it means conducting foreign policy on narrowly defined national interests and through pragmatic and reciprocal exchanges based on short-term concerns centered around power calculus, rather than a long-term strategic vision or shared normative framework. This is anathema for two countries that are in an institutionalized relationship and a values-based alliance since it prioritizes bilateralism over multilateralism, weakens the importance of shared norms, and involves a short-term, zero-sum approach. Moreover, to the extent that it caters to populism, transactionalism leaves ties between countries hostage to the domestic political calculus of leaders, which may further drive short-termism and undermine normative foundations.

A purely transactional approach would seem incompatible with the fact that US-Turkey engagement is structured around the treaty-based NATO alliance. Shortcomings of transactionalism for the two countries have been widely discussed.

First, Turkey and the United States are still NATO allies and they are likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. Although transactionalism is mostly offered as a short-term measure to prevent further deterioration in the relationship, it could persist and turn into a permanent operating mode, undermining the remaining elements and, eventually, the NATO core of their relationship. It may also reduce their bilateral engagement to a tactical defense entente. Furthermore, pure transactionalism whereby they engage in ad hoc cooperation only on certain issues may eventually end up being costlier when it comes to delivering the same security benefits than what is currently offered to both countries by the alliance.

However, some elements of transactionalism can be useful. President Trump's approach to foreign policy has loaded the concept of transactionalism with negative connotations. It came to be identified as inherently unpredictable and unstable, as completely disregarding any institutionalized interaction, and as rejection of any global leadership role and passing off of risks to others. But flexibility, dealmaking, issue-based cooperation, and pragmatism are part of a classical Realpolitik foreign policy. While the Biden administration has taken office calling for multilateralism and restoring alliances and partnerships, there is nothing to suggest that it would disregard a pragmatic approach to foreign policy with elements of transactionalism as long as it is structured within an institutional framework. This pragmatism was reflected during the call between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesperson and chief advisor to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Sullivan spoke of the administration's "desire to build constructive US-Turkey ties, expanding areas of cooperation and managing disagreements effectively."⁶

Most on both sides would agree that neither country benefits from the current dysfunctional situation, which has trapped them in a suboptimal outcome. The US strategic community is keen to maintain a deeper security engagement with Turkey, given the many areas of convergence with it and the critical role it plays in various issues or regions. Despite its skepticism about the United States and lingering anti-Americanism, the Turkish public wants to see the continuation of extended security ties. It perceives the relationship in purely defense-military terms and disregards its normative dimension.⁷ Turkey's security elite also upholds the transatlantic and NATO security ties, in a similar pragmatic manner. The expert community has

⁶ The White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's Call with Ibrahim Kalin, Spokesperson and Chief Advisor to the President of Turkey," 2 February 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/02/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivans-call-with-ibrahim-kalin-spokesperson-and-chief-advisor-to-the-president-of-turkey/>

⁷ Kadir Has University, "Turkish Foreign Policy Public Perceptions Survey - 2020," April 2020, <https://www.khas.edu.tr/tr/haberler/turk-dis-politikasi-kamuoyu-algilari-arastirmasi-2020-sonuclari-aciklandi>

also identified the necessity to sustain such security engagement.⁸

Given all this, a dual framework based on elements of both is needed. We propose “structured transactionalism,” i.e., institutionalized bilateral cooperation based on pragmatic and flexible foundations alongside a vision of long-term commitments, to supplement the NATO core of their security relationship.

As conceived here, structured transactionalism could not only fit better the current reality, it could also help allay some of the concerns raised above. Talk of restoring the alliance or resetting the relationship may sound great but, unless based on a realistic framework, it is likely to face the same fate as similar initiatives in recent decades. Structured transactionalism within a dual framework may provide a better foundation for the United States to elicit Turkey’s cooperation while accommodating its quest for strategic autonomy.

At the same time, the continuation of some form of multilateral, long-term commitment within a more flexible framework would serve Turkey’s security interests better. Strategic autonomy does not mean going it alone, and Ankara needs to bolster its capacity with issue-based coalitions to realize its interests. In the final analysis, this may act as a major restraint on Turkey’s understanding of its autonomy. A dual framework incorporating structured transactionalism would be viable if Turkey assumes all the risks involved in an independent course and understands that the United States may, when Ankara goes it alone, not act as the final provider of its security.

The Case for Structured Transactionalism

The case for structured transactionalism rests on three interrelated arguments.

First, it is already upon us. The era of the strategic partnership framework that went beyond a simple defense entente is long gone. Erosion of its normative foundations and changes in the structural parameters of the relationship have been the reality of the post-Cold War era. And elements of transactionalism had already been introduced even before the rise of populism in both countries’ domestic and foreign policy.

Second, structured transactionalism fits an international security environment in transition. The challenge of finding a new framework for relations with allies is hardly a problem that pertains to the Turkey-US relationship only. The United States is in need of rethinking its security cooperation with various long-standing allies not only

⁸ As part of this research project, a Delphi study and a policy workshop were carried out. In both, the participants highlighted the need to invest in security cooperation.

in Europe but also in Asia and elsewhere. Turkey has also been in need of rethinking its strategic relationships, as it has ventured into new partnerships with Russia, Iran, Qatar, and other countries. Recent strategic discussions have centered on the return of power politics, including whether this is a new era of great-power competition. In this new setting, old alliance relations have been going through a redefinition chiefly because of the changing threat perceptions of different countries, including within the transatlantic community. In recent decades, there has also been growing resort to “coalitions of the willing” to manage the challenges posed by NATO’s foray into out-of-area operations.⁹ Moreover, concerns over the United States’ reliability and commitment have already forced many of its allies and partners around the world to develop more independent security and defense policies. The European quest for strategic autonomy is only one manifestation of this trend, which is redefining the nature of the security relationships between the United States and its European allies. Today, a main challenge for Washington is to develop an effective alliance management model that advances its security interests while allaying the concerns of its allies and partners by taking into account their own security needs and priorities.¹⁰ Third, structured transactionalism may provide the flexibility needed to manage some of the current challenges the transatlantic alliance is facing. It may offer a less complicated way to attend to the bilateral problems in the US-Turkey security relationship outside NATO mechanisms. Moreover, it may allow for compartmentalization, considering how issue-based divergence has become a reality of the relationship. As such, the dual approach may also contribute to alliance cohesion, which is already under pressure from disagreements over several internal challenges. For example, it has been difficult for the United States to pursue uniform relations with its European allies, as was reflected in the Libya crisis in 2011. To the extent that structured transactionalism could address issues contested among NATO members outside the alliance’s mechanisms, it might also help preserve its cohesion.

The Outline of a Dual Framework

The Turkish-US security relationship is based on long-term foundations forged around a multitude of institutional mechanisms. However weakened those foundations are due to their strategic divergence of recent decades, it remains embedded within a complex network in the economic, cultural, trade, and political fields.

⁹ Sophie Arts and Steven Keil, “Flexible Security Arrangements and the Future of NATO Partnerships,” *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 16 February 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/flexible-security-arrangements-and-future-nato-partnerships>

¹⁰ Emma Bates, Samuel Brannen, and Alexander Kaplan, “Global Security Forum 2020: A New Era for U.S. Alliances, Center for Strategic & International Studies,” 14 December 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/global-security-forum-2020-new-era-us-alliances>; Karl Friedhoff, “Democrats, Republicans Support Alliances, Disagree on International Organizations,” *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 26 January 2021, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/democrats-republicans-support-alliances-disagree-international>

The core of the relationship is the NATO alliance, which consists of the nucleus of the Article 5 collective-defense commitment, the wider NATO main competences such as defense planning, as well as other “core” issues the allies agree collectively to govern within the NATO framework, such as the operations in Afghanistan. The secondary area of the relationship lies outside of NATO’s remit, where the two countries come into contact in various bilateral or multilateral settings. Structured transactionalism would take on this secondary area. It would not replace but supplement the strategic partnership that would remain the core of the relationship. It does not exclude multilateralism altogether or reject a rules-based institutional framework.

As elaborated below, structured transactionalism can better guide US-Turkey interactions in the secondary area in order to avoid mutually hurting collisions, minimize costs, and prevent negative spillovers to the treaty-based core of the relationship. The objective is to make sure that their engagement in the secondary area is not based on a short-term, zero-sum mentality. This can be realized by striking the right balance between flexible and ad hoc behavior in the short term and sustaining joint interest in shared strategic objectives in the long term. Therefore, Turkey and the United States should maintain a vision of long-term commitments and institutionalized bilateral cooperation in the secondary area, which would otherwise be subject to short-term thinking and pure transactionalism. This does not foreclose the possibility of moving beyond bilateralism to address these challenges—they could resort to structured transactionalism with regard to each other while at the same participating in issue-based small groupings with other concerned allies where possible.

Rethinking Issues in a Dual Framework

The agenda of the US-Turkey security relationship has widened in the post-Cold War era as a result of fluidity in the regional and international systems, transformations in the foreign policy orientations of the two countries, and the rise of new security challenges. While NATO members opted to address some of these within the context of the alliance, when it came to other ones they acted outside it, unilaterally or in concert with other partners. Sometimes disagreements among members have prevented the incorporation of certain issues into NATO’s remit, which effectively left them to be managed through outside mechanisms.

The relationship has been overburdened by crises stemming from policy differences and interest divergence on issues ranging from the Libya crisis in North Africa to recent tensions over hydrocarbon explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Syrian conflict in the Levant. The United States’s partnerships with unconventional

actors in those regions has also pitted it against Turkey, which considers some of them as direct challengers, if not existential threats, to its core security interests. In a similar fashion, the United States feels that Turkey's engagement or cooperation with different state and non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa undermines its security interests or those of some US allies. The result has been erosion of trust, further exacerbated by mutual suspicions over intentions. Furthermore, although Turkey increasingly views these issues as the main focus of its foreign policy, most of them fall outside the NATO core of its relationship with the United States; hence there is no institutionalized, treaty-based framework for the relationship with regard to these issues. Thus the main source of tensions in the relationship are actually "out of area" engagements from the NATO perspective.

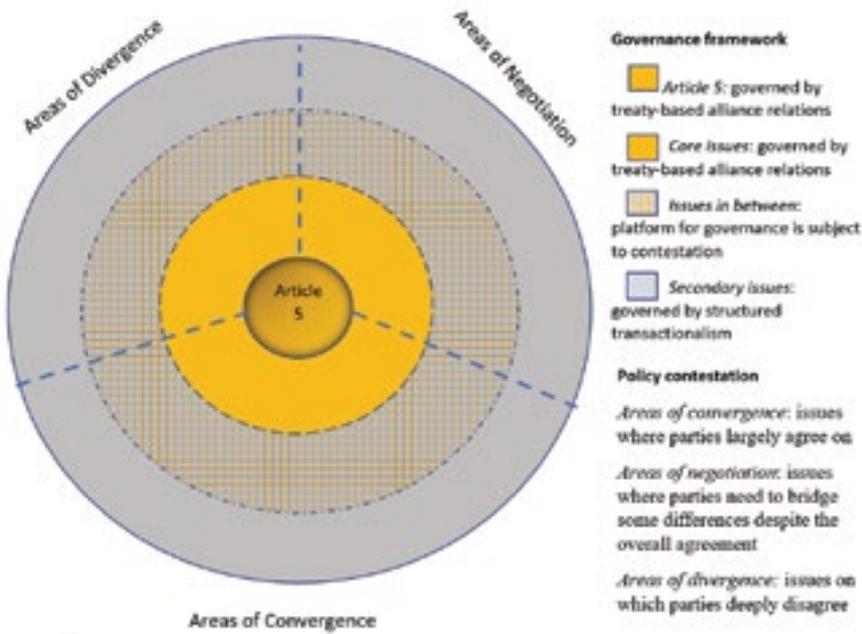
To add a further complication, there has been disagreement over what is a NATO issue and what is not, as well as other questions raised by this disagreement. This situation poses two challenges for policy coordination and crisis management for the two countries. First, how can they agree whether an issue belongs to the NATO-core of the relationship or is "out of area"? Second, what would be the best way to deal with "out of area" issues?

Even during the Cold War, there was always some ambiguity regarding the alliance's commitments to Turkey since it was not originally designed to address primarily the challenges in the country's security environment, especially those emanating from the "south." In the evolving post-Cold War security environment, this demarcation has been further blurred. For instance, NATO has stepped into new areas to respond to conventional and evolving threats. Moreover, considering that the Turkey-US relationship is essentially that between a global power and a regional power, divergence in their interests, threat perceptions, and priorities has been inevitable. For instance, Turkey has preferred to see Russia's growing assertiveness in Eurasia and more recently in the Middle East and North Africa as falling outside NATO's remit. Meanwhile the United States wanted to see Turkey act in line with the alliance's positions on these issues, particularly in Eastern Europe. These challenges have exerted enormous pressure on the Turkey-US security relationship in recent years. The two countries have at times employed several bilateral channels including issue-based task forces to manage such divergence in recent years, with mixed track record.

On the uncertainty over which platform is best suited to handle policy divergence in "out of area" issues, one alternative would be to keep them within NATO. Indeed, in many crises it has encountered in the Middle East, Turkey has tried to discuss matters within traditional NATO mechanisms, especially considering the Article 4

consultation process, under which members can bring all issues of concern affecting their security to the attention of the alliance. However, Turkey-US grievances over contested issues have occasionally played out on the NATO stage, threatening alliance cohesion. Therefore, considering the risk of negative spillover and the declining relevance of the alliance as the sole reference point in an age of flexible security relationships, we believe that it is best to move those issues out of NATO. A dual framework that includes structured transactionalism may offer a better way to manage some contested issues outside NATO.

Figure 1: Classification of Issues



Two Dimensions for Classifying Issues: Policy Contestation vs. Governance Framework

The issues in the Turkey-US security relationship can be examined in two distinct dimensions. The classification here provides a compass that can be used for analytical purposes to map out where issues fall in the current practice. It does not seek to solve the problem of whether an issue is or should be a core or secondary issue—this is a policy question that the countries themselves decide. As explored below, depending on their specific position on this classification, different issues may produce unique challenges, hence need to be handled with specific considerations

in mind. The framework is useful in the sense of proposing ways to approach those specific issues.

- *Governance Framework*: Issues can be classified based on whether they fall within the core or secondary areas of the relations. Issues that are deemed to fall into the NATO core can still be managed through the strategic partnership, while those in the secondary area can be managed by structured transactionalism. There are also “issues-in-between” on which the two countries disagree about whether they fall within the core or outside. Hence, where these issues will be governed will be a matter of contention.
- *Policy Contestation*: Depending on where the two countries stand on a specific issue, there arise different degrees of policy contestation: *areas of convergence*, that is, where they largely agree on, *areas of negotiation*, that is, where they have some differences despite overall agreement, and *areas of divergence*, that is, where they deeply disagree.

The NATO Strategic Partnership in the Core

Under a dual framework, the core of the Turkey-US security relationship will continue to be managed through the two components of the existing strategic partnership within NATO: the Article 5 nucleus of territorial defense and those issues that allies collectively agree to bring within the wider remit of NATO.

The Article 5 nucleus needs to be kept free from policy contestation. Beyond the Article 5, Turkey and the United States may experience patterns of convergence, divergence, or negotiation on issues belonging to the core NATO remit, but they will continue to manage this policy contestation based on alliance mechanisms, norms, and values. This would include contingencies such as the current NATO mission in the Black Sea and evolving operations and missions, such as Resolute Support in Afghanistan or the Kosovo Force.

Structured Transactionalism on Secondary Issues

A large part of the agenda between Turkey and the United States will continue to involve issues that fall outside the NATO core of their relationship. These secondary issues will also be divided across areas of convergence, of negotiation, or of divergence.

- *Areas of convergence*: This includes secondary issues that Turkey and the United States largely agree on. Cooperation in Syria against DAESH and the

Assad regime, leaving aside the differences over engagement with the country's Kurdish groups, and in Central Asia falls into this category. Although being NATO allies makes it easier for them to cooperate on these issues, this will remain most likely within a bilateral framework to be shaped according to their respective interests. Sometimes, managing these issues may also gain a multilateral character, as in the case of the “coalitions of the willing” the United States has launched to manage certain issues such as combating terrorism. The two countries should continue to cooperate on these issues and use them to demonstrate how a cooperative approach provides benefits to both.

- *Areas of negotiation:* This includes secondary issues on which Turkey and the United States broadly agree but also have differences that need to be bridged. Currently, most issues on their common agenda fall into this category. Iran is one example. The United States sees it as adversary and treats it as such, using a wide range of tools including sanctions, intelligence operations, and military instruments. Turkey sees Iran as a regional competitor but not as an adversary. Turkey wants to see it contained but is against military options. Another example is Iraq. Turkey and the United States aim at keeping the country stable, secure, and independent from Iranian influence, but they have differences regarding power-sharing between the Iraqi national government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). A further example is the South Caucasus. Turkey and the United States support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states in the region and their potential integration in NATO. However, they have disagreements on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. On all these issues, Turkey and the United States should cooperate as much as they can and continue to negotiate to bridge their remaining differences so that some can be moved to the areas of convergence category.
- *Areas of divergence:* This includes secondary issues on which Turkey and the United States disagree and are most likely to continue to disagree in the foreseeable future. The issue of the armed Kurdish non-state actors is one example. The United States has supported autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds while Turkey was concerned that this would lead to Kurdish independence and destabilize the region. While Turkey did establish close ties with the KRG, it remains vigilant to prevent it from declaring independence. The United States also supports the PYD-YPG in Syria, which Turkey treats as an offshoot of the PKK, which is also designated by the United States as a terrorist organization. The United States is very likely to continue its

partnership with armed Kurdish non-state actors in the region, while Turkey is likely to try to prevent them from increasing their capacity or gaining territorial control. While cooperation on these issues is not possible, crisis-prevention mechanisms are required to avoid collisions that could make cooperation on other issues more difficult.

Conclusion

There are serious structural problems in the Turkey-US security relationship, including issue-based divergence, mutual suspicion, and on both sides disengagement by the relationship's core constituency and negative public attitudes. Nonetheless, the way ahead is neither decoupling nor a reset based on a grand bargain over issues.

Those calling on both sides for decoupling point out to the erosion of the core NATO relationship as the main driver of strategic divergence. However, the United States is also facing the erosion of conventional security relationships and having to redefine its alliances with many other countries. Arguing for upholding the treaty-based NATO alliance is not to say that it is set in stone. Indeed, the values underpinning it are under constant pressure. Nonetheless, the redefinition of the normative dimension of the treaty-based relationship in the core as well as deciding who should be the members of that alliance is an open-ended process that transcends the Turkey-US relationship. The future of the treaty-based relationship will be shaped by the overall evolution of the dynamics within the US-led global order in general, and the transatlantic security community in particular. This will be a result of the long-term strategic deliberations between Washington and European capitals including Ankara. As a matter of fact, such a need has already been recognized and is underway, as reflected, for example, by the "NATO 360 degree" concept adapted at the Warsaw summit in 2016.

Alternatively, calls for a reset downplay the need for finding a suitable framework for the Turkey-US security relationship against the background of strategic divergence. Underpinning the current negative picture is the lack of a comprehensive framework that takes into account new global and regional geopolitical realities as well as the domestic conditions of the two countries. Therefore, the challenge is agreeing on how to manage the patterns of convergence and divergence on specific issues, which requires coherent and determined effort by both countries.

While the old strategic partnership framework has lost its relevance for the security relationship in its widest sense, a purely transactional approach cannot provide a sustainable framework either. Thus the dual framework proposed here in which the core NATO strategic partnership between Turkey and the United States

is supplemented with structured transactionalism on secondary issues can potentially alleviate mutual suspicions, generate institutional and elite ownership, and help identify confidence-building measures and ways for managing crises. US-Turkey interactions on secondary issues being managed through structured transactionalism may allow creative and flexible compartmentalization that helps preserve the strategic nature of the relationship in the core area, and it may also leave open the possibility of moving these to the core in the future.

However, this can only be achieved if Turkey and the United States have a vision of long-term commitment to institutionalized cooperation and are willing to invest in their relationship.

Policy Recommendations

Below are some ideas that policymakers on both sides could consider for designing institutional foundations and tools to flesh out the dual framework proposed here. To the extent that such a framework can be operationalized, it may help avoid collisions, minimize costs, and prevent negative spillovers from secondary issues to the core of the relationship.

(i) Introduce Regular Strategic Reviews

Turkey and the United States should invest in regular strategic reviews about their common challenges. Structured transactionalism cannot be casual and driven by crises; it needs to be based on functional mechanisms of consultation and policy coordination that are at work before crises arise. It would help address the deficit of trust while also providing more resilient, effective, and prompt crisis-response capability and a flexible structure for developing ad hoc security cooperation on various issues. Both countries possess this capability as part of NATO's existing mechanisms under Article 4. However, in recent years many rapidly evolving crises have dragged them into an escalation spiral and such NATO mechanisms have been of limited utility. Therefore, they should explore denser bilateral mechanisms, as opposed to relying on Article 4 consultations, to review current and evolving issues, with an eye to identify common threat perceptions and shared interests. It may also contribute to the identification of the most appropriate channels for handling such issues as well as ways to manage the patterns of convergence and divergence.

(ii) Revisit the Institutional Ownership

There is a need for genuine rethinking about the institutional foundations of the Turkey-US security relationship—alliances need nurturing. Considering the erosion

of the constituencies invested in the relationship and the questions surrounding its institutional ownership, both countries need to review the relevant policymaking mechanisms, starting from the presidential offices and foreign policy apparatus and expanding toward defense and security agencies, and eventually other stakeholders. As the experience of recent years has shown, addressing institutional foundations is overdue and it is high time for a creative redesign of the various branches involved in the decision making and implementation of policies on both sides. In that regard, one urgent area is the identification of institutionalized crisis-management mechanisms, as resorting to leader-to-leader channels might not always deliver. Other critical lessons learned, moreover, include the need to involve the legislative bodies in the policy process, including but not limited to enhanced interparliamentary exchanges. Well planned out parliamentary diplomacy initiatives may deepen mutual understanding and improve public support. Moreover, public opinion has also emerged as a major force affecting the dynamics of the relationship and it needs to be engaged on both sides. Public outreach campaigns might be also necessary, considering the collapse of the strategic constituencies.

(iii) Invest in Confidence-Building Measures

Turkey and the United States will benefit from investing in confidence-building measures and from revisiting the overreliance on coercive diplomacy against each other. This may be particularly true in the defense and security field. It is ironic that in a relationship centered on collective defense, arms-procurement issues have been one of the main drivers of divergence and mistrust. Letting the situation in such a critical part of the partnership escalate into a crisis that triggered US sanctions has left a very negative legacy. Defense-industry cooperation between the two countries may need to be revisited from the perspective of confidence building to address their respective concerns and security and defense needs. Another critical area is intelligence sharing. Though provision of actionable intelligence is already happening in the context of counter-terrorism and specific crisis situations, it could be expanded on a more regular basis. Positive steps in these areas are likely to help rebuild trust and strengthen solidarity.

(iv) Cooperate Where Possible, Fix What Is Fixable, and Manage Divergence

A “one size fits all” formula for managing the issues that make up the Turkey-US security relationship should be replaced by a more realistic approach based on different modalities applied to different ones. Turkey and the United States should continue to cooperate on issues in the convergence category, in the process demonstrating how a cooperative approach benefits both. In the negotiation category, they should cooperate as much as they can and continue to negotiate to bridge their remaining

differences so that some can be moved to the convergence category. Managing their differences in the divergence category should be a key concern. The two countries should not settle for just “agreeing to disagree.” They should instead consider developing special bilateral arrangements and mechanisms to manage their engagement on the issues in the divergence category and to prevent disagreements from escalating into crises that makes even transactional cooperation very difficult. As a first step, they could, for example, consider agreeing on demarcation lines beyond which they will not challenge each other’s sensitivities. The long-term goal should be to move as many issues as possible from the divergence and negotiation categories to that of convergence.

Furthermore, special attention needs to be placed on certain issues within the divergence category, considering their explosive nature. If not handled properly, the issue discussed below may turn into a make-or-break test for the Turkey-US security relationship.

(v) Coordinate Engagement with Third Parties

The divergence of Turkey and the United States with regard to their engagement with third parties requires closer attention. Policy contestation has been largely a product of the duality of each country’s regional engagements. As they interact with other regional actors on secondary issues, both are driven by mixed motivations. They have their own priorities and make commitments independent of a shared bilateral strategic vision. The challenges created by their engagement with third parties have been revealed most clearly by their involvement with non-state actors. As the use of proxies has become a new normal in Turkey’s security environment, both countries need to rethink how they will manage their engagements in proxy dynamics, with a view to minimize the cost to each other.

(vi) Watch Overlapping Contentions

The most challenging issues will be those on which Turkey and the United States not only disagree substantively but also disagree on whether they belong to the core or secondary area. As these issues are likely to put the biggest stress on the future of the relationship, they will require particularly careful handling.

The outstanding dispute between the United States and Turkey over the latter’s acquisition of the S-400 missile system from Russia is such a make-or-break issue. While they are deeply divided in terms of the substance, their dispute also is rooted in identifying the proper platform for dealing with it. If such crises cannot be managed, they will poison all aspects of the relationship and push it to the point of

collapse. The ideal situation would be for Turkey not to have S-400s and to instead acquire an air-defense system serving its needs that is integrated to NATO, as well as for Turkey to return to the F-35 program. A genuine solution in that respect extends well beyond US-Turkish relations and goes to the very heart of the meaning of the transatlantic alliance. Therefore, this crisis should serve as a reminder of the need for all NATO members to consider bringing defense procurement back to the core of the alliance with all that this entails, including in terms of burden sharing and technology transfers.

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