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Is there strategic ground for a Turkish-Russian alliance in the 2010's? – Authoritarian alliances under emerging multipolarity



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Abstract

The post-Cold War decades introduced two major trends to the international state system. The first trend was an authoritarian backlash after a period of democratization and the second one was a general growth in power capabilities for many states (Chapter 1). As a consequence, alliance choices of rising authoritarian powers became increasingly important. Scholarly arguments are summarized to explain why it is important to adopt a two-pronged analysis when faced with the grand strategic choices by countries that were affected by both of these trends (Chapter 2). On one hand, the domestic system of such states resembles the anarchic conditions of the international system, creating special security needs for authoritarian regimes. On the other, traditional state interests cannot be dismissed as long as the object of analysis is not a failed state or close to state failure, especially, under the assumption that states with growing capabilities will craft more assertive foreign policies.

This two-pronged analysis of regime-and state interest is then used to assess whether there is grand strategic ground for an alliance between Russia and Turkey, two of the most relevant authoritarian powers. A discourse analysis shows how both regimes' strategic rationale is affected by the growing authoritarianism of the Turkish regime. While Western criticism on the actions of the Turkish re-

gime pushed it further away from its traditional allies, the Russian reaction to such criticism resulted in growing strategic incentives for an alignment with Moscow (Chapter 3). Still, the states interactions over their strategic objectives in Syria and the South Caucasus seem to bear significant conflict potential (Chapter 4). Therefore, realignment from the prior strategic positioning might be possible, but a future alliance will face several obstacles (Chapter 5).

1. Introduction

The end of the 3rd wave – Regime interests and authoritarian alliances

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, euphoric liberal theorists talked about reaching the “end of history” through the spread of democratic government, which constitute the final form of human government.¹ Indeed, the process leading to this euphoria already began in the 80’s with emerging democracies in Latin America and the Asian Pacific but was strongly accelerated by the end of the superpower competition that gave way to the democratization of large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe.² Fukuyama’s vision of the near future not only related to the way societies will be governed domestically, but also predicted that international relations will be pacified by shared values and liberal institutions.

Nevertheless, the development seemed to halt in the mid-90’s and more critical scholars started to describe the ebbing process as the “3rd Wave of Democratization”, indicating that recent developments might have been significant but not unique, and that authoritarian backlash usually occurs after a phase of democratization.³ Competing theories were formulated;⁴ and Realism started to re-gain its

importance in order to explain outcomes in the international system. Latter events like the so-called “Color Revolutions” in the 2000’s and the Arab Uprising in 2011 were seen by many liberals as evidence for the continuation of democratization. Yet, the meager achievements of these displayed the resilience of many authoritarian regimes when they are confronted with popular protest.⁵ Still, the inter-connection of regime and state interest in non-democratic states remains relatively under-researched.

Turkey and Russia are two prominent examples for the failure of democratization during the 3rd Wave. Turkey was often described as a progressing system under the schism of Kemalism during the Cold War and the early AKP was seen by many in the West as a reliable liberal-reformist player willing to ultimately enter the final stages of democratization in the 2000’s. Contrary to these expectations, a slow downtrend in democracy indicators⁶ signaled a backlash into authoritarianism since the party was able to consolidate its power in the 2007 elections.⁷ In recent years this trend seems to have accelerated, and the reality of a fully democratized Turkey has become more unlikely. Russia on the other hand experienced a different development. After strong signs of a liberal progression under

¹ Fukuyama, Francis: *The End of History and the last Man*, New York 1992.

² Diamond, Larry: *Is the Third Wave Over? An Empirical Assessment*, The Kellogg Institute 1997.

³ Ibid., Huntington, Samuel: *The Third Wave. Democratization in the 20st Century*, Norman 1991.

⁴ E.g. Huntington, Samuel: *The Clash of Civilizations*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72/No. 3, pp. 22-49, 1992.

⁵ Graeme, Gill: *Building an Authoritarian Polity: Russia in Post-Soviet Times*, Cambridge 2015.

⁶ E.g. Freedom House 2005/2007/2011.

⁷ Robins, P.: *The Foreign Policy of Turkey*. in: Hinnebusch, Raymond/Ehteshami, Anoushiravan (ed.): *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, 2nd ed., Boulder 2014.

Gorbatschow, Russia's drive for democratization peaked in 1993 under Yeltsin. Even if Yeltsin's intentions are contested between scholars it is generally accepted that a downturn set in after this democratization and the authoritarian structures were consolidated over the following years. Putin as Yeltsin's successor continued this trend consequentially by forging ties between the oligarchy and the regime as well as creating an authoritarian polity over the 2nd Chechen War. This trend continued when pressure was put on the regime by the Color Revolutions, especially by those in the post-Soviet space.⁸ Even though Russia's experience with the democratic project was shorter, the authoritarian tendencies recently increased with shrinking freedom of NGO's, and Putin's change of the constitution in 2011 in advance of his third term as president in 2012.

Due to these developments towards an authoritarian system it will be relevant for future foreign policy analysis to gain insight into these two respective regime interests. In chapter 2 general theories and assumptions on authoritarian regimes' interest will be explained and specific features of the Russian and Turkish regime and their needs will be analyzed. After that, evidence will be provided in chapter three regarding a possible solidarization on the regimes' side towards the respective other on domestic policies.

Case studies are given in order to provide data on means of repression and changes of the polity. The data will be generated through a discourse analysis covering Russian and Turkish (English speaking) pro-government media, as well as comments made by key state officials. The underlying hypothesis is that both regimes would have grounds for a strategic partnership if their shared interest's result in solidarization.

The Shift Towards Multi-Polarity – The Crafting of Assertive Foreign Policies

The other factor strongly influencing the grand strategic needs for Russia and Turkey was the fact that the international system was shifting towards multi-polarity. After a time of unipolarity in the 90's⁹ this trend became obvious through the growing US war weariness caused by the ongoing military struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as through the decline in relative capabilities after the financial crisis in 2008. Some realists believed that the unipolar system would be superseded by a bipolar system split between the US as the status quo power and China as the challenger for global hegemony.¹⁰ Nevertheless, multiple nations experienced an increase in capabilities leading to a willingness to take on more re-

⁸ Duncan, Peter: *Russia, the West and the 2007-2008 Electoral Cycle: Did the Kremlin Really Fear a 'Coloured Revolution'?* in: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 5/No. 1, pp. 1-25, 2012.

⁹ Krauthammer, Charles: *The Unipolar Moment*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70/No. 1, 1990.

¹⁰ Mearsheimer, John J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, New York 2014.

sponsibility and assert their interests in the international system as regional great powers.¹¹ That led to an increased interest in the emerging institutions and formats fit to function in a multi-polar system like the G20 or the BRICS.

Russia and Turkey are classic examples of this process, both experiencing sharp economic growth under Erdogan and Putin in the 2000's.¹² Additionally, Russia has shown a strong increase in its military capabilities, which were seen as obsolete during the conflicts of the 90's.¹³ That rise in capabilities led to growing assertiveness in both countries neighboring regions (and the strategically important Middle East for Russia since 2011), making it important to look at the overlapping spheres of state interest to assess the strategic ground of a possible future alliance. Even though realist theory suggests that there is ground for collision between two rising powers sharing the same neighborhood, assertive foreign policies do not necessarily need to be confrontational. While Russia's concept of the "the Near Abroad" resembles a traditional great power sphere of influence, the Turkish "Zero-Problem-with-Neighbors" (sometimes labeled as "Neo-Ottomanism") is seen as a more ambiguous concept with a smaller military dimension. The emergence and form of these two foreign policy concepts will be analyzed in detail in chapter

two. Following that, both foreign policy courses will be analyzed in qualitative case studies in chapter three in order to assess compatibility of both states foreign policies in the international system. The case studies will include the Syrian Civil War and key issues in the South Caucasus. Publications by independent scholars and think tanks¹⁴ on both case studies are abundant.

Hypotheses regarding the research question

H1: The shared domestic security interests of the regimes are leading to a solidarization of both regimes.

Test: Qualitative discourse analysis of the regimes' stances on each other's authoritarian policies and methods.

H2: Growing assertiveness in their neighborhoods does not hinder the strategic ground for an alliance.

Test: Qualitative case studies on key foreign policy interactions.

If both validated = Grand strategic ground for an authoritarian alliance in a multi-polar international system.

Reasons for the Time Frame

As mentioned above, the consolidation of authoritarian power set in before the 2010's in both countries. Still, this development per-

¹¹ For great power criteria see: Waltz, Kenneth: *Man the State and War, A Theoretical Analysis*, New York 1959.

¹² According to the World Bank Database, available under: www.worldbank.org [15.11.2017].

¹³International Institute for Strategic Studies (1990-2017): *The Military Balance 1990-2017*, London.

¹⁴ E.g. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* or *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*.

sisted over recent years with more evident repercussions, especially in Turkey. On the international level the Arab Uprising led to the Syrian Civil War, which is one of the most critical factors in the Russian-Turkish relationship of today, symbolizing the growing assertiveness in their foreign policies and opening up the Middle East as a sphere of influence for Russia.

2. Authoritarian states and the analysis of grand strategy

Trubowitz's introduction to *Politics and Strategy* states that the study of grand strategy is dominated by two general approaches.¹⁵ The first is the analysis of the geopolitical circumstances of a country traditionally under the leading paradigm of structural realism. According to this analysis, the state has to be seen as a unitary actor in the international system and its grand strategy is determined by factors like relative capabilities (e.g. military strength, economic power, population size), defense-offense balance (e.g. terrain, technology etc.) as well as the overall distribution of power (multi-bi- or unipolarity of the system).¹⁶ The second dominant approach is the *Innenpolitik*-approach. Researchers following that tradition assume that grand strategies

are determined by pressures within the state and mostly focus on coalition government building, emphasizing the premise that societal interests (socioeconomic, ideological etc.) influence the state's formulation-and direction of foreign policies.¹⁷ Initially, both approaches seem contradictory, but the following arguments will explain why both are needed to analyze weak-authoritarian states.

2.1 The need to open the "black-box"

The traditional approach to geopolitics has been increasingly criticized over its inability to explain the strategic orientation of authoritarian states suffering from weaker statehood. These states share certain characteristics that seem to defy the neorealist balance of power logic.

Authors who tried to approach the grand strategy making of such states softened the parsimony by giving up the assumption of a unitary state as the object of analysis, combining neorealist analysis of geopolitics with the *Innenpolitik*-approach. According to Ayoob, the anomaly in specifically postcolonial states is caused by them being newcomers to the international system, and lacking the necessary

¹⁵ Trubowitz, Peter: *Politics and Strategy. Partisan Ambition & American Statecraft*, Princeton and Oxford 2011, pp. 2-4.

¹⁶ Waltz, Kenneth: *Man the State and War, A Theoretical Analysis*, New York 1959. / Taliaferro, Jeffrey W.: *Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited*, in: *International Security*, Vol. 25/No. 3, pp. 128-161, 2000. / Mearsheimer, John

J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, New York 2014.

¹⁷ Trubowitz, Peter: *Politics and Strategy. Partisan Ambition & American Statecraft*, Princeton and Oxford 2011, pp. 2-4. / Ripsman, Norrin M., Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. and Lobell, Steven E.: *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York 2016, pp. 2-15.

historical processes to form a coherent Westphalian-type state.¹⁸ Plagued by economic problems, social non-cohesiveness and often irredentism as well as secessionism, the security dilemma is primarily a domestic, rather than an interstate phenomenon. Therefore, Ayooob puts forward his *Subaltern Realism* as a more classical approach instead of the “scientific” structural realism. Due to the fragile nature of the state he takes into account the historical circumstances of the weak states and acknowledges the interconnection between regime and state security.¹⁹

David introduced his concept of *Omnibalancing* in order to explain the balancing decisions made by 3rd World regimes. Like Ayooob, he is willing to relinquish parsimony by giving up the assumption of the state as a unitary actor pointing out that 3rd World regimes are primarily faced with domestic threats because of their weakness and struggles to be perceived as legitimate. Referencing the few examples of regimes removed through an interstate war, David argues that the vast majority of 3rd World statesmen were actually overthrown by domestic challengers.²⁰ Additionally, he highlights that the drive to ensure survival not only applies to states in the international system, but also to the regime in the domestic sphere of a weak state. In Turkey frequent references to the “parallel state” show how

certain groups within the country operate outside the legal framework if certain interests are threatened. In the military, for example, the traditional Kemalist elite safeguard their ability to forcefully interfere in the political process in order to guard their vision of state identity and the privileges of the military. Another famous term framed by the AKP leadership over the last years was the “parallel structure”, meaning Gulen’s Hizmet movement which allegedly tries to undermine the regimes influence by creeping through the state institutions to lie in wait for the right moment to revolt. In the case of Russia, the Putin regime is mostly the focus of foreign policy analysis. Still, it is often speculated how specific groups vie for influence over the states policies outside of the political and legal framework.²¹ Just recently Zygar, one of Russia’s leading investigative journalists, published *All of the Kremfins Men*, in which he tried to counter the narrative of a strong Putin government by laying out how the security apparatus, political elites, oligarchs and groups of the organized crime work behind the scenes.²² Due to the extralegal nature of the political arena and the violent tactics to which these domestic actors revert to from time to time, Russian politics is often illustrated as a

¹⁸ Comment: Cohesive unitary states; named after states belonging to the European state system after the Peace of Westphalia.

¹⁹ Ayooob, Mohammed: *Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism*, International Studies Review, Vol. 4/No. 3, pp. 27-48, 2002.

²⁰ David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-238, 1991.

²¹ Mankoff, Jeffrey: *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham 2010, pp. 53-97.

²² Zygar, Mikhail: *All the Kremlin’s Men. Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin*, New York 2016.

“dog fight under the carpet”.²³ Under these conditions, the emerging central authority is not ensuring the survival of the loser of the domestic power competition.²⁴ Operating under circumstances resembling domestic anarchy, an authoritarian regime staying in power is often bound to the leadership’s physical survival. Therefore, David’s approach not only takes the structural realist balance of power logic to the domestic level, but also assumes that domestic threats have an even greater effect on shaping grand strategies due to their prevalence. Hence, he assumes that the appropriate research question concerning authoritarian government alliance-making should not be “Which outside power is the most likely to ensure the survival of the state?”, but rather “Which outside power is the most likely to help me stay in power?”.²⁵ The reasoning of the regime trying to ensure its survival against domestic challengers definitely applies to Turkey and Russia. One only has to consider the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016, during which Erdogan and his family’s

prior whereabouts were attacked by military units, and the president’s jet was almost shot down by a fighter plane shortly after that.²⁶ In Russia, Putin reportedly survived several attempts on his life, especially during his early years in power.²⁷ Beyond that, both countries share several other characteristics that David uses to generally categorize 3rd World states^{28,29}. Again, indicating that a traditional neorealist approach would not be sufficient to explain their alliance considerations.

In his article *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy* published in 1998, Gideon Rose categorized more comprehensive approaches that combine classical realist thought and structural realism into so-called “Neoclassical Realism”.³⁰ Originally, these more holistic approaches were seen as ad-hoc concepts used to explain anomalies which neorealists failed to predict. Because of their allegedly limited scope of analysis and their incoherent holistic nature, neoclassical realist approaches were often dismissed as Type-1 theories³¹ by other scholars. In 2016, Ripsman, Taliaferro

²³ Rogers, James: *Moscow Diary: Kremlin guessing game*, BBC 2007, available under: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7151517.stm> [15.08.2017]. / Mankoff, Jeffrey: *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham 2010, pp. 53-97.

²⁴ Comment: Usually the defeated contender gets either a severe punishment or will be executed (e.g. Ceausescu, Mubarak, Morsi, Gaddafi)

²⁵ David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-256, 1991.

²⁶ Pamuk Humeyra and Coskun, Orhan: *At height of Turkish coup bid, rebel jets had Erdogan’s plane in their sights*, Reuters 2016, Available under: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-plot-insight-idUSKCN0ZX0Q9> [14.07.2017].

²⁷ CBS News: *Vladimir Putin tells Oliver Stone about escaping assassination attempts*, CBS News 2017, available under: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/vladimir-putin-interviews-with-oliver-stone-assassination-attempts-destiny/> [14.07.2017].

²⁸ Comment: Russia and Turkey share especially the first three characteristics to a lesser degree. These are problematic territorial demarcations or the lack of what Miller describes it as a “state-to-nation balance” (Miller, Benjamin: *Balance of Power or the State-to-Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War-Propensity*, Security Studies, Vol. 15/Issue 4, 658-705, 2006) indicated by separatist issues, the governments lack of legitimacy and authoritarian rule (David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 239-240), 1991.

²⁹ David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 239-242, 1991.

³⁰ Rose, Gideon: *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, World Politics, Vol. 51/No. 1, pp. 144-172, 1991.

³¹ Comment: Ad-hoc made up theories to explain specific anomalies but not universal theories.

and Lobell attempted to counter that criticism by laying a coherent theoretical foundation for neoclassical realism in their book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.³² Contrary to David's *Omnibalancing*, they still prioritize the traditional balance of power logic in the international system. From there, they claim that the international system does not provide a "true solution" to encounter threats to the state. The system rather sets a range of options for the government to choose from.³³ During the decision making, the foreign policy executive (FPE; key government officials shaping foreign policy) is then influenced by intervening variables in the domestic sphere. Using methods of the *Innenpolitik*-approach, these variables are then analyzed in order to predict the FPE's decision on how to act internationally. Departing from this basic understanding of neoclassical realism, Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell are more open on the question of how to analyze the intervening variables. Depending on the circumstances, psychological, organizational, societal and institutional models could all have explanatory power. Yet, they assume that the most intervening variables can be categorized as leader images, strategic culture,

state-to-society relations and domestic institutions.³⁴ Even though the authors do not intend to specifically analyze authoritarian regimes with their two-level analysis, they still provide valuable ideas on how to approach decision making on the domestic level. The leader images as a first intervening variable constitute an insightful object of analysis. The authors suppose that different leader types of the FPE have different cognitive filters comprising philosophical beliefs about politics and instrumental beliefs on which strategy is best suited to achieve their interests.³⁵ Furthermore, the kind of domestic institution particular to authoritarian states is important for the analysis of their foreign policy making. Less restrained by checks and balances, the authoritarian FPE can craft a grand strategy more freely to fit its needs.³⁶ In general, neoclassical realism has proven to be valuable for adding explanatory power to the realist school of thought. The combination of agent and structure is especially useful when dealing with FPE strategizing in rather non-cohesive states.

All of the mentioned approaches relinquish parsimony to gain explanatory power necessary to predict authoritarian regimes' strategic decisions. Even though approaches like these

³² Ripsman, Norrin M./Taliaferro, Jeffrey W./Lobell, Steven E.: *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York 2016, pp. 1-32.

³³ Ibid. pp. 15-32.

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 58-80.

³⁵ Levy, Jack S.: *Psychology and Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, in: Huddie, Leonie and O.Sears, David and Levy, Jack S.: *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, New York 2013, pp. 306-309. / Kitchen, Nicholas (2010): *Systemic pressures and*

domestic ideas: a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation, *Review of international studies*, Vol. 36/No. 1, pp. 117-143. / Holsti, Ole R. (1967): *Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy*, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 21/No. 1, pp. 16-39.

³⁶ Ripsman, Norrin M./Taliaferro, Jeffrey W./Lobell, Steven E.: *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York 2016, pp. 75-79.

are often classified as Type-1 theories, they actually gain relevance with a number of states rising in the hierarchy of the international system without democratizing and transforming into Westphalian-type states. As discussed in Chapter 1, Russia and Turkey are the most prominent countries now vitally important for outcomes in the international system while fitting many Ayoob and David's characterizations. Beyond that, the occurrence of war was the key phenomena to explain even the earliest IR classics, like Thucydide's *History of the Peloponnesian War*. During the Cold War, hot conflicts were already located on the "strategic periphery".³⁷ Still, scholars mostly tried to gain an understanding of deterrence mechanisms and strategic shifts in the "strategic centers" of Europe and East Asia, a point of criticism raised by Ayoob and David.³⁸ With superpower competition gone, the continuation of political violence in less stable parts of the world became more relevant to IR scholars, making the new approaches key to the understanding of war. With interstate war and traditional balancing becoming the anomaly, non-traditional approaches should no longer be dismissed as auxiliary instruments to the traditional approaches.³⁹

2.2 The need to assess the state interest

In Ayoob's and David's criteria to describe postcolonial/3rd World states, Russia and Turkey share many similarities as former imperial centers of land empires, especially in regard to the weaker state structures and the threat of separatism (Chechen-and Kurdish issue), though to a lesser degree.⁴⁰ Still, they both have strong national identities. Therefore, they are not fragile states despite structural weaknesses that limit the explanatory power of a traditional neorealist approach.⁴¹ According to a Brookings report, Turkey and Russia were both "states-to-watch" in regards to a possible state failure in 2008.⁴² The Economist Intelligence Unit estimated their state capacity as moderate in Turkey's case and low in Russia's case in 2010, while the Fund for Peace database indicated medium-to-high warnings for state failure in 2017.⁴³ Rankings and indices like these should be taken with caution, considering the criticism voiced against measures to estimate state fragility

³⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond: *The International Politics of the Middle East*, Manchester 2003.

³⁸ Ayoob, Mohammed: *Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism*, International Studies Review, Vol. 4/No. 3, pp. 27-48, 2002, pp. 32-35. / -David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-256, 1991, pp. 255-256.

³⁹ Ayoob, Mohammed: *Inequality and Theorizing in International Relations: The Case for Subaltern Realism*, International Studies Review, Vol. 4/No. 3, pp. 27-48, 2002, pp. 32-35.

⁴⁰ Fund For Peace Fragile States Index 2017.

⁴¹ Schön, Anna Marisa: *The Construction of Turkish National Identity: Nationalization of Islam & Islamization of Nationhood*, Tilburg University 2013. / Zevelev, Igor: *Russian National Identity and Foreign Policy*, CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program 2016.

⁴² Rice, Susan E./Patrick, Stewart: *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World*, The Brookings Institution 2008.

⁴³ Kekic, Laza: *The state of the state. So much to do, too weak to do it?* The Economist 2010. / Fund For Peace database 2017.

through standardized processes.⁴⁴ Still, most of the established ones at least enable the observer to gain a general picture on a states level of statehood in relation to others.

The same can be said about the level of authoritarianism, which is another indicator for the intensity of the domestic security dilemma. Both Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit list Turkey as a hybrid regime (or “partly free”) and Russia as lesser authoritarian regime (or “not free”).⁴⁵ This indicates that the threat level is not as urgent as for states with more fragile regimes faced with the daily threat of state failure, even though hybrid regimes still have to deal with threats to their physical survival on the domestic level.⁴⁶ Therefore, David’s strong prioritization of regime security in his *Omnibalancing* does not seem optimal when analyzing these hybrid cases. Ayoob and David acknowledge that their definition of post-colonial/3rd World states are not exclusive categories but rather have to be seen as a continuum.⁴⁷ Being on the end of the continuum where threats to the regime do not necessarily outweigh threats to the state, both regime and state interests should be analyzed. An approach that more equally values both levels in the decision making process and is open for

interconnectivity, like Ayoob’s *Subaltern Realism*, is promising for hybrid cases. If one assumes that both states have an appropriate degree of statehood, neoclassical realism can be a satisfactory analytical tool with the base assumption that the international system dictates the broad parameters of grand strategy. This ensures that the threats of the anarchical system to the survival of the state, which neorealists like Waltz and Mearsheimer see as prevalent for the decision making process of governments, are not dismissed.⁴⁸

In general it can be summarized that grand strategies of hybrid states have to be analyzed as what Trubowitz calls “two faced”. Meaning that the heads of state act as “strategic statesmen” both domestically and internationally, with the substantiation that the strategic behavior in the domestic sphere also aims for survival and not only for political coalition making, how it is assumed to be in more democratic states.⁴⁹

In order to analyze the grand strategy making of Turkey and Russia, both levels are approached openly, combining case studies of the *Innenpolitik*-approach as well as a more traditional geopolitical analysis. Giving up restrictions of parsimonious theories, it enables the scholar to take into account both effects of a domestic security dilemma and possibly

⁴⁴ E.g.: Graf, Timo Alexander: *Measuring State Failure. Development of a New State Capacity Index*, Conference Paper, Jacobs University Bremen 2012.

⁴⁵ Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2017. / Freedom House database 2017.

⁴⁶ Comment: Similar regimes like in Ukraine and Egypt collapsed rapidly after unsuspected events.

⁴⁷ David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-256, 1991, pp. 242.

⁴⁸ Waltz, Kenneth: *Man the State and War. A theoretical analysis*, New York 1959. / Mearsheimer, John J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York 2001.

⁴⁹ Trubowitz, Peter: *Politics and Strategy. Partisan Ambition & American Statecraft*, Princeton and Oxford 2011, pp. 2-7.

intervening variables like “leader images” as well as possible limiting effects of the international level.

3. The analysis of regime interests

3.1 The liberal threat to authoritarian regime security

When trying to analyze the strategic rational of authoritarian regimes, one should have an understanding of the major threats to authoritarian rule. While other non-democratic or politically ambiguous players constitute a serious threat, it is the liberal forces supported by Western powers who pose the most systemic challenge to their rule. According to Gilpin, hegemonic powers do not solely rule with the direct use of hard power, but establish certain “mechanisms of control” to consolidate dominance over an international system. One of these mechanisms is the establishment of rules in the international system.⁵⁰ To return to Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, the US and its allies share liberalism as a strategic culture, meaning that liberal institutions and shared values lead to democratic peace, as is the case in Western Europe and parts of Pacific Asia.⁵¹ Thus, the continued spread of

democracy is itself a strategic goal for the US and its liberal allies due to its pacifying effect on the international system.^{52 53} This is evidenced the close connections between the US and Russia during the few Yeltsin years of liberalization and the early Erdogan government, which proclaimed to be on a path of democratization. After the 9/11 attacks, the spread of liberal strategic culture was manifested in the Bush-Doctrine, which proclaimed the lack of democratic culture and institutions were the reasons for the revisionist behaviour of “rogue states”.⁵⁴ Alongside the direct Western military intervention to topple authoritarian regimes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, it is the constant peaceful pressure towards democratic transition that can poses a threat even to strong regimes. For authoritarian regimes, this type of hegemonic order is accelerating domestic threats to their rule. How this intermestic dynamic comes into play will be explained in the following section.

Dahl’s famous model for democratic transition emphasizes the strategic rational of authoritarian elites when faced with the pressure to democratize. According to him, elites

⁵⁰ Gilpin, Robert (1988): *The Theory of Hegemonic War*, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol. 18/No. 4, pp. 591-613, 1988, pp. 28-29.

⁵¹ Ripsman, Norrin M./Taliaferro, Jeffrey W./Lobell, Steven E.: *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York 2016, pp.67-68.

⁵² Owen, John M.: *How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace*, International Security, Vol. 19/No. 2, pp. 87-125, 1994. /

Miller, Benjamin: *Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq*, Security Studies, Vol 19/No. 1, pp. 26-65, 2010.

⁵³ Comment: Visible through the establishment of institutions like the EEU, EU, NATO etc.

⁵⁴ Miller, Benjamin: *Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq*, Security Studies, Vol 19/No. 1, pp. 26-65, 2010.

give in to demands if the “costs of suppression” outweigh the “costs of toleration”.⁵⁵ The threat to their physical survival should be factored in,⁵⁶ considering that processes of democratization, especially ones triggered by spontaneous public protest, can quickly slip out of a regime’s hands, ending with the arrest or death of the political leadership.⁵⁷ In order to keep costs of suppression low, authoritarian regimes need to limit what Levitsky and Way described as “linkage” and “leverage”. These were defined by them as following:

“**Western leverage** refers to incumbent governments’ vulnerability to external pressure for democratization. Such pressure may be exerted in a variety of ways, including positive conditionality (for example, EU membership), punitive sanctions (aid withdrawal, trade sanctions), diplomatic persuasion, and military force. [...] **Linkage** can be defined as the density of ties and cross-border flows between a particular country and the U.S., the EU, and western-dominated multilateral institutions.⁵⁸

When the 3rd wave gained momentum after the fall of the Soviet Union, democratization

was set high on the agenda of the US and its European allies. Levitsky and Way conclude that linkage seems to be the more impactful of both variables. A higher linkage to the West means that repressive means will be more commented on by Western media as well as state officials, which affects both Turkey and Russia, and an actual political reaction also grows more likely. This encourages and legitimizes the claims of a variety of liberal actors who can build up more momentum, claiming a stake in their nation’s affairs. Growing linkage also means the establishment of channels through which external actors are able to funnel resources to the opposition, creating a more even playing field. In addition to that, the international economic connections pushed by institutions found under the Washington Consensus results in economic elites having an interest in sustaining the Western linkage due their profit oriented rational. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult for the regime to maintain an authoritarian coalition willing to carry its repressive methods and policies.⁵⁹ Since Levitsky and Way published their theory, numerous scholars attempted to enhance its explanatory power. On this part, Tolstrup amended their theory with the element of “gate-keeping elites” who are not all uniform and might

⁵⁵ Dahl, A. Robert: *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven 1971, 14-18.

⁵⁶ David, Steven (1991): *Explaining third World Alignments*, *World Politics*, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-256, 1991, p. 242.

⁵⁷ Comment: Peaceful transitioning is explained by Putnam’s two-level game logic (Putnam, Robert D. (1988): *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*, *International Organization*, Vol. 42/No. 3, pp. 427-460.)

⁵⁸ Levitsky, Steven/Way, Lucan A.: *Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change*, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 38/No. 4, pp. 379-400, 2006, pp. 382-384.

⁵⁹ Levitsky, Steven/Way, Lucan A.: *Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change*, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 38/No. 4, pp. 379-400, 2006, pp. 382-390.

have differing sets of values or strategic rationales.⁶⁰ He draws upon former arguments made by O'Donnell and Schmitter, who point to the fact that regime elites consist of both hard-liner and soft-liner factions, whose basic values intervene in their cost-benefit calculation on when to desert the regime, equal to the neoclassical realist intervening variable of leader images.⁶¹

The costs of international isolation, or the threat of it on the side of the authoritarian regime in order to reduce the linkage, grow parallel to the degree of linkage. Cutting ties with the West and authoritarian abuse of power can then provoke a double boomerang effect by Western actors both internationally and domestically. Due to the resulting spiraling effect, authoritarian regimes have an interest in limiting linkage.⁶²

One factor central to this analysis of countering leverage and linkage is the existence of a non-democratic power that is able to support the country economically, politically and militarily.⁶³ Due to the increase in relative capabilities, Turkey and Russia became each other's option for an alternative alliance that might be sufficient enough to mitigate the Western influence in the future (in Turkey's case), or reinforce its geostrategic position

(Russia), while not undermining the regime's dominance in the domestic balance of power. Also, both countries are located on the strong end of the weak state continuum, which means they are less dependent on keeping up the existing ties. Additionally, the international environment in general seems more permissive for authoritarian powers since the negative experience for the US during the Global War on Terror and its accompanied activism on democratization, which led to a more cautious foreign policy approach under Obama, decreasing possible costs for authoritarian abuse.⁶⁴ This change seems to coincide with the early Trump administrations favoring of traditional security alliances.⁶⁵ Yilmaz claims that gate-keeper elites are able to anticipate changing international patterns like these, and could therefore be discouraged even before the abuse of power by an authoritarian regime revealing the price of its actions.⁶⁶

3.2 Replacing the hegemonic order

The failures of the GWOT revealed, that the Bush administrations grand strategy could be interpreted as what Gilpin and Kennedy call

⁶⁰ Tolstrup, Jakob: *When can external actors influence democratization? Leverage linkages and gatekeeper elites*, Democratization, Vol. 20/No. 4, pp. 716-742, 2012.

⁶¹ O'Donnell, Guillermo/Schmitter, Philippe C.: *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Vol. 4, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracy*, London/Baltimore 1986.

⁶² Levitsky, Steven/Way, Lucan A.: *Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change*, Comparative Politics, Vol. 38/No. 4, pp. 379-400, 2006, pp. 382-390.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 383.

⁶⁴ Miller, Benjamin: *Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq*, Security Studies, Vol 19/No. 1, pp. 26-65, 2010. / Stephens, Bret: *America in Retreat. The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder*, New York, 2015.

⁶⁵ Bandow, Doug: *Trump and U.S. Alliances*, CATO Institute 2017.

⁶⁶ Yilmaz, Hakan: *External-Internal Linkages in Democratization: Developing an Open Model of Democratic Change*, Democratization, Vol. 9/No. 2, pp. 67-84, 2002.

an “imperial overstretch”,⁶⁷ a narrative that was later integrated in the overall academic debate on hegemonic decline after the financial crisis of 2008.⁶⁸ Along with the disenfranchised reactions in the West to the outcomes of the “Arab Uprising”, the hope for Fukuyama’s “End of History” and the spread of liberal strategic culture seemed like an illusion. Even though liberal democratic culture is still a key pillar of US hegemony and has some restraining effects on the domestic actions of authoritarian regimes, its strategic agenda has changed and democratization has become a lower priority, resulting in a more favorable cost-benefit calculation for authoritarian actions.⁶⁹ Still, in order to break the international rules set by the US to spread liberalism permanently, rising authoritarian states will have to engage the US over a battle for legitimacy outside of the hegemonic order.

Besides some scholars’ acknowledgement of the existence of legitimacy in international systems, there is little research done on its essence and the process of legitimization.⁷⁰ Assuming that the international system is mainly

characterized through the absence of government, the subject of legitimacy was mostly excluded from Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST),⁷¹ especially within the realist school of thought. Still, some defensive realists like Buzan, Snyder and Van Evera agree with the assumptions of HST scholars like Gilpin and recognize that norms as well as organization are important systemic modifiers, with an effect similar to the state of military technology⁷²; David highlights the fact that states characterized as part of the 3rd World usually have an agenda in opposition to the hegemonic order. During the Cold War the non-alignment movement was the manifestation of states that were interested in being excluded from the superpowers’ hegemonic spheres.⁷³ Today, this can be seen as an attempt to organize in formats like BRICS, SCO or the G 20, which reflect emerging multipolarity and increase the stakes of rising states shaping outcomes in the international system. Although, rising powers share the interest of challenging hegemonic order, there is no competitor who could currently replace

⁶⁷ Gilpin, Robert: *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge 1981. / Gilpin, Robert: *The Theory of Hegemonic War*, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18/No. 4, pp. 591-613, 1988. / Kennedy, Paul: *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, New York 1989.

⁶⁸ Stephens, Bret: *America in Retreat. The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder*, New York 2015. / Rachman, Gideon: *Easternization: Asia's Rise and America's Decline From Obama to Trump and Beyond*, New York 2017.

⁶⁹ Stephens, Bret: *America in Retreat. The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder*, New York 2015. / Inbar, Efraim: *Consequences of American Retreat from the Middle East*, *The Begin-Sadat Center For Strategic Studies, BESA Center Perspectives Paper*, No. 331, 2016.

⁷⁰ Clark, Ian: *Legitimacy in International Society*, Oxford/New York 2008, pp. 1-33 and 155-245.

⁷¹ Gilpin, Robert: *War and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge 1981. / Wohlforth, William C.: *The Stability of a Unipolar World*, *International Security* Vol. 21/No. 1, pp. 5-41, 1999.

⁷² Buzan, Barry/Jones, Charles A./Little, Richard: *The Logic of Anarchy*, New York 1993, pp. 69-77. / Snyder, Glenn H.: *Process variables in neorealist theory*, *Security Studies*, Vol.5/Issue 3, pp. 167-192, 2007. / Van Evera, Stephen: *Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War*, *International Security*, *International Security*, Vol. 22/No. 4, pp. 5-43, 1998, pp. 6-11.

⁷³ David, Steven (1991): *Explaining third World Alignments*, *World Politics*, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-256, 1991, p. 241.

the Western value system. Taking the argument of strategic culture, one could assume that an equivalent of democratic peace exists between authoritarian states, whose leadership might share specific “authoritarian values” and have a better understanding of each other’s security needs and the process of foreign policy making.⁷⁴ Yet, so far studies refuted the hypotheses of “dictatorial peace”. Even if “personalistic dictatorships” wage significantly less war, one cannot assume that there is a shared strategic culture between authoritarian regimes.⁷⁵ Still, since authoritarian regimes do not benefit from the liberal strategic culture⁷⁶, it is in their interest to replace the current hegemonic order with something that resembles a global Westphalian state system more neutral towards a variety of non-liberal great powers. The commitment of non-interference in other states domestic affairs would decrease the threat level faced by authoritarian regimes in their domestic balance of power. Therefore, emerging multipolarity not only gives states the opportunity to decrease Western linkage and leverage by constituting an alternative alliance option but also to legitimize authoritarian rule in the international system in order to eliminate liberal

strategic culture as a “mechanism of hegemonic control”.

3.3 Methodology

Official statements by key members of the foreign policy executive as well as the reporting of government oriented news outlets are used to assess Russian-and Turkish regime stances. These statements were accessed through online databanks of the Presidents’ and Prime Ministers’ respective offices, as well as the foreign ministries and occasionally complemented by unrecorded statements referenced by the pro-government media.

There were two English-speaking media outlets used for each country to gather data. While proximity to the government’s agenda was a logical criteria in the selection process, size also mattered to maximize the representability of the data. In the case of Russia, a wider range of suitable options were available due to a stronger state dominance over the media landscape. *RT* and *Sputnik* were picked due to their prominence as well as the fact that *Sputnik* is state-owned and *RT* is state funded. Both media outlets are non-profit oriented and were frequently criticized by fellow journalists and in academia of being propaganda tools of the Russian regime.⁷⁷ On

⁷⁴ Waltz, Kenneth : *Man the State and War. A theoretical analysis*, New York 1959 / Gilpin, Robert: *The Theory of Hegemonic War*, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1988, Vol. 18/No. 4, pp. 591-613.

⁷⁵ Peceny, Mark and Beer, Caroline C. and Sanchez-Terry, Shannon: *Dictatorial Peace?* *The American Political Science Review* 2002, Vol. 96/No. 1, pp. 15-26.

⁷⁶ Comment: Mixed dyads of authoritarian regimes and democracies still wage war against each other (ibid.).

⁷⁷ E.g.: Ioffe, Julia: *What is Russia Today? The Kremlin’s propaganda outlet has an identity crisis*. *Columbia Journalism Review* 2010, available under: http://archives.cjr.org/feature/what_is_russia_today.php?page=all [15.08.2017]. / Groll, Elias: *Kremlin’s ‘Sputnik’ Newswire is the BuzzFeed of Propaganda*, *Foreign Policy* 2014, available under: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/10/kremlins-sputnik-newswire-is-the-buzzfeed-of-propaganda/> [15.08.2017]. / Nimmo, Ben: *Propaganda in a New Orbit*, Center for European Analysis

the Turkish side, *Yeni Safak* and *Daily Sabah* were the only options suitable for a discourse analysis. Even though they are the biggest ones fitting the profile, both outlets are of significantly smaller size than their Russian counterparts. Yet, both are firm in their support of the regime agenda, which is again reflected in the criticism of academia and independent media.⁷⁸ The *Albayrak Holding*, which has owned *Yeni Safak* since 1997, is known for its proximity to Erdogan, dating back until his time as mayor of Istanbul. *Daily Sabah* was founded specifically for the purpose of countering the regime critical media outlets.⁷⁹ It is important to give a general picture of the coverage, if one takes into account that both regimes are not totalitarian and don't have control over every article published by the outlets all the time. Even if the pro-government outlets are not fully controlled by the FPE, they still have similar- if not equal- images as cognitive filter. Therefore, its full range of analysis should be representative of the regime's decision-making process.

Founded in 1997 and 2005, *RT* and *Yeni Safak* cover the full time range of analysis. Still, one has to consider that the English-speaking sections of these outlets mainly grew in prominence over the last year. Even though *Sputnik* and *Daily Sabah* were officially launched in November 2014, the outlet translated older

articles published in Russian and Turkish from related outlets. Therefore, there are fewer publications on the first themes of analysis than the later ones. Due to the lack of data in Turkish pro-government media, every article that was cited or published by the Turkish state media agency *Anadolu* was also included.

Themes that were analyzed are the conduct of elections and their outcome, the portrayal of opposition's protests and their claims as well as threats to the regime and authoritarian policies to counter. From time to time these themes were interconnected, especially in regards to the events in Turkey which gave the regime an opportunity to introduce authoritarian policies.

There will be a quantitative summary for to every theme of analysis to indicate the relevance of every issue (to assess the level of interest). Again, it has to be taken into account that the late development of English-speaking media impacts the amount of coverage on early issues. After that, a detailed qualitative analysis of the articles is given, on the basis of how the counterpart regime's actions are portrayed in content, language and the use of visuals.

The qualitative analysis will point to noticeable patterns in the pro-government media

2016, available under: http://cepa.org/files/?id_plik=2083 [15.08.2017].

⁷⁸ E.g. Armstrong, William: *Army of Spin. Following in Putin's footsteps, the Turkish government is gearing up for full-fledged information warfare*, Foreign Policy 2014, available under: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/09/army-of-spin-tur->

key-media-erdogan/ [15.08.2017]. / Akoz, Emre: *New English daily offers Turkish government perspective*, al-monitor 2014, available under: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/02/turkey-new-english-newspaper-government-perspective.html> [15.08.2017].

⁷⁹ Ibid.

coverage and official statements. The evaluated regime stances can be categorized by the level of interest (extent of coverage) and the level of sympathy (type of agenda).

Table 1.

Level of Sympathy	Level of Interest		
	<i>Low (a)</i>	<i>Medium (b)</i>	<i>High (c)</i>
<i>Low (1)</i>	unlikely	unlikely	very unlikely
<i>Medium (2)</i>	possible	possible	possible
<i>High (3)</i>	likely	likely	very likely

3.4 Analysis of the Turkish discourse

Russian legislative election 2011 and Russian presidential election 2012

Quantitative summary: Media coverage:

N=4, FPE coverage: N=2

-*Yeni Safak*=0, *Daily Sabah*= 2, *Anadolu*=2, President =2, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: While the legislative election ensured the regimes' dominance in the competitive authoritarian system through the United Russia party, the Russian presidential election was the marking point of authoritarian entrenchment by the Putin regime. Due

to the importance of these events, there was solid ground for solidarization on the Turkish side, if wished. Still, no efforts were made considering the negativity of the pro-government media coverage and the non-commented reports on two phone calls between Erdogan and Putin during that time. While the FPE did not give out any statements on the elections⁸⁰, it commented in detail on other (strategically less relevant) elections in the same month, like the presidential election in Senegal, leaving the impression that Russian events were intentionally ignored. This theory is supported when compared to the excessive and rather positive commentary by main Western FPE's on Putin's win in 2012, legitimizing the Russian regimes to justify the continuing strategic partnership.⁸¹ In contrast, the Chinese regime, another major authoritarian FPE, used the Russian elections to try to legitimize authoritarian regimes by arguing that the legitimacy of political leadership should be assessed by its achievements.⁸² The slim media coverage could be caused by the problem of the early 2010's coverage.⁸³ Still, in both articles *Daily Sabah* used the negativity of critics of the constitutionality of Putin's return, and the OSCE's complaints on the legislative election's conduct as well as the general state of the political landscape, to portray

⁸⁰ Comment: The Prime Minister's archive only reaches back to 2014.

⁸¹ Rogin, Josh: *Obama congratulates Putin for election "win"*, Foreign Policy 2012, available under: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/09/obama-congratulates-putin-for-election-win/> [15.08.2017].

⁸² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China: *President Hu Jintao Congratulates Putin on His Inauguration as Russian President*, 2012, available under: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3220_664352/3222_664356/t930181.shtml [15.08.2017].

⁸³ Comment: See chapter 3.3

the events in Russia from the viewpoint of the opposition.⁸⁴ These reports show strong negative language on the Russian regime and positive language on the opposition.

Box: Low level of interest, low level of sympathy = box 1a, rapprochement unlikely.

Nemtsov's assassination in 2015

Quantitative summary: Media coverage:

N=21, FPE coverage: N=0

-*Yeni Safak*=4, *Daily Sabah*= 16, *Anadolu*=1,

President =0, Prime Minister=0, Foreign

Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: The assassination of Putin's opponent Nemtsov received international attention and was widely criticized by Western media and governments. The irregularities in the following processes particularly gave the impression that the regime had no intention in finding the employer of Nemtsov's killers. The media coverage in Turkey was also critical of the re-occurring pattern of political assassinations in Russia, and is attempting to decimate and silence critical gate-keeper elites.⁸⁵ Still, the overall coverage seemed more moderate compared to Western media. There were some strong op-ed articles blaming the Russian regime directly for creating a threatening environment for opposition and polarizing the society to

an extreme. These reports used harsh language to judge the Kremlin's authoritarian behavior and referenced critical reports by NGO's, praises of Nemtsov as well as statements by international governments demanding a transparent trial. Yet, there were many others which diverted the suspicion from Putin by mentioning that Nemtsov made himself many enemies, or by describing the grievous situation in Chechnya, an argument used by Putin before in order to counter theories involving him. Nevertheless, it does not seem that there was a concerted effort by the regime to enforce a political agenda upon the media outlets, enabling more coverage diversity. Even though the state media agency *Anadolu* reported on Obama's demands of a transparent trial, the Turkish FPE itself gave no statement, taking a more passive stance than Western governments. It has to be said that coverage in favor of the regime on an issue like this was unsuspected, due the extreme nature of political assassinations. Therefore the coverage cannot be assessed out of the proper context, but has to be interpreted in regards to the nature of the event and in relation to other government's stances. Considering that, the Turkish regime seemed to have taken a middle ground between the highly critical Western FPE's and the Chinese regime, which proclaimed its strong trust in

⁸⁴ Partlett, William: *The Constitutionality of Vladimir Putin's Third Term*, Brookings 2012, available under: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-constitutionality-of-vladimir-putins-third-term/> [15.08.2017]. / OSCE: *Russian Federation Presidential Election 4 March 2012. Final Report*, 2012,

available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/90461?download=true> [15.08.2017].

⁸⁵ O'Donnell, Guillermo and Schmitter, Philippe C. (1986): *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, Vol. 4, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracy*, London/Baltimore 1986.

the Kremlins ability to resolve the murder case and maintain stability.

Box: High level of interest, medium level of sympathy = box 2c, rapprochement possible.

Repressive tactics 2014-2017: Navalny's bid and "Foreign Agent Laws"

Quantitative summary: Media coverage:

N=19, FPE coverage: N=0

-*Yeni Safak*=5, *Daily Sabah*=13, *Anadolu*=1, President=0, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: The fact that daily political repression of the opposition is covered by the Turkish pro-government media as frequently as in the Western media shows that there was no attempt made by the Turkish regime to minimize the attention on authoritarian behavior. Furthermore, the overall coverage is rather critical by referring to detailed accounts of police violence, praises for Navalny, critical statements made by Western officials and NGOs, as well as explaining the unequal political playing field in Russia's competitive authoritarian system. This again indicates that the regime does not make a sympathizing political agenda on its channels of communication. Some of the most critical articles surfaced in 2014 and 2015, before the two regimes voiced their desire to enter a closer strategic partnership. The critical coverage of 2017 is less direct in its language and content than most articles published by West-

ern outlets. Beyond that, several articles portrayed events neutrally by pointing out that the regime acts within the legal framework. Both regimes' repression, but also the West's "double standard" in regards to the bias and restrictions on the AKP campaigning in Europe were criticized. Others legitimized the application of the "Foreign Agent Laws" by comparing them to the "repression" of the US government against RT. Having said that, repressive means against the Russian opposition are well covered this is not the case in regards to the vastly undercovered "Foreign Agent Laws". *Anadolu* -the direct communication channel of the government- was silent on commonly used authoritarian methods. In addition to that, there were no recorded statements found by the FPE on the repressive "Foreign Agent Laws" that are used to restrict foreign NGO's access to the country in order to further decrease Western linkage. Again the Turkish FPE seems to take a more cautious middle ground in comparison to Western FPE's.

Box: Medium level of interest, medium level of sympathy = box 2b; rapprochement possible.

Russian legislative elections 2016

Quantitative summary: Media coverage:

N=9, FPE coverage: N=2

-*Yeni Safak*=1, *Daily Sabah*=5, *Anadolu*=3, President=1, Prime Minister=1, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: While the Russian legislative election in 2016 did not have a changing

impact on the Russian political landscape, it provided yet again an opportunity for the Turkish regime to make a political stance in regards to Russian domestic politics. Having consolidated his power after the mass protests in 2012, the Putin-loyal UR led by Medvedev dominated the polls and did not have to fear the rise of a political competitor. International institutions and media criticised the aspects of competitive authoritarianism, especially in regards to the state media and the use of legal restrictions to weaken opponents, while at the same time acting outside the legal framework. These measures prevented the emergence of a strong non-loyalist opposition.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, there was only a single case of comprehensive negative coverage on these matters, while the other critical pieces solely revolved around the Turkish claim against the elections in Crimea. The moderately positive coverage focused on the Kremlin's attempt to avoid mass irregularities, like in 2012 and the popularity of Putin, therefore partially legitimizing the unequal playing field in competitive authoritarian systems. Claims of the opposition were only marginally described, particularly if they are compared to the few publications on prior elections. The overall language was much more sympathetic on sensitive issues, like the fact that most opposition parties are loyal to

the regime. While the West seemed critical after effectively ending its strategic partnership, the Turkish FPE responded in the form of Yildirim and Erdogan calling their counterparts Medvedev and Putin to congratulate them and discuss further cooperation on geopolitical issues. These legitimizing acts constitute a reversed pattern to the earlier elections in 2011 and 2012.

Box: Medium level of interest, high level of sympathy = box 3b, rapprochement likely.

3.4 Analysis of the Russian discourse

Parliamentary election 2011

Quantitative summary: Media coverage:

N=0, FPE coverage: N=1

-*Sputnik*=0, RT= 0, President=1, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: The parliamentary election in 2011 is the equivalent to the Russian Duma election in the same year, ensuring continuance of the political dominance of the AKP against its political competitors. The lack of attention also resembles the Turkish regime's level of interest. While no articles directly related to the elections could be found on *Sputnik* or RT, President Medvedev called Prime Minister Erdogan to congratulate him on his "convincing victory" and to discuss future cooperation's.⁸⁷ Therefore, the Russian regime was more positive in its approach and

⁸⁶ OSCE: *Russian Federation State Duma Elections 18 September 2016. Final Report*, 2016, available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/russia/290861?download=true> [15.08.2017].

⁸⁷ Kremlin: Kremlin Archive 2011, available under: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/11563>, [16.08.2017].

the media did not criticize the problematic aspects of the elections, which were pointed out by the OSCE. These were minor complaints compared to the report on the Russian elections but would still have provided enough ground for criticism if wanted.⁸⁸

Box: Low level of interest, medium-to high level of sympathy = box 2a to 3a; rapprochement possible to likely.

Challenges to the AKP rule: Taksim square and the Graft scandal 2013-2014

Quantitative summary: Media coverage: N=86, FPE coverage: N=0
-Sputnik=19, RT=67, President=0, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis:

The riots over the Gezi Park project at Taksim square and the Graft scandal undermined the political legitimacy of the Erdogan regime, which accused outside powers and the Gulenist movement of being responsible.⁸⁹ The situation in Turkey in 2013 was often compared to, and occasionally put into the same category as Arab Spring.⁹⁰ Showing solidarity on matters of countering political instability with resolute measures would therefore have sent a strong message to the Turkish regime that Russia might be the more

suitable partner in confronting domestic threats than its critical Western allies. Yet, *Sputnik's* and *RT's* broad coverage did not indicate a coordinated attempt to justify the Turkish authorities' actions. Most articles were critical and pointed to the excessive police violence, portrayed the AKP's crackdown strategies as illegitimate, and covered details on the questionable judicial investigation of the graft scandal. Often times graphic images were used to trigger emotions, and the opposition's tweets were shown to give them a voice. Western journalists were allowed to publish several overwhelmingly negatively framed and critical op-eds and interviews with experts. The media coverage in Turkey was directly criticized for refusing to air the ongoing riots on Taksim. Later on, one of the most critical articles accused pro-government media like *Yeni Safak* of trying to mislead the public on behalf of Erdogan, showing harsh disdain for the regime circles attempts to handle the pressure. Still, overall there was a considerable amount of neutral reports in which both sides were portrayed as violent and the illegality of the protests were mentioned without critical commenting. There were also attempts to create a general understanding of the threats the Turkish regime faces by explaining the influence of the

⁸⁸ OSCE: *Republic of Turkey Parliamentary Elections 12 June 2011. Final Report*, 2011, available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/84588?download=true> [15.08.2017].

⁸⁹ Solaker, Gulen and Pamuk, Humeyra: *Turkey's Erdogan says corruption probe aims to smear government*, Reuters 2013, available

under: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-corruptionidUSBRE9BH0PL20131218> [15.08.2017].

⁹⁰ Oezdil, Zihni: *Why the Gezi Park Protests Do Not Herald a Turkish Spring (Yet)*, 2013, available under: <https://muf-tah.org/why-the-gezi-park-protests-do-not-herald-a-turkish-springyet/#.WYHVUOnkWM8> [15.08.2017].

Gülenist movement and pushing the ideas of foreign interference in domestic issues by the West and Israel. This variety indicates that there was no forced political agenda on *RT* or *Sputnik* by the FPE. Importantly, the Russian FPE did not comment on the issues and therefore took a more cautious stance than its opinion channels, which extensively covered the statements of Western governments and NGO's.

Box: Medium level of interest, medium level of sympathy = box 2b; rapprochement possible.

The 2014 Presidential Elections and the June/November 2015 general elections

Quantitative summary: Media coverage: N=28, FPE coverage: N=1
-*Sputnik*=20, *RT*=8, President=1, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: The 2014 Presidential Elections ensured Erdogan's grip on power after transitioning from the Prime Minister's Office to the presidency, while the general elections in 2015 again secured the AKP's dominance over the political arena of the increasingly authoritarian system. This time the elections received a considerable amount of coverage by *Sputnik* and *RT*, unlike in 2011

when the parliamentary election was basically ignored. The articles were overall more positive than critical. Sympathetic coverage mentioned the mutual respect between political camps, the economic achievements of Erdogan and his popularity, or even praised him as a historic figure comparable to Atatürk. Even though the OSCE reports on all three elections were moderately critical of certain aspects of a competitive authoritarian system, there was little coverage on the opposition and the ongoing media crackdown.⁹¹ Parts of the criticism focused on Erdogan's foreign policy in Syria, ignoring his domestic power consolidation. Additionally, there was almost no coverage on the 2nd general election in November 2015. The broken promise by the AKP to accept the mandate of the first result and to form a coalition was ignored. The Russian FPE also showed acknowledgement when President Putin called Erdogan in order to congratulate him to his victory in the Presidential election and to express his hopes for the development of their strategic partnership.⁹²

Box: Medium level of interest, high level of sympathy = box 3b; rapprochement likely.

⁹¹ OSCE: *Republic of Turkey Presidential Election 10 August 2014. Final Report*, 2014, available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/126851?download=true> [15.08.2017]. / OSCE: *Republic of Turkey Parliamentary Elections 7 June 2015. Final Report*, 2015, available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/177926?download=true> [15.08.2017]. /-OSCE: *Republic of*

Turkey Early Parliamentary Elections 1 November 2015. Final Report, 2015, available under: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/219201?download=true> [15.08.2017].

⁹² Kremlin: Kremlin's Website, 2014, available under: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46431>, [16.08.2017].

Coup attempt 2016 (Coverage from: 15.July-18.July)

Quantitative data: Media coverage: N=313, FPE coverage: N=8

-*Sputnik*=266, *RT*= 47, President=5, Prime Minister=1, Foreign Ministry=2-

Qualitative Analysis: The coup attempt conducted by mainly mid-level officers on the night from July 15 to July 16 was the most severe challenge to the AKP regime's survival since the party gained power under Erdogan's lead in 2002 and was a vivid example for David's argument that there is a struggle for physical survival by domestic actors in weak states.⁹³ The coverage by *RT* and especially *Sputnik* was inflated by constant breaking news that were neutral summaries of the ongoing events. Despite the vast number of articles, there were few opinion pieces that had a strong negative or positive connotation; but there was an evident re-occurrence of specific themes. These included mainly the negative impact on Turkey's relations with the West caused by Gulen's exile in the US, and the criticism by Western FPE's on the following crackdown as well as the idea of reintroducing the death penalty. More re-occurring themes were the argument that the coup was partially triggered by the AKP's adventurist foreign policy in Syria and the suspicion that external powers could have had supported the coup-or at least had an interest in regime

change. All these themes are creating the perception of Turkey being misplaced within NATO and as an EU-aspirant. The involvement of the pilot who was responsible for the shutdown of the Russian fighter jet in 2015 was also covered multiple times. Some articles connected this to a Western conspiracy in order to drive Turkey away from the geopolitical integration of Eurasia and Russia, therefore presenting Russia as the more natural alliance partner. The FPE itself showed by far the strongest response compared to other events. This reflects the severity of the situation. The Russian regime obviously differed in its reactions from the West. While all sides were condemning the coup as an illegitimate act, the Russian regime did not strongly demand from the Turkish regime to react in a lawful and democratic manner through public statements. Even though expectations of a "constitutional" response was raised by Lavrov, this was done in a in a less urging manner and stated as a side note in an overall encouraging statement. The following meetings and press conferences of the FPE figures showed a change of language suggesting a strong solidarization. This was most obvious when Erdogan addressed Putin as "my dear friend" and expressed his thankfulness and the psychological importance of Putin's call, which was one of the first ones. On the same occasion he also stated: "We believe Russian-Turkish relations are now much more stable

⁹³ David, Steven: *Explaining third World Alignments*, World Politics, Vol. 43/No. 2, pp. 233-238,

than any time before and will help us counter all kinds of crises”⁹⁴ Coincidentally, the Turkish regime publicly criticized the West for its restraint in speaking out more clearly on behalf of the Turkish government, showing an adjustment in the regime’s strategic calculation due to the prevalence of domestic threats.

Box: High level of interest, high level of sympathy = box 3c; rapprochement very likely.

Constitutional Referendum 2017 (Coverage from: 14.April- 18.April)

Quantitative summary: Media coverage: N=75, FPE coverage: N=2

-Sputnik=68, RT=7, President=2, Prime Minister=0, Foreign Ministry=0-

Qualitative analysis: The referendum in 2017 was set up to increase the executive power of the President. It was also seen as a test on the political leverage available for cracking down further on the opposition and as a set up to reintroduce the death penalty. The coverage by Sputnik and RT mirrored the international media attention. Nevertheless, Western media coverage, FPE voices, the OSCE and NGO’s were highly critical of the fact that the referendum was held under the state of emergency. They also pointed to irregularities and the increasingly unequal political playing field. All in all, the Sputnik and RT coverage

seemed balanced towards the Erdogan regime’s stance on the matter, and neither critical nor positive coverage was prevalent. Still, there were indications of certain reporting patterns. Even though the opposition’s claims were covered, many critical pieces were reporting on the divide between the West and the Erdogan regime on the issue of executive powers. Therefore, the reader gets the perception that Turkey and the West are two opposite poles when it comes to Turkish domestic issues. This time, the split was more gravely portrayed with the dispute over the AKP’s campaigning attempts in Europe and the discussion of the death penalty seen as the nail in the coffin for Turkey’s EU aspirations. On the other side, many positive articles covered Turkey’s new geopolitical orientation away from the EU and the US. Multiple times, the US and EU-Turkish partnerships were often framed as one-sided in favor of the Western states, indicating the decreasing Western leverage over the AKP’s handling of domestic affairs. Russian-Turkish relations in context of the referendum were portrayed as mostly positive. The Kremlin covered the issue twice. Putin made a congratulatory phone call to Erdogan, during which the further development of bilateral relations and the maintenance of personal contact between both presidents were agreed upon. Beyond that, the Kremlin’s spokesperson urged the

⁹⁴ Kremlin: Kremlin’s Website, 5th September 2016, available under. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52834>, [16.08.2017].

international community to accept the result as a “sovereign affair of the Republic of Turkey”, a clear sign of public solidarization aimed at Western criticism. Overall, there was no clear solidarization in the Russian pro-government media, but there were obvious patterns of highlighting the opposing opinions of the Turkish regime and its Western allies, as well as flagging Russia as a viable alternative for a strategic partnership.

Box: Medium-to high level of interest, high level of sympathy = box 3c; rapprochement very likely.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

In the 2010's, a solidarization over three phases took place. The first phase was characterized by the absence of solidarization in the early years of the Erdogan regime. This was possibly due to the fact that it has not yet started its authoritarian drift. Western pressure just started to mount after the riots on Taksim square and the Graft scandal. Before that, the FPE was not immediately threatened by the Western linkage. Therefore, there was no need to solidarize with an authoritarian regime against the liberal hegemonic system for the sake of its own domestic legitimacy. Due to that, Russia was solely perceived as a geopolitical competitor in its proximity. The early discourse of the Russian regime was more passive, and unwilling to draw critical attention to practices that it was itself using to a far greater degree.

The second phase was started by the Taksim riots and the Graft scandal, which constituted a serious threat to the Turkish government and would have been a logical consequence to solidarize with the AKP if a rapprochement was seriously considered by the Russian regime in 2013 and 2014. Still, this series of events can also be seen as the starting point of Turkey's authoritarian shift, and therefore the Russian regimes leader images in regards to the Erdogan government might not have been adjusted to this development. Because of that, the window of opportunity for an alliance was not yet prevalent in the strategic calculations of the Russian FPE. Following the challenges to its rule in 2013 and 2014, the Turkish regime started to perceive the hegemonic order as an accelerator to its domestic threats, and thus softened its discourses. Pro-government coverage seemed more understanding of the domestic threats faced by the Kremlin, and the FPE did not comment on hard attacks against the opposition or the attempt to decrease Western linkage by introducing and implementing the Foreign Agent Laws. With the authoritarian drift in Turkey now sunk into the Kremlin's decision making process and the announcement of new strategic cooperation attempts, the discourse now reflected that a rapprochement was desired by the Russian regime (shift from box 2b to 3b).

The last phase began with the failed coup attempt in Turkey, driving the West and the AKP regime further apart. The Russian FPE

on the other hand strongly supported the AKP government, offering an alternative partnership of Westphalian nature through its solidarization. Parallel to that, the pro-government media underlined the possibility of a geopolitical re-orientation and pointed to the pressure put on the Erdogan regimes by its Western allies. In addition, the idea that Western linkage and leverage over Turkey are not big enough to force the Erdogan regime back on a benign path was accentuated.⁹⁵ This provides the Turkish FPE with the possibility of an international partnership that would not hinder the Erdogan regime in its crackdown on the critical gate-keeping elites within state structures and the liberal media. The Turkish regime reciprocated the solidarization against domestic threats by legitimizing the unequal playing field in the Russian legislative election in 2016 in opposition to its NATO allies (shift from box 2b to box 3b). The Russian regime then continued with its agenda during the 2017 constitutional referendum, re-assuring the Turkish FPE of its willingness to respect basic principles of non-interference in the future (remaining in box 3c).

The answer to David's initial question "Which outside power guarantees me staying in power?" changed after the Erdogan regime started its authoritarian drift in order to counter the mounting pressure by opposing do-

mestic actors. Considering the FPE's strategic calculations through the prism of non-traditional approaches to foreign policy, there is definitely growing strategic ground for a Turkish-Russian rapprochement. In regards to regime security, this Westphalian-type relationship would enable both countries (especially Turkey) to further decrease Western linkage and leverage.

4. The analysis of state interests

4.1 Turkey and Russia in the international system

Realists assume that states first and foremost act according to their position in the international system, which is determined by their relative capabilities. With the growth of rising regional powers' capabilities, combined with the relative decline of the US, states like Russia and Turkey adopt an ambitious role in their regional subsystems.⁹⁶ The consequences of relations between rising powers under these developing geopolitical foreign policy profiles is interpreted differently by offensive and defensive realists.

In offensive realism, the proximity of Turkey and Russia creates huge potential for conflict in times of growing influence. Mearsheimer claims that regional hegemony is the only relatively safe position in the international system. Consequently, he argues that every ma-

⁹⁵ Comment: "Costs of suppression" do not outweigh the "costs of toleration" (Dahl, A. Robert: *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven 1971, pp. 14-18.

⁹⁶ Waltz, Kenneth: *Man the State and War, A Theoretical Analysis*, New York 1959. / Mearsheimer, John J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, New York 2014.

major power tries to achieve this status by actively maximizing power in a zero-sum game, especially against other nearby powers.⁹⁷ The numerous wars between Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire between the 16th and the 20th century over their respective spheres of influence like the Greek War of independence are proof of this.⁹⁸ Defensive realism, however, does not equate security with power. Instead, it includes other parameters, like geography or the state of military technology (offense-defense balance).⁹⁹ Accordingly, they would argue that the Caucasus mountain range and the Black Sea as the contact point between both nations, take the momentum out of military offensives. The rugged and narrow terrains as well as big bodies of water have a stopping effect, making the projection of power difficult and rather ineffective. Quick territorial gains through military strategies of annihilation or dislocation, like those repeatedly achieved over the North European Plain are therefore unlikely.¹⁰⁰ The likelihood of lengthy wars of attrition or costly stalemates decrease the incentive to have a revisionist strategy towards each other. Defensive realists also acknowledge the effect of the most basic international rules and

norms to a certain degree.¹⁰¹ Today, the independent Caucasus Republics constitute a buffer zone separating both countries on land, complicating a possible military advance through sovereign states. Additionally, the expansion of territory by conquest is likely to be gravely punished, as Operation Desert Storm against Saddam Husain's occupation of Kuwait in the 90's, and the sanctioning over the annexation of Crimea in 2014 have shown.

Taken all together, offensive realists are skeptical towards an alliance between Russia and Turkey against the US on the global level. Because of their geographic proximity they assume both countries prioritize gaining regional influence, using their growing capabilities in order to achieve a secure position in their own regional system.¹⁰² Thus destined to be competitors, Turkey might continue to use outside powers like the US to balance Russian ambitions.¹⁰³ Defensive realists' arguments lead to the assumption that there could be more room for cooperation because factors like geography and modifiers in the international system ease the security dilemma. Therefore, a more permissive strategic environment is created where geopolitical spheres of influence overlap, in which both countries

⁹⁷ Mearsheimer, John J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, New York 2014, pp. 1-54 and 138-167.

⁹⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica: *Russo-Turkish Wars*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, available under: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russo-Turkish-wars> [15.08.2017].

⁹⁹ Glaser, Charles L. and Kaufmann, Chaim: *What is the offense-defense balance and can we measure it? Offense, Defense, and International Politics*. International Security 1998, Vol. 22/No. 4, pp. 44-82. / Van Evera, Stephen: *Offense, Defense, and the*

Causes of War, International Security, International Security 1998, Vol. 22/No. 4, pp. 5-43.

¹⁰⁰ Echevarria II, Antulio J.: *Military Strategy, A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford 2017.

¹⁰¹ Ripsman, Norrin M. and Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. and Lobell, Steven E.: *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, New York 2016, pp. 80-99.

¹⁰² Mearsheimer, John J.: *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd edition, New York 2014, pp. 83-137.

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 234-266.

can pick from a broader range of options on how to deal with each other.¹⁰⁴ Under that assumption, a balancing coalition against the US's global hegemony could be prioritized over the achievement of conflicting goals in the region.

4.2 Syrian Civil War

More recently Syria was the dominant issue in strategic interactions and discourse between the Turkish and Russian FPE. Analysis of the respective interests of both states will reveal the impact of the conflict's development on the current strategic environment in regards to a Russian-Turkish alignment. Even though many immediate decisions are made out of tactical considerations,¹⁰⁵ the observer should not mistakenly obsess over tactical details and daily operational endeavors, but instead try to assess the overall strategic picture. Without this, a deeper understanding of the potential for further conflict or cooperation between Turkey and Russia cannot be gained.

The first phase (2011-2015) – Original intentions

Interactions in the Syrian theatre between Russia and Turkey evolved, and can be separated into two distinct phases. The first phase

revolved purely around Turkey's and Russia's confrontational agendas of regime change vs. regime saving after both sides started their involvement. Meanwhile, the downing of the Russian fighter jet Sukhoi Su-24 in November 2015 marked the height of the tensions between Turkey and Russia.¹⁰⁶ Turkey entered the Syrian quagmire along the lines of its regionalist foreign policy concept. Despite previously being on good terms with the Assad regime, the Arab Uprising was perceived by the FPE as a chance to increase influence and to promote its own branch of moderate Sunni Islamism as a shared strategic culture. Encouraged by the early successes of the Libyan Civil War, the AKP decided to move quickly, and expected to become the king-maker in Syria. This would have given Ankara leverage to influence the country's reconstruction and foreign policy orientation later on, finalizing its rise to regional great power status. After a drastic public diplomacy campaign against the Syrian regime, Turkey followed up with the financing of FSA rebel units and optimistically predicted the downfall of Assad.¹⁰⁷ Yet Turkey miscalculated important factors in the regional dynamics. First was the evolvment of a sectarian and ethnic

¹⁰⁴ Glaser, Charles L. and Kaufmann, Chaim: *What is the offense-defense balance and can we measure it? Offense, Defense, and International Politics*. International Security 1998, Vol. 22/No. 4, pp. 44-82. / Van Evera, Stephen: *Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War*, International Security, International Security 1998, Vol. 22/No. 4, pp. 5-43.

¹⁰⁵ Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A "Turkish Tragedy" in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/> [15.08.2017].

¹⁰⁶ Amini, Alexis: *Breaking Down Iran and Russia's Military Strategy in Syria*, Geopolitical Monitor 2016, available under: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/breaking-down-iran-and-russias-military-strategy-in-syria/> [15.08.2017]. / *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A "Turkish Tragedy" in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/> [15.08.2017].

split that intensified the fighting, making negotiations between the factions increasingly difficult. Furthermore, the Syrian terrain makes it difficult to establish central authority once the country is destabilized. Additionally, Turkey dismissed the possibility of a direct intervention by Assad's supporters in Iran and Russia, both of which had strong interests concerning their Syrian ally.¹⁰⁸

Russia likewise had several strategic motivations to interfere in Syria. Though the post-Soviet space is the prime focus under the "Near Abroad" doctrine, the Middle East is still identified as a vitally important region by Moscow. By supporting the Libyan warlord Haftar and securing the Assad regime, Russia attempted to increase its influence and contain Western powers after the Arab uprising.¹⁰⁹ Russia is not expected to retreat from the region due to its vision of a multipolar international system. Besides the general importance of the Middle East, the Syrian case provides more specific reasons. While being a major trading partner for Moscow, the country also hosts Russia's only military base outside of the "Near Abroad". In its search

for accessible warm water ports, Tartus is Moscow's only mean to project power into the Mediterranean, and is therefore crucial if Russia wants to be seen as a global power. Additionally, Russia saw an opportunity for cooperation with Iran, a declared strategic partner according to the "Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation", published in 2016.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, it seems that the containment of Turkey, which was still a steadfast ally of Washington and a candidate for EU enlargement in the early 2010's, was a direct aim of Russia.¹¹¹ In general, Russia repeatedly claimed to act on behalf of a counter-terrorism strategy against Jihadist militias. This claim cannot be completely dismissed because of the Russian FPE's leader images formed by the Chechen experience.¹¹² Beyond that, Russia's image as a reliable ally was at stake, and a successful campaign was a useful distraction from domestic problems. At the beginning of the conflict, Russia supported Assad through indirect means, like giving loans and buying crude oil instead of refined oil to save the regime's economy. Moreover, Moscow used every opportunity

¹⁰⁸ Stein, Aaron: *How Russia Beat Turkey in Syria*, Atlantic Council 2017, available under: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/how-russia-beat-turkey-in-syria> [15.08.2017]. / Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A "Turkish Tragedy" in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/> [15.08.2017].

¹⁰⁹ Comment: Contrary to the Turkish FPE who saw the events as an opportunity to grow its influence, the Russian FPE perceived the Uprising as yet another American attempt for liberal regime change undermining Moscow's agenda.

¹¹⁰ Comment: The anti-American rival serves as a counterweight against the US allied Kingdoms in the Persian Gulf and is already the third largest importer of Russian arms.

¹¹¹ Berman, Ilan: *Russia's Risky Syria Strategy*, The Journal of International Security Affairs 2016, No. 30, available under: <http://www.securityaffairs.org/issues/number-30/russias-risky-syria-strategy> [15.08.2017]. / Borshchevskaya, Anna: *Russia's Strategic Objectives in the Middle East and North Africa*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2017, available under: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-strategic-objectives-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa> [15.08.2017].

¹¹² Suchkov, Maxim A.: *Putin lays out Moscow's new Mideast strategy*, Al Monitor 2016, available under: <http://al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/middle-east-russia-for-eign-policy-strategy.html> [15.08.2017].

in the UN to block coordinated sanctions against the Syrian regime. It was only when it became apparent that the Iranians and their proxies could not provide enough support to save Assad that the Russian military interfered in September 2015. Through the use of modern artillery and air power, Russia compensated for the lack of regime manpower and halted rebel advances.¹¹³

The use of Russian capabilities was a game-changer for Turkey, and not only put Ankara's goal of regime change out of reach, but incurred other strategic side effects as well.¹¹⁴

Due to the indiscriminate bombing of rebel areas, the flow of refugees severely increased, and the early welcoming stance of the Turkish FPE towards Syrian refugees soon came under question with an estimate of about 3 million refugees in Turkey in 2017. Most concerning was the fact that the YPG, a Syrian offshoot of the Turkish PKK, was considerably strengthened by the direction of the war. Both under threat by Salafist groups, the Kurds and the regime soon decided not to turn against each, other but to focus on their defenses against Islamist forces. Turkey tolerated a strong Daesh (ISIS) presence on its

borders as a serviceable means to contain the Syrian Kurds, or even conquer their territories. Its Western allies, however, condemned Ankara's decision. The split became apparent during the siege of Kobane in 2014, when Ankara was strongly criticized for its passivity, while Washington started to arm and provide direct air support for the YPG. Having survived the battle of Kobane, the YPG gained popularity, attracting Kurds throughout the region and foreign fighters willing to take on Daesh.¹¹⁵ Following this success, the YPG developed into the dominating player of the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and began to conquer more territory along the Turkish border. This constitutes a serious threat to Turkish territorial integrity, considering the recent erosion of the Turkish-PKK peace process and the strong influence the PKK wields over its Syrian offshoot.¹¹⁶

The second phase (2016-2017) – Time for strategic adjustments

After Turkey initially tried to deter the Russian air campaign, resulting in the downing of

¹¹³ Amini, Alexis: *Breaking Down Iran and Russia's Military Strategy in Syria*, Geopolitical Monitor 2016, available under: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/breaking-down-iran-and-russias-military-strategy-in-syria/> [15.08.2017]. / Borshchevskaya, Anna: *Russia's Strategic Objectives in the Middle East and North Africa*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2017, available under: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-strategic-objectives-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa> [15.08.2017].

¹¹⁴ Amini, Alexis: *Breaking Down Iran and Russia's Military Strategy in Syria*, Geopolitical Monitor 2016, available under: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/breaking-down-iran-and-russias-military-strategy-in-syria/> [15.08.2017]. /

Stein, Aaron: *How Russia Beat Turkey in Syria*, Atlantic Council 2017, available under: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/how-russia-beat-turkey-in-syria> [15.08.2017].

¹¹⁵ Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A "Turkish Tragedy" in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/> [15.08.2017].

¹¹⁶ Teoman, Elizabeth and Beaudoin, Ethan: *The U.S.-Turkey Divide Beyond Raqqa*, Institute for the Study of War 2017, available under: <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/us-turkey-divide-beyond-raqqa> [15.08.2017]. / *ibid.*

the SU-24 bomber and leading to a diplomatic break between the two countries, the Turkish FPE ultimately came to the realization that its original goals were unachievable. Since the Russian intervention, the balance of power continuously shifted in favor of the Assad regime.¹¹⁷ Following the fall of Aleppo in 2017, the regime looks stronger than at any point since 2012, while the opposition is split by infighting between Turkey's moderate Islamist proxies and the American supported SDF.¹¹⁸ Turkey's opportunistic attempts to using Daesh against its Kurdish adversary have backfired. The organization frequently describes Turkey as an enemy and a legitimate target in its propaganda. Terrorist attacks in Turkey have since spiked, forcing Ankara to combat the jihadists more directly. The terrorist threat, in combination with the Kurdish problem and the refugee issue destabilizes Turkey.¹¹⁹ Formerly seen as a strategic opportunity to increase its influence in the region, the Syrian Civil War is now perceived as a security concern that requires a pragmatic approach to contain the spill-over.

The Turkish FPE's behavior suggests a strong strategic adjustment towards the new

security interests. Since its "Operation Euphrates Shield" in August 2016, the country uses its rebel proxies mainly to prevent the YPG from connecting its controlled territories, which is now identified as the primary threat in Syria. Washington will have to make a clear decision at some point and choose between either the support for its main anti-Daesh proxy or its already fragile strategic alliance with Turkey. Even though Ankara now also combats Daesh, Washington is still suspicious because of Turkey's prior opportunism and unreliability on that matter.¹²⁰ Russia's support for the Kurds, on the other hand, seemed more tactical in nature. With the Assad regime winning more ground, Russia could now expand its strategy and try to establish control over all of Syria again, including the Kurdish territories. Clashes between pro-regime militias and the YPG indicate growing frictions in the pragmatic cease-fire.¹²¹ The evolving balance of power in Syria could force Ankara to ultimately accept the rule of the Assad regime in the hope that a partition or federalization of the country will be prevented. Therefore, the Kurdish threat would be contained and cordial relations with Syria could be re-established, even though the

¹¹⁷ Amini, Alexis: *Breaking Down Iran and Russia's Military Strategy in Syria*, Geopolitical Monitor 2016, available under: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/breaking-down-iran-and-russias-military-strategy-in-syria/> [15.08.2017].

¹¹⁸ Teoman, Elizabeth and Beaudoin, Ethan: *The U.S.-Turkey Divide Beyond Raqqa*, Institute for the Study of War 2017, available under: <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/us-turkey-divide-beyond-raqqa> [15.08.2017].

¹¹⁹ Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey's Syria Strategy: A "Turkish Tragedy" in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/>

[making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/us-turkey-divide-beyond-raqqa) [15.08.2017].

¹²⁰ Teoman, Elizabeth and Beaudoin, Ethan: *The U.S.-Turkey Divide Beyond Raqqa*, Institute for the Study of War 2017, available under: <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/us-turkey-divide-beyond-raqqa> [15.08.2017].

¹²¹ Barfi, Barak (2016): *Assad Bombs the Kurds: Implications for U.S. Strategy in Syria*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2016, available under: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/assad-bombs-the-kurds-implications-for-u.s.-strategy-in-syria> [15.08.2017].

full return to “Zero-Problems-with-Neighbors” is unrealistic in regards to Assad. Beyond that, the re-establishment of central authority by the regime would dry the Daesh safe-havens and could reduce the terrorist threat in Turkey. Due to the American restraint to use more than symbolic force against the Assad regime,¹²² the direction of the war is unlikely to switch, even if the US and Turkey can successfully resolve their differences.¹²³ Considering this, it might be wise for Ankara to cut its losses and accept a future victory of Assad.

The Russian FPE seems receptive of Turkey’s strategic openness, and Moscow publicly stated its general desire for flexible regional alliances under the mantra of Realpolitik.¹²⁴ The Astana talks indicate that both countries, together with Iran, are engaged in finding a solution without direct American participation. Early proposals for safe-zones might help to reduce the numbers of refugees still arriving in Turkey. Principally, Russia’s interest in containing Turkey can now be compromised with the scenario of a Sunni government loyal to Ankara being of the table. Furthermore, Turkey is significantly less

tied to its Western allies than it was at the beginning of the conflict due to its authoritarian drift. Therefore, concessions towards Ankara seem to be an attractive option to develop a closer strategic partnership under a Westphalian framework. One vital concession that could convince Turkey to cooperate would be the withdrawal of Moscow’s demand of the YPG participation at the Astana talks. Moscow publicly opposed the idea of a partition of Syria, still the option of federalization is on the table and the Putin regime could use this as a bargaining chip towards Turkey.¹²⁵ Another incentive Russia could offer is more military restraint, or leveraging the Assad regime to stop its policies of ethnic cleansing to reduce the flow of refugees.

4.3 The South Caucasus

Following a summary of Turkey and Russia’s interests in the Caucasus, this section will analyze and describe the countries’ behavior in the 2010’s, and their impact on the strategic environment. After a brief explanation of the Caucasus’ significance for Russia’s and Turkey’s foreign policy concepts, this analysis adopts the realist logic and focus on the core

¹²² Comment: Meant are the temporary strikes against military assets after Assad repeatedly used chemical weapons contrary to its former concessions.

¹²³ Bechev, Dimitar: *Russia in Syria: What Next?* The American Interest 2017, available under: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/04/10/russia-in-syria-what-next/> [15.08.2017]. / Kadercan, Burak: *Making Sense of Turkey’s Syria Strategy: A “Turkish Tragedy” in the making*, War on the Rocks 2017, available under: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/making-sense-of-turkeys-syria-strategy-a-turkish-tragedy-in-the-making/> [15.08.2017].

¹²⁴ / Borshchevskaya, Anna: *Russia’s Strategic Objectives in the Middle East and North Africa*, The Washington Institute for

Near East Policy 2017, available under: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-strategic-objectives-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa> [15.08.2017]. / Suchkov, Maxim A.: *Putin lays out Moscow’s new Mideast strategy*, Al Monitor 2016, available under: <http://al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/middle-east-russia-foreign-policy-strategy.html> [15.08.2017].

¹²⁵ Pakhomov, Nikolay: *The Strategy Behind Russia’s Moves in Syria*, The National Interest 2016, available: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-strategy-behind-russias-moves-syria-15497> [15.08.2017].

security issues of alliances and basing rights. After that, their interactions over primary economic interests will be analyzed, which in the case of the Caucasus is the control over the hydrocarbons of the Caspian Basin.

Even though the Syrian Civil War is the most defining factor for both FPE's since 2011, the Caucasus is still a vital region when it comes to the development of the Russian-Turkish relationship. Both foreign policy concepts value the South Caucasus due to Turkey's and Russia's imperial history. Beyond that, many strategists point to the geostrategic centrality of the Eurasian Heartland, especially when it comes to trading routes the access to the hydrocarbons of the Caspian Basin.¹²⁶

Significance of the Caucasus

Russia's interests in the South Caucasus are often portrayed by Moscow as especially urgent matters. This is the case in every region that falls under the definition of the "Near Abroad", in which Russia publicly admits to reserve itself a special right to interfere on behalf of its interests and the protection of its citizens. In proclaiming an exclusive sphere of influence, Russia is able to strengthen the perception of being a global power. To

achieve this, the Russian state has to retain its military-and economic dominance over the three independent Caucasus republics.¹²⁷ Turkey, however, also identifies the Caucasus as a region of special interest, even though its claims are voiced less urgently and are not pursued as aggressively under the concept of "Zero-Problems-with-Neighbors".¹²⁸ Like Russia, Turkey has historical ties to the Caucasus that affect its domestic political arena¹²⁹, increasing the strategic incentives to be active in the Caucasus. Therefore, Turkey tries to increase its influence over the Caucasus, even though full dominance is not necessarily a strategic goal of the Turkish FPE.

Security interests – Alliances and military bases

When it comes to security interests, it must again be mentioned that the terrain of the Caucasus does not allow for quick offensive gains. Therefore, military capabilities stationed in the region are not perceived as threatening as, for example, deployments on the North European Plain. Still, basing rights enable external powers prepare their military capabilities in order to pursue their own interests or undermine their rival's (support counter-terrorism, securing regimes, guarding

¹²⁶ Mackinder, Halford J.: *The Geographical Pivot of History*, The Geographical Journal 1904, Vol. 23/No. 4 (April 1904), pp. 421-437. / Zbigniew Brzezinski: *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Strategic Imperatives*, New York 1997. / Svante E. Cornell: *Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia Perceptions*, Journal of International Affairs 1999, Vol. 4/No. 2, pp. 100-125. / Ismailov, Eldar: *Rethinking Central Eurasia*, Stockholm 2010.

¹²⁷ Laenen, Ria (2012): *Russia's Vital and Exclusive Sphere National Interests in the Near Abroad*, in: Freire, Maria Raquel/ Kanet, Roger E.: *Russia and its Near Neighbours. Identity, Interests, Foreign Policy*, New York 2012, pp. 25-30. / Gvosdev,

Nikolas and Marsh, Christopher: *Russian Foreign Policy. Interests, Vectors and Sectors*, London 2015, pp. 157-194.

¹²⁸ Caman, Efe and Akyurt, Ali: *Caucasus and Central Asia in Turkish Foreign Policy: The Time Has Come for a New Regional Policy*, Alternatives: Turkish Journal for International Relations 2011, Vol. 10/No. 2/3, pp. 46-64.

¹²⁹ Comment: The regions of the "Near Abroad" are also framed as special places in the political narratives of domestic politics. In Turkey's case, nationalist fervor is often caused by ethnic ties to Azerbaijan and historical hostilities with Armenia.

or taking over pipelines etc.). Therefore, it is in Russia's interest to be the only power to have a military presence in the Caucasus in order to emphasize its claim of a special sphere of influence. At the same time, having military capabilities ready in the region would also be a strategic asset for Turkey, even though there is likely to be a tolerance for the military presence of other external powers, considering Turkey does not claim the Caucasus to be its exclusive sphere of influence. Overall, Russia benefitted from the relative military weakness of the independent republics, which restricted their decision making when it comes to relations with their powerful neighbor.¹³⁰ Georgia's ambitions to escape Russia's grip by allying with the West were crushed before the 2010's,¹³¹ and Armenia technically accepted Russia as its suzerain after being internationally isolated in the 90's due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.¹³² While Georgia adopted cautious neutrality, Armenia joined the CSTO, giving Russia legal pretenses to intervene on its domestic or foreign security matters. Only Azerbaijan has retained its sovereignty on security matters. The main reason for that is Turkey's ongoing

commitment to give external support, enabling the country to conduct a balanced foreign policy.¹³³ Even though Turkey was a strategic partner of Baku since the 90's, cooperation between both countries grew significantly in the 2010's, to Russia's displeasure. The signing of the "Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support", a mutual defense treaty in the case of aggression, was the first formalization of the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance. This was a clear indication of Turkey's growing influence over Baku, and a willingness of both parties to openly defy Russian military dominance in the Caucasus. Although the treaty's phrasing is rather vague, it was definitely a framework for further cooperation between the Turkish arms industry and Azerbaijan in order to break Baku's dependence on Russian arms sales. Cooperation between both countries' militaries increased as well, evident in mutual training programs and large exercises like in 2015.¹³⁴ Additionally, rumors about plans to set up a Turkish military base in the Nakhichevan enclave surfaced frequently in the press recently.¹³⁵ Whether the project will be realized or not, the fact that this possibility is discussed

¹³⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies: *The Military Balance 2017*, London 2017, pp. 183-236.

¹³¹ Friedman, George: *The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power*, STRATFOR 2008, available under: <https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo-georgian-war-and-balance-power>, [15.08.2017].

¹³² Comment: Yerevan transferred its national air defense to Russia by leasing its ally a base for over 3000 service members (IISS 2017, 183-236).

¹³³ Jones, Scott A.: *Turkish Strategic Interests in the Transcaucasus*, in: Gertsch, Gary K. et. al (ed.): *Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, New York/London: 2000. / Svante E. Cornell: *Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and*

Central Asia Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs 1999, Vol. 4/No. 2, pp. 55-66.

¹³⁴ Abbasov, Shahin: *Azerbaijan-Turkey Military Pact Signals Impatience with Minsk Talks*, Eurasianet 2011, available under: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62732> [15.08.2017].

¹³⁵ E.g. Kucera, Joshua: *Will Turkey put a base in Azerbaijan in response to Russia-Armenia agreement?* Eurasianet 2010, available under: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61778> [15.08.2017]. / Radio Free Europe: *Turkey, Azerbaijan Agree to Joint Military Arms Venture*, Radio Free Europe 2010, available under: http://www.rferl.org/a/Turkey_Azerbaijan_Agree_To_Joint_Military_Arms_Venture/2211138.html [15.08.2017].

means that Turkey's efforts to undermine Russian military hegemony in the Caucasus through an Azerbaijani alliance has reached a new level since 2010. It must be mentioned however, that Turkey's actual will to confront Russia directly over Azerbaijani interests, most likely within the Nagorno-Karabakh context, can be doubted. During the "4 Day War" in 2016, it again became apparent that Russia is the power-broker in this territorial conflict. With Turkey only willing to give minimal security assurances to Azerbaijan, Russia can set itself up as the key actor on the issue. Considering the importance of the conflict to Baku, Moscow is still holding a bargaining-chip to convince Azerbaijan to halt its attempts to establish a stronger military alliance with Turkey and pressure it to join the CSTO or the EEU.¹³⁶

Economic interests - Hydrocarbons and their political leverage

Russia's ambition to make the "Near Abroad" an exclusive Russian sphere of influence is not only expressed in its decisive agenda to stay militarily dominant, but also in its attempts to exert control over the former

Soviet imperial periphery.¹³⁷ According to this, Moscow especially tries to gain control over the hydrocarbons of the Caspian Basin by being the sole provider of a pipeline network through its territory. This is not only vital because control over the resources' transportation is a means to control Baku's decision making by strong economic leverage but also because Russia's own economy is poorly diversified and its state revenues are mainly generated through the sale of oil and gas.¹³⁸ Due to that dependency, Russia's economy is vulnerable to falling energy prices. Therefore holding the most possible leverage over the global energy markets is a vital interest of Moscow. Turkey, however, is a net-energy consumer, and Ankara sees its geographic position between the energy ellipse (Map 1) and the European economies as a chance to set itself up as a key transit hub for hydrocarbons.¹³⁹ Russia vehemently tried to prevent early projects like the BTC-pipeline from Azerbaijan over Georgia to Turkey and the occupation of the Georgian separatist regions were sometimes seen as an attempt to gain the capability to sabotage or take over energy routes throughout the Caucasus.¹⁴⁰ Countries

¹³⁶ Gafarli, Orhan: *Secrets of the Four-Day Karabakh War*, The National Interest 2016, available under: <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/secrets-the-four-day-karabakh-war-15772> [15.08.2017]. / Shiryev, Saur: *The "Four Day War": New momentum for Nagorno-Karabakh resolution?* The Central Asia – Caucasus ANALYST 2016, available under: <https://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13356-the-four-day-war-new-momentum-for-nagorno-karabakh-resolution?.html> [15.08.2017].

¹³⁷ Mankoff, Jeffrey: *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham 2010, pp. 219-262. / Skak, Mette: *Russia's New "Monroe Doctrine"*, in: Kante, Roger E. (ed.): *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, New York 2010, pp 138-154. / Ziegler, Charles E.: *Russia, Central Asia,*

and the Caucasus after the Georgia Conflict, in: Kante, Roger E. (ed.): *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, New York 2010, pp. 155-178.

¹³⁸ Eurasianet: *Russia needs to diversify away from energy*, Eurasianet 2016, available under: <http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Russia-Needs-To-Diversify-Away-From-Energy.html> [15.08.2017].

¹³⁹ Fischer, Severin: *Turkey and the Energy Transit Question*, Carnegie 2016, available under: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategicEurope/?fa=64382> [15.08.2017].

¹⁴⁰ Kucera, Joshua: *U.S. Intelligence: Russia Sabotaged BTC Pipeline Ahead of 2008 Georgia War*, Eurasianet 2014, available under: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/71291> [15.08.2017].

interested in making Caspian hydrocarbons accessible to the global markets also tried to exclude Moscow from major projects designed to free up Azerbaijan's production, like the BTC.¹⁴¹ Efforts by Turkey to provide Azerbaijan the means to distribute resources is manifested in the TANAP project, which aims at bringing Caspian energy from Azerbaijan over Georgia and Turkey to the European consumer markets (tanap.com 2017). Construction started in 2015, and was again strongly opposed by Russia.¹⁴²



Map 1: The Strategic Energy Ellipse (Geopolitical Intelligence Service 2014)

Considering the continuing trend of pipeline diversification, one could ask why Russia is not accepting the situation and adjusting its strategic calculations. Even though Russia has lost the monopoly over the Caspian pipeline structure, it is not in the same position as

Turkey in the Syrian case, where cutting losses is a possibility. As previously mentioned, the Russian economy is dependent upon price development on the global markets. Additionally, one has to consider that an advanced network of pipelines would also provide the opportunity to link up the Central Asian reserves with European markets independently from the Russian pipeline network.¹⁴³ This significantly increases the stakes for Russia. Hence, every time Russia's economy comes under strain and domestic pressure starts to mount, the issue will likely re-surface in the strategic discourse between Ankara and Moscow. The different strategic orientations of both countries on this issue will therefore remain opposing. Nevertheless, Turkey has some room to maneuver by being able to back down from new projects. If the strategic environment outside of the Caucasus sets strong incentives for realignment, Turkey could trade its position on the Caspian energy to gain concessions or support on other aspects of their grand strategy. This is indicated by Turkey's newest offers to connect TANAP with the existing Turkish Stream, a project planned to bring Russian natural gas to Turkey.¹⁴⁴ This would allow Russia at least additional access to European consumer markets. The offer comes at a time

¹⁴¹ Cornell, Svante E.: *Azerbaijan Since Independence*, New York/London 2011, pp. 199-253.

¹⁴² Altan, Adem: *Why TANAP Pipeline is not an Alternative for Turkish Stream*, Sputnik 2015, available under: <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201512051031284388-turkey-gas-pipeline/> [15.08.2017].

¹⁴³ Zbigniew Brzezinski: *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Strategic Imperatives*, New York 1997, pp. 123-148.

/ Fishelson, James (2007): *From the Silk Road to Chevron: The Geopolitics of Oil Pipelines in Central Asia*, The School of Russian and Asian Studies, available under: http://www.sras.org/geopolitics_of_oil_pipelines_in_central_asia [15.08.2017].

¹⁴⁴ Abbasova, Nigar: *Ankara offers to connect Turkish Stream, TANAP*, Azernews 2016, available under: https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/100692.html [15.08.2017].

when both FPE's toy openly with the idea of a rapprochement.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

In the case of Syria, the initial interests of both sides were contrary. Nevertheless, the shift in the balance of power within the civil war brought about further conflicts of interest between Turkey and its Western allies, and forced Turkey to abandon its initial ambitions of spreading regional influence through regime change. This made Russia a viable alternative that could be sufficient to deal with its most vital security needs. Again, it must be acknowledged that the decision making in Washington is impactful, and should be closely watched. Nevertheless, it can be said that Syria developed from an obstacle to a Russian-Turkish alignment in 2011 to an open opportunity for cooperation.

Things look different in the Caucasus. Even though the term "New Great Game" is controversial and its zero-sum logic certainly does not apply to the whole spectrum of interactions between external powers in the Caucasus, it still has explanatory power for the Russian-Turkish competition in the military realm and over the control of the hydrocarbons. Therefore, the conflict potential over key security-and economic interests in the 2010's is still higher than grounds for strategic cooperation, continuing the competition that characterized the Russian-Turkish interactions in the Caucasus since the end of the Cold War.

5. Conclusion

After the first phase of the 2010's, Russia clearly became the better choice of ally for Turkey, compared to its critical Western allies, when considering the domestic security interests of the regimes. A solidarization was evident and ever increasing over the last years. Over three phases, this finally culminated in a stark contrast between the critical Western FPE's discourses on events in 2016 and 2017, and the solidarized discourse of both the Russian and Turkish regimes. The discourse analysis strongly indicates that both regimes factor in their domestic security needs when faced with alliance choices. This supports the arguments made by David, Ayooob as well as several neoclassical realists, resulting in an alternative Westphalian-type alliance option for Turkey and Russia that would decrease the threat posed to these authoritarian regimes by Western linkage and leverage. H1 (box 1) can therefore be seen as validated in this analysis.

Still, a geopolitical analysis showed mixed results. While the development in the Syrian conflict provides an opportunity to cooperate, the divergence in Russia' and Turkey's initial interests were partially based on the motivation to balance each other (especially in the case of Russia). This supports the offensive realists' argument that there is general conflict potential for rising powers that are geographically close. The South Caucasus still constituted an arena for Turkish-Russian

competition in the 2010's. With the "Near Abroad" putting an emphasis on full military dominance and opposing strategies in regards to the Caspian energy reserves, both countries key interests are conflicting. Even though a direct military confrontation in the region seems unrealistic, this still constitutes a hindrance to a strategic realignment. Therefore, H2 (box 2) cannot be fully validated in this analysis.

The answer to the research question is therefore ambiguous. While there is definitely strategic ground for realignment, there are several obstacles for an alliance. If Turkey and Russia pursue commitments to increase their cooperation, it will most likely be interrupted by episodes of contention. Because of that, the developments should be closely observed in the future, and further research on other areas of strategic interactions should be conducted. Having covered cases that showed significant conflict potential, more cooperative cases should be considered to gain a more balanced overview. Bilateral trade, for example, was repeatedly indicated as an area of common interest by both the Russian and Turkish FPE's.

It is clear, however, that two faced grand strategic approaches are better suited for authoritarian regimes. This discourse analysis provided evidence of interplay of state and regime interests. Nevertheless, with both interests bearing similar weight in strategic calcu-

lations, the flexibility of non-traditional approaches is needed to gain as complete of an understanding as possible.